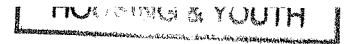


Submission No. 408

(Inq into better support for carers)

A.O.C. 2/7/08



20th June 2008

The Secretary
Inquiry into Better Support for Carers
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
P O 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.

In making this submission I will briefly explain my involvement. Having being an Electorate Officer for State and Federal Members of Parliament for nearly 30 years I became a Member of the Queensland Council of Carers in those early years of my employment to keep abreast with the needs of carers by attending meetings on behalf of the Members. In these latter years I became a carer of not only my elderly Father but a Cousin as well with major health problems. Staying a member of Carers Queensland for all those years assisted me in more ways than one to cope with this latter situation.

You learn through going to Carers meetings that everyone's situation is different and what may have worked for you, does not necessarily work for another carer. The important thing about Carer's meetings is that they are a support group for you to air your stresses with people who understand your situation. It is also a release from your caring role for a couple of hours.

The government has to realize that most carers are in their role 24/7. Unlike the staff in caring facilities, they have a shift to do and then they can go home to their normal environment. The carers have their day shift and then their night shift when you may have an elderly person walking around the house at all hours in the night because they think it is time to get up at 2am in the morning. Or you have an insulin dependent diabetic who lives a half an hour's drive away from you, who flatly refuses to give himself needles anymore so you know if you don't attend to this situation, it will be another call to the Ambulance by a neighbour. Naturally these points were based on my own situation.

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Categories of Carers-

- A daughter or son who may be looking after an elderly parent or another family member.
- A wife or husband looking after their spouse.
- Parents or sole parent looking after a disabled son or daughter.
- A friend looking after a friend who may be elderly, sick or disabled.
- A sister or brother looking after a sibling who may have had a stroke or suffering some other disease.

I list these categories because I have found that what has eased my caring situation is not the solution for other carers as they will say “my situation is different to yours.”

Financial situation-

In my caring role I was eligible for the Carers Allowance of approximately \$98.00 a fortnight because my elderly Father lived with me. Although I was caring for a cousin who had never married and was an insulin dependent diabetic who lived a half an hour's drive away from my home, I was not eligible to claim the Carers Allowance for looking after him because I was not living in his home and he wasn't living with me. I think the government should look at this situation and if people can prove that they are looking after more than one person, then they should be eligible for two Carers Allowance allocations. My caring role is over but there must be other carers all over Australia who have done or are doing exactly what I did. A second \$98 would have helped to pay for the petrol for my car driving to and fro my cousin's place to attend to his needs.

Impacts

Through the onset of early dementia with my elderly Father, I found that it impacted on my social life because I could no longer leave him alone for a few hours while I went out. I was restricted to the home. The personal impact was pure frustration because I had to follow up on things because of the short term memory loss. With my cousin it meant more trips to Doctors, hospitals and Specialists in Cairns. This then meant putting some support services in place for my Father so I could undertake the second caring role.

Difficult coping situation-

During my caring role I broke my ankle, was on crutches and could do very little for myself let alone undertake my caring role. Respite in a Residential Care facility would have been great for me at that particular time but respite is not readily available for emergency situations like this. This is another area I feel the government should look at and try to put in place some solution for emergency situations when the carer falls over like I did.

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In summary the important factors are:-

- Because a lot of carers are in their role 24/7, the government must recognize that these carers are a cost saving to the government therefore their needs should be considered.
- When a carer is caring for more than one person and providing they can prove this, consideration should be given regarding the entitlement of two Carers Allowances. I am not saying two Carers Pensions but if they were given an extra Carers Allowance, this would help with petrol for their car when one considers the price of petrol at this present time.
- More respite in Residential Care facilities is needed, particularly in emergency situations that involves the Carer.

I submit these points for your consideration.

Yours faithfully

Helen