

Submission to Senate Committee

Grandparent Carers

Introduction

My wife and I are Grandparent Carers, caring for our 6 year old Grandson whom we love unconditionally and are absolutely devoted to.

Our son and his partner have been deemed by the authorities as not being capable of caring for our Grandson. They have since separated.

Our Grandson first came into our care on 21 February 2012 when the Department for Child Protection in Western Australia became involved when it was reported to us that our Grandson was being removed from his father's care due to neglect and being subject to and witnessing violence between his father and his partner.

Initially our Grandson was placed in our care under a Family Arrangement and we were not entitled to any assistance other than a small grant from the Department for Child Protection and we also received Family Tax Benefit Part A and B. There was no access to support services, no guidance, no assistance and very little care from the authorities.

It was not until our Grandson was placed into the care of the Department for Child Protection by the Children's Court of Western Australia on 16 May 2013 and after being assessed as suitable our Grandson was placed in our care by the Department for Child Protection.

Since 16 May 2013 the now Department for Child Protection and Family Support have been excellent in providing for our Grandson's needs in regards to Education, Health and Mental Health.

I am now retired on a TPI Pension from Veteran Affairs and a Disability Allowance from Centrelink. My wife receives Tax A only and a Carers Allowance for me.

Our Grandson's care is high maintenance, we transport him to all the various appointments, therapies and treatments he requires. We are out and about everyday attending to his requirements.

Our Grandson at the time of writing has been assessed for Autism and fails the test by ½ a criteria point. He has been assessed with delayed development due to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. We do not receive Carers Allowance or Carers Payment.

Currently my wife and I belong to a small group of Grandparent Carers (13 in all) from our neighbourhood. We meet monthly and discuss issues which are topical and of interest. We do have guest speakers and numerous discussions and what support or lack of support is available. Mostly it is learning from each other's experiences.

There is a common thread, virtually a total lack of support from the Federal Government.

There is no funding other than Tax A or B, there are no respite services, counselling is not available, there are no Vacation care programmes, no mentoring programmes, tutoring services for our children in care etc.

Practical Challenges

- a. Modern Technology and what is an appropriate level of exposure.
- b. Modern Teaching Methods and understanding what is being taught.
- c. Parenting Techniques have evolved very quickly, what was once acceptable is no longer tolerated.
- d. Finding a Central Agency where a Grandparent Carer can go to get advice and assistance as required.
- e. Finding the funds to provide the best possible care for our Grandchildren, many of us are on pensions which are well below what a working family would earn.
- f. Accessing Legal Services and advice as required.
- g. Finding appropriate options for respite.
- h. Gaining access to Legal Services where required.

The Role and Contribution of Grandparents

- a. The role as I see it is to provide a loving, nurturing and caring environment for the children we care for.
- b. To be parents and mentors to the children we care for.
- c. To provide guidance, where necessary discipline and friendship.
- d. To provide opportunity and hope for a much better future
- e.

Other Challenges

Barriers

- a. Grandparents providing care for their Grandchildren must be given the same rights and privileges as any other parent. This includes but is not limited to, signing documents on the child in care's behalf, signing Passport Applications etc,
- b. Access to Legal Aid to formalise a Family Agreement through the Family Law Courts would be a step in the right direction.
- c. Access to a Justice of the Peace to formalise family custodial agreements prior to attendance at the Family Law Courts would be beneficial.
- d. This document could also be produced at Centrelink to hasten the payment of any entitlements.

Practical Measures

- a. A grandparent carer specific Information/Drop in Centre would be beneficial. Like a one stop shop for access to information/services.
- b. Access to various Mentoring/Tutoring services
- c. Once grandparents become carers their details could be forwarded to this central agency who would then make the initial contact and invite new carers to attend.
- d.

Specific Needs

Grandparent carers must be given the same entitlements and support that is afforded to General Carers.

Where an informal family agreement is in place and Grandparents are providing care then they also must be entitled to all benefits and support.

Other Related Matters