



Inquiry into Balancing Work & Family
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family & Human Services

A Families First Community Development Project connecting families in the Rouse Hill Development Area and The Hills Community Aid & Information Service Inc. facilitated two focus groups at two playgroups and received written responses from a mobile playgroup for submission to the Balancing Work and Family Inquiry.

This submission is a representative sample of those 3 playgroups which are based in the Rouse Hill & Kellyville areas. Five representatives attended each focus group.

There was representation from people who worked in both the professional and trade industries.

The families represented comprised of single parents, a couple with children, parents who had a multiple births and an IVF recipient. Fathers were represented as well as mothers. Immigrants were also represented from diverse backgrounds such as Sweden, the UK and Malta.

There were parents who chose to stay at home as a full-time carer and those who worked in paid positions from home part-time either self employed or as an employee, and also casual and part-time workers outside the home.

Several of the mothers were pregnant with their second child.

There was a strong and repeated response on the importance of parents to be able to choose to work or stay at home with their children and the choice of working flexible hours.

The importance of the attachment and bonding of the mother and child and the positive development of stable relationships between the parents and children is essential in building a secure family structure. The adult to adult and adult to child relationship is affected if parents work long and inflexible hours. This puts the stability of the family at risk. A strong family structure builds resilience and sets up a good pattern for life.

The Rouse Hill Development Area consists of new housing estates. Most families are new to the area and therefore have left extended family and friends behind. To build and develop new social networks is difficult unless there is the time and resources available to access available facilities and supportive community groups. The pressure to work long hours limits the availability and accessibility for parents to become involved in their community.

Recommendations for Future Inquiries

There was a lack of publicity and promotion to the general public/community about the inquiry and the invitation for submissions. We found out by reading an article in the Sydney Morning Herald which didn't provide contact details or invite responses. An internet search was the only way we found the website requesting a response.

There has been a lack of community consultation by the committee. In our case we initiated community consultation by setting up focus groups and giving interested people the opportunity to respond in writing. This has been compiled and submitted below.

The time frame for submitting a response was short especially as it wasn't clear from the publicity that a response could have been given. If there had been more time we would have set up more focus groups covering a wider geographical area and more people from diverse backgrounds would have been able to attend.

There is limited information about the role of the committee overseeing the inquiry and the extent of the research being obtained. This is important so there is not a duplication of the research given and informs the community of the extent of the inquiry and the transparency of the committee's role. We have not included relevant research on this topic because of lack of time and the possibility of duplication of this information.

The input we have received has been given from various individuals therefore we request a copy of the completed report and the results from the senate so it may be distributed to them.

Yours faithfully,

Jennifer Alderton

On behalf of Families First Community Development Project (A NSW Government Initiative) and The Hills Community Aid & Information Service Inc.

PO Box 3356

Rouse Hill NSW 2155

Ph: 9629 9749 mobile: 0400 910 037

Email: famfirst2@ihug.com.au

7th April 2005

Inquiry into Balancing of Work and Family

Financial, career and social disincentives to starting families

- **childcare**
 - well paid jobs are usually full-time positions with less scope to work part-time or flexible hours but the childcare costs are the same
 - A mother from Sweden talked about the affordability of childcare. She stated, "what it costs for childcare in Australia for a week will pay for a month's childcare in Sweden." In Sweden parents cannot afford to stay at home with their children there isn't a choice not to work. Both parents contribute equally in the home, with childcare and family life. Parents usually only have 1 or 2 children. In Australia it is too expensive for 2 children in full-time childcare.
 - A mother stated she currently has 2 children and wants to return to the workforce. Childcare will cost \$2400 per month. This is completely unacceptable.
 - At least 50% contribution from the government towards childcare. This is just a start.
- **stress**
 - a less stressful job is needed to be able to deal with the every day stress and time needed to raise a family.
 - travel time to work increases the time away from family and increases stress.
 - there is a feeling of guilt of not contributing financially to the household costs.
 - there is also a feeling of guilt for leaving children to go back to work.
- **inflexible work hours**
 - it is difficult to find part-time work when re-entering the workforce
 - flexible days/hours gives the option of working Thursday nights/Saturdays/Sundays if there isn't another carer
 - with the option of being able to work Thursday nights/Saturdays/Sundays spouses are able to care for children to save on childcare.
 - a mum returned to work after having her baby to a workplace she had been employed for six years. Her position had changed while on maternity leave with no provision for flexible working hours. She was retrenched and opened her own home business and now works a few days a week.
 - working from home would be an option for some mums but doesn't suit all industries or individuals. More accessibility to information about setting up and running a small business would be worthwhile. There is also the difficulty of losing skills when working from home.
 - Employers want 'time committed' employees which with childcare and increased family commitments after having child/children

- work-based childcare would mean the child/children are nearby therefore less travel time to childcare and able to fit into work hours while still having access to child/children
- the opportunity for part-time and job-share positions. Not all employers/industries are able to or want to provide this. Working shorter hours means more time to spend with the family.
- An employer will allow part-time work after returning to work after having a child but this is for the short term and eventually the position returns to full-time.
- Often a parent wants to work part-time and may be forced to leave or find another option if full-time is the only option.
- Sometimes working a couple of days per week gives you the sanity you need to be a better mother.
- Having 2 children gives them more than having more children, bringing up kids is so expensive.
- **Loss of skill and/or upgrading of skills**
 - Industries change and being out of the workforce means loss of skills
 - training or retraining to re-enter the workplace either of an evening or with childcare would assist in returning to the workforce.
 - 'Lifestyle Choices' program for mums to provide information on choices of employment, re-training for career changes etc for mums to make informed decisions about their return to work
 - There will be a loss of skills and confidence if the mum doesn't return to work especially in industries such as IT which is constantly changing.
- **Financial**
 - parents are unable to stay at home to look after their children and have to return to the workforce to pay the mortgage
 - with the increase in the cost of housing there is more pressure to earn more money to be able to afford to buy a house
 - buying a house in a safe and family friendly area is more expensive. Both parents need to work to provide this for their family.
 - Loss of income. Living on one income.
- **lack of energy**
 - working and having a family is exhausting. There is no energy left to give 100% to a job
- **lack of social interaction/isolation**
 - returning to work provides a different outlook to being at home
 - work provides social interactions
 - isolation of being out of the workforce, lack of support, independence and identity.
- **lifestyle changes**
 - can't afford to have more children. It means a change in lifestyle such as moving to a less expensive area, changing from a private school to a public school, buying a bigger car to accommodate the children.
 - Planning a family doesn't always turn out as expected eg triplets instead of one child
 - The pressure of wanting and needing to spend time and 'bond' as a family when both parents have to work.

- Not having the choice of staying at home with the child/children or going to work with a choice in how many hours to work often isn't available.
- Home is the family base and the family suffers if there is added pressure to go to work
- A parent works nightshift while the other works days to be able to drop off and pick up children from childcare and school. Leaves very little time together as a family.
- **Career**
 - If you want to progress in your career the employer doesn't want someone with a family
 - There is limited career prospect with mums with a second child. The employer won't put in the effort of retaining staff.
 - employers make judgements about women wanting more children after having their first.
 - Difficulty getting back into workforce after long periods at home. Being out of touch ie skills, business, self - esteem.
 - Not guaranteed your job when returning or the option of part-time work.
- **Social**
 - Can't go out after having a child
 - Eating out is difficult unless it is a child friendly restaurant
 - Being the first one to have a child in the circle of friends means the contact with those friends is limited. Need to find new friends with children.
 - When moving to a safer and family friendly area new friendships need to be developed. It takes a while to find out what groups and activities are available in the area.
 - Moving to a new area is costly and means no extra money to access activities.

Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce

- **Training**
 - Changes to the workplace means a loss of skills and confidence. Training programs in CV preparation, job skills and options for career changes would assist in making it easier return to work.
 - After hours training or with child care available during the day.
 - More readily available and affordable retraining and skill updating.
- **Employers**
 - Flexibility and understanding in a family friendly workplace environment
 - Availability of part-time and job share positions
 - Option of being able to work from home even for part of the time.
 - Paid maternity leave
 - Well paying jobs are full-time without flexibility
- **Childcare**
 - More family based child care
 - Finding the 'right' care is difficult when there are limited choices and vacancies. There needs to be more choices of types of child care such as Family Day Care and available on weekends or evening for flexible work hours.

- Work place childcare for more convenience and enables a choice of either parents workplace
- If the government made it beneficial. With the high cost of childcare, having 2 children wouldn't bring any money home after paying for childcare.
- affordable and more availability of quality childcare
- flexible childcare for occasional workers
- more out of school hours care

The impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family work

- Tax breaks are needed when both parents are working. There is extra tax paid when both parents work. This is a punishment if the mum returns to work. Tax incentives needed to work second job or both parents to work.
- Limited hours are worked to pay less tax but this means less income.
- Access to family tax benefits (FTB) is a disincentive to earn more than able to claim. Consideration on working more hours if the threshold was increased and simplified.
- Being self employed provides the flexibility in work hours/earnings but doesn't cover childcare costs.
- The cost of the second child in care limits work options
- Financial expenses and commitments force the family to go backwards financially
- Child care must be tax deductible for the family to survive financially
- To sacrifice time with the child/children the job must be worth it. It isn't worth it unless it is enjoyable.
- Limited employment choices in certain industries doesn't give flexibility
- Consideration of dads staying at home. This is a choice the family makes on who has the greater income, whether they will lose their job/skills. It may be for a limited time so paternity leave or leave without pay may be an option.
- Cash incentive to return to work or to pay for retraining would encourage parents to return to work.
- Companies often don't want to employ mums although they are often more loyal and will stay with the company if there is flexibility and understanding and with a family friendly environment. This provides a more valuable employee.
- The means testing on Child Care Benefit is limited.
- The baby bonus isn't worthwhile in the long term for families.
- The choice of when to receive Family Tax Benefit is available only if earnings are known otherwise families must wait until the end of the year to receive the benefit.
- If there were greater incentive to return to work there would be less dependence on benefits.
- Less tax is better, as a single income family tax isn't an issue until the other parent starts looking for work.

- There are too many taxes!!! Income tax (taxes too high in middle income bracket), GST, petrol, superannuation. Higher taxes on second job, reducing incentive to try and get ahead.
- No tax concessions for families may mean the difference between both parents working or just one parent working to make ends meet.
- Difficult to predict future income to be entitled to FTB then having to pay the money back when earning too much.
- The more money you earn, the more you pay. There is no real incentive to earn top scale money.