

Centrecare Incorporated Submission
Social Security and Veterans' Entitlements Legislation Amendment
(Schooling Requirements) Bill 2008

Centrecare has 88 different programs and services that are targeted to assist people from all walks of life. Many of these programs involve outreach services to family's within their own homes or to out of home care options whereby children are unable to live at home or to housing that we provide for families who are homeless.

Centrecare's offices based in Cannington, Gosnells and Lockridge are its major office locations that work with the target group most likely to be impacted by the introduction of the new legislation and trial pilot project within the Cannington district. This includes a Humanitarian Settlement Scheme in the South East corridor of Perth, youth offending prevention program, supported accommodation options, therapeutic services for children of homeless families and support for Department of Housing and Works households who are at risk of homelessness, the Aboriginal Tertiary Family Preservation Service and the Indigenous Family Program

Centrecare fully supports and believes that life chances for children are greatly improved by continuity of schooling. However, it does not consider that compulsory income management in itself or that involuntary income management will greatly improve the likelihood of continuity of children's school attendance or their ability to learn or that their home conditions will improve. Centrecare considers that there is a high likelihood that the child's wellbeing and learning ability may be placed at a higher risk with the introduction of this new legislation which links involuntary income management with children's attendance at school.

The families who are most expected to be impacted by this legislation are highly likely to be:

Homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness with a

- History of poor tenancy management;
- Have large debts and lack of appropriate skills in financial management;
- Lack of stability;
- Lack of appropriate support to assist families in maintaining and/or managing a home;
- Have a welfare dependency;
- Already have *Conflict in the home*;
- There may be a lack of boundaries between adults, children and other household members or visitors;
- Domestic/family violence;
- Family breakdown;
- Lack of respect for authority (i.e. police, teachers, etc.);
- Unemployment issues;

- Substance abuse;
- Mental health issues;
- Limited finances;
- Already living in poverty;
- Low Self-esteem;
- Illiteracy - not just for children but also for the care givers;
- Criminal activities may be prevalent;
- There may be a lack of parental concern over academic and individual development of children due to their own experiences with their schooling or current life circumstances;
- There maybe parent and child conflict/cooperation issues with teachers and the school system.

And there are other issues to consider such as

- Effects of colonisation;
- Racism;
- Oppression;
- Poverty;
- Gender inequalities;
- Lack of resources to effectively deal with issues;
- Lack of support services or well funded services available for families both government and non-government.

And this is not always about the family it is also about the education system and how it welcomes and supports children who may already be marginalised by their life circumstances and may have learning difficulties as a direct result of their life circumstances.

A further concern for Centrecare is that this legislation will have a greater impact on Indigenous people who are already disproportionately disadvantaged and marginalised than any other group in Australia as is well documented.

Involuntarily income management may also actually increasing levels of criminal activity and increase likelihood of neglect/ ill-treatment of children by their care givers because finances have been limited. Children do not necessarily go to school because they don't want to. Children may be required or made to stay at home by their care givers for a multitude of reasons other than poor learning difficulties.

As the West Australian Council of Social Services states in their submission, compulsory Income Management is a welfare model approach, whereby there is no evidence or research to suggest that income management prevents the neglect of children. Therefore we should be trialling a combination of supports and services that we know do work. As it has been proven 'that wrap around services, family centres, safe houses, drug and alcohol treatment, and early intervention programs do help to prevent neglect. All the national and international research provides a clear evidence base to support that.'

In order to support families to send their children to school regularly we have to increase the level of support and services available to at risk families. Therefore, Centrecare does not support involuntary income management, unless all the other supports and services are in place.

Additionally, there may be more positive ways to encourage parents to send children to school such as the provision of additional services or even monetary incentives that may not only encourage parents to send their children to school but will enhance their lives further.

Lastly, Centrecare also fully supports the written submissions of The Australian Council of Social Services and the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA.

Submission presented by Leanne Strommen – Executive Manager.