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(Inq into better support for carers)

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Secretary
Inquiry into Better Support for Carers
Standing Committee on Family, community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

I wish to make a submission to the House of Representatives standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.

I am the Carer of an adult son with disabilities. I am 49 years old and my son is 21. My son is blind and autistic. He is unable to work and requires constant supervision. He cannot be left at home alone for even short periods of time. He receives a Disability Pension. He is supported for approximately 12 hours per week under the Post School Funding scheme. He also attends day respite for one day a week (approx 9.30 am to 2.30 pm).

I have been single for the last 2 ½ years and currently receive the Carer Support Payment. I have no family support in Qld as my family all live interstate. I have a degree in Pharmacy but have not been able to work since moving to Qld from NSW in 1994 due to a lack of support and services. Because of this my degree is now out of date and I can no longer work in this area.

I would like to draw to your attention the difficulty faced by myself and others in a similar situation in finding and retaining employment.

- As I have not been able to work for many years I do not have a recent work history or references.
- I can no longer use my degree and so need to find work in another area that I have not previously worked in. I am currently studying TAFE at home through open learning but it will still be difficult to find work as I do not have any relevant and recent experience.
- My son is not able to be left at home alone, which means the only hours I can work are those where he is supported. The hours available through post school funding are not sufficient for even part time work. Most part time work involves flexible hours, weekends etc which I am not able to do.
- Even when my son was at school I was not able to access outside school hours care as there were no suitable facilities available.

The main difficulty for me is the lack of available hours of support. Post school funding is aimed at supporting the person with disability and is not intended to give the carer time to work. However, because we get this funding we are not eligible for any other funding.

I feel that my role as a carer means that I do not have the same rights, opportunities or choices as the rest of the community due to this lack of services and funding.

- I do not wish to spend the rest of my life on the Carer Payment. I want to be able to work at least part time but under the present system this is going to be very difficult to do.
- You do not receive the Carer Payment if married or living with someone. That would mean in this situation (as when I was married previously) I would be totally financially dependent on the other person unless able to work.
- As the main carer for my disabled son, I find myself in a situation where he is dependent on me almost every minute that he is at home. This substantially restricts my ability to socialise and also to achieve my academic goals in order to try to rejoin the workforce.

I feel that the best way for the role and contribution of carers in society to be recognised is to set up funding and services that enable us access the same social and working opportunities as the wider community. Perhaps this could be achieved by utilising a system such as the new post school funding system in NSW, or a system similar to family day care that would give access to more flexible hours of care.

Thank you for taking my views into consideration as part of the Committee's Inquiry. I look forward to reviewing the recommendations you make you make in order to improve support for carers.

Yours sincerely

Susan