

May. 16 2002

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Providing support and services for children
with disabilities and other special needs.

SUBMISSION ; INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

We refer to

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the effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs,

and (a) v

access to and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors

As a parent support group established in 1990, for families who have children (0 – 18 years) with special needs, we have a very strong view on the value of early intervention.

We are a not for profit organisation, community based group who attract small amounts of funding from DET and DADHC. This funding is supplemented by fund raising for some 20% of our operating funds.

Presently our staff consists of two part time early childhood trained intervention teachers who work a combined total of 32 hours per week, an administration officer working 15 hours per week, four hours for an aide at playgroup and our cleaner 2 hours per week.

The only way we can cope with the 35 children on our program is through many hours of unpaid work by these staff, combined with the hours freely given by our Management Committee members.

Our formation was necessitated by the cross border issues re the availability of services between the ACT and NSW.

Queanbeyan was an area not targeted for early intervention services whilst ever we could cross the border, and access the federally funded services in the ACT. It was only after this group was formed that we attained some minimal funds to give some support and services especially in early intervention.

We feel that currently running we have a very workable, but small, service but there are certainly improvements to be made.

Our service is often one of the first asked to speak with parents whose children have been recently diagnosed with an additional need.

After a preliminary visit of introduction by one of our teachers, we follow up by getting information and offering suggestions so that families can make an informed decision on the future direction they wish their child to take.

Parents may stay on this home visitation list until their child is old enough to interact, and that parents feel comfortable to come along to a centre based playgroup, where parental support is a huge benefit.

As the child reaches preschool age we have a second early childhood trained teacher who will assist families in getting a mainstream placement at a local preschool.

The child is then supported in this process and during the usual two years spent there.

It is during this time that families are supported in making their decision as to which school offers the best placement for their child.

Much lead up time is often needed (between us and the local school) to have the school environment adapted to cater for the additional needs of the individual child.

Our teacher is a vital part of the smooth transition to this next school setting.

There are three main ways in which the current system could be improved:

- The way which funding is allocated:

Currently we have to apply for annual funding for children 0 – 6 years with a specific diagnosed disability through Department Education and Training. As this is applied for in September for the following year there are several issues requiring attention:

A lot of babies can be born in that intermediate period, a lot of people move from town to town, or in many cases parents haven't realised that there is indeed a problem with their child's development.

This means that we are not funded for those children that apply after submission date although they really need the services we can offer.

The only way we can counter this dilemma is by using fund raised monies to support these additional children.

- The way the children are selected for funding:

Due to limited funds available by DET only children with moderate or high support needs are funded.

Speech is not solely regarded as an additional need (unless it is part of a bigger disorder).

Children with mild disabilities are not funded.

Many problems encountered later in other school settings would be alleviated by having some type of assistance with therapy and intervention at this early age.

As early intervention services are already set up in many regions it would be a very cost effective solution to increase the funded hours at existing services.

- The increased amount of reporting necessary to justify funding:

So many hours are involved with paperwork following Individual Family Planning Meetings, statistics etc that small organisations are disadvantaged by the increased demand for reporting, and have insufficient time and resources for planning and working more hours with the children.

Many of our committee voluntarily give of their time to cover this requirement.

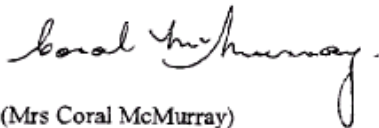
However many non government organisations would, from time to time, not have this expertise on their board of management.

An extra small amount of funding could be given so this matter could be attended to on a regular and ongoing basis. Continuity is an important factor.

We thank you for this opportunity to offer our suggestions.

I may be contacted on 6299 7221 (ph work) or 6297 1096 (home) should you wish any further information.

Yours sincerely,



(Mrs Coral McMurray)
Administration Officer
(Also a foundation member of this Group)
15th May, 2002.