



ROC 15/7/08

**YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL
NEW SOUTH WALES**

**House Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and
Youth: Inquiry into better support for carers.**

NSW Youth Advisory Council submission.

The NSW Youth Advisory Council (Council) is a statutory body which advises the Minister for Youth on issues concerning young people. It is the only Youth Advisory Council in Australia that has its own legislation, the NSW Youth Advisory Council ACT (1989).

The NSW Youth Advisory Council is a 12 member Council and this year there are two members who are young carers.

The Council in its submission has chosen to focus on two areas of the Terms of Reference, with an emphasis on supporting Young Carers, those being:

- *Barriers to social and economic participation for carers, with a particular focus on helping carers to find and/or retain employment*
- *Practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action*

Council believes school plays an important role in any young person's life and recognises the enormous social and economic benefits attributed to all young people remaining in and staying fully engaged with school. Council strongly believes that young carers should be supported and encouraged to remain in and stay fully engaged with school and not hindered or financially penalised for doing so.

As your terms of reference make note carers are often at an increased risk of becoming socially isolated from their peers and disconnected from mainstream employment. Council believes that by supporting young carers to remain in school will help to minimise social isolation and provide young carers with better opportunities to find and retain employment.

Council is concerned that the current Centrelink restrictions on accessing the full carer payment hinders the ability of young carers to remain in school. Council believes that these restrictions deter and discourage young carers from remaining in school, due to the financial discouragement associated with a potential loss or reduction in their carer payments.

The current Centrelink restrictions imposed on the maximum time (25 hours including travel time) that fulltime carers can be away from their caring responsibilities, in order to qualify for the full carer payment, greatly disadvantages and restricts the access young carers have to attend and stay fully engaged with school. (Please refer page 6 of the Centrelink information brochure, *Information you need to know about your claim*)

Normal school attendance, not including travel time is estimated at approximately 30 hours, this is some 5 hours above the current restrictions imposed on young carers to access the full carer payment, before even taking into consideration the travel time associated with attending school.

Council recommends that changes be made to lift the current restrictions imposed by Centrelink on the maximum number of hours that carers can be away from their caring responsibilities, thus allowing young carers to both receive the carer payment and remain in and stay fully engaged with school.

Carer payments are often the family's main source of income. The loss of this payment often means that families are forced to live in debt or the cared for person go without treatment or adequate health care.

How can we ask young people to choose between caring for their family and attending school?

This is just one practical measure that if changed, would better allow young carers to remain in and stay fully engaged with school and not be financially penalised for doing so.

The Council believes that the current structure socially and economically disadvantages already vulnerable young people.