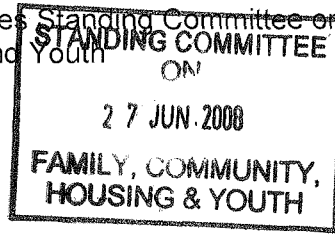


Committee Secretary
Inquiry into Better Support for Carers
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family,
Community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No. 492
(Inq into better support for carers)

A.O.C. 7/7/08



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 primary carer for my son who is diagnosed with severe autism. At the time of submission, my other children are also under examination for developmental delay and possibly autism. I believe my opinions and experience would be of interest to you who are concerned with better support to carers, especially those who care for younger children with disabilities.

1. The role and contribution of carers in society

My roles: 1) The provider of love and daily care; 2) the advocate for their welfare in acquiring extra resources for them, so that they may grow to their full potential and become a contributing member of the society in the future.

Current Situation: The society seems to have little understandings on the invaluable contribution from carers and/or it is simply taken for granted. We are seen to have low or no economic values because most of us are not able to earn an income or pay tax, and the world is measuring worthiness by the dollar. Admittedly, carer is not an income producing job, but without us, the government/society would pay much more for similar level of care and it would place enormous pressure on the welfare system.

How should carers be recognised: 1) Carers who have no personal income miss out on the "super co-contribution" because we don't have the 10% employment income! That means we will be left with very little superannuation when we retire, while we have contributed to care for others all our lives. The 10% employment income requirement should not apply on carers, since we do not have super contribution from employers already.

2) Carers often are left with no super to retire on (no employer contribution). To recognise carers' contributions, the government should consider periodic super contributions on our behalf.

3) Allowances for transition out of caring role are important to help us back on our feet:

a) education allowance; b) living allowance while studying/looking for work.

These allowances need to be separate and more generous than the "newstart" payment, to value the contribution carers have given to the society.

2. The barriers to social and economic participation for carers

1) No social life / no support network/ social isolation: the caring responsibility is making it impossible to have any social life, the carer support groups does not provide child minding services so I end up not joining because I couldn't stop to talk to others at all.

2) Education barrier: the cost of childcare is preventing me from fully participating in further education to improve my future employability. Last year, I studied an honours degree and paid the gap of childcare benefit (CCB) for full time care. It's a heavy financial burden on top of my HECS fees because I didn't earn an income, but having an honours degree give me a chance to study PhD so I tried my best to pay. I am now starting my PhD this year and again I am faced with the child care cost, so I need to cut back the hours in care to reduce the gap that I am paying. Reduced childcare support means that I don't get enough time to study.

3. The practical measures required to better support carers

1) Full time **FREE** childcare to support further education: I am entitled to 50 hours of CCB per week, but the gap between actual childcare charge and CCB is unaffordable. Although the government is paying 50% childcare rebate, the remaining 50% is a burden for someone studying without an income. For this reason, I am currently using about 40 hours per week only. I don't get enough time to study and I find this very difficult. I need the government to help me pay for the childcare gap so that I can utilise the 50 hours childcare fully, as long as I am studying (not just once-off short term help for 13 weeks). If the government can increase

the 50 hours to 60, it would be even better. Currently an average working couple with normal children gets 50 hours CCB per week anyway, there is a case for increased hours for couples with disabled children who is working or studying.

2) Swimming lesson / personal training: my son have dyspraxia as well as autism, he needs extra muscle exercises on a regular basis for his muscle to develop properly and one-to-one attention (for safety). For this reason, I am paying the local leisure centre for swimming lessons and personal training weekly which is a very substantial expense. I do exercise with him at home but I lack the expertise and fitness level to help my son. If my son does not get the exercise it affects his other areas of development. I need the government to help me fund the cost on a long term basis.

4. Strategies to assist carers to access opportunities and choices

1) Funding priority should be given to help carers to study/work part-time, which in the long term will free up resources to help others who are most in need. Policy to encourage carers to remain in part-time employment/study should provide financial incentive for them to do so e.g. tax break for the first \$20,000, assistance with educational cost etc.

2) Encourage share-care arrangements e.g. 2 part-time carers both work/study part-time would require far less support in respite than 1 full time carer because each of them have regular time-off from their caring role. Working and studying give them the chance to “get-away” and be connected with the society, and it helps with their self-esteem. They both retain their skills and employability which means less resources are needed to retrain them to transit them out their carer role in the future.

3) However, the support for carer's study/work needs to be on **a long term basis** that is **stable**. At the moment the support for carers to work/study are “short term” / “once-off” e.g. increase hours of CCB to over 50 is only temporarily available for 13 weeks. Work and study commitments are often over a few years or even longer, if the carers don't get stable support then they would rather not start work or study at all. In my case I need more childcare hours, I struggle so much for the uncertainty of continuous care for my children so I

often think about stop studying when things get tough. But if I stay out of work/study for a long time I won't be able to get back in later on, so I just hang in there.

4) More resources should be given to help the person in care to develop life skills to function more independently (especially for younger disabled persons), so that the carers may be freed up later on. In my case, the swimming and personal training exercises are helping my son's language and coordination, which will help him to transit into main stream school later and allow me to take up employment then.

5) Please do not treat carers as the "unemployed" in the welfare payment system, it is very demoralising and insulting. We are sometimes treated as the unemployed by the society, but in fact we are actively contributing to the society in a non-monetary way. Carers should be paid more than the unemployed to recognise our contributions. When I finish my carer role, I do not want to be asked to queue for the dole.

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

Yours sincerely

Wai Ling

Print your name

23 June, 2008

Date