

Senate Select Committee on Autism

Public Hearing – 27 July 2020

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on Autism - Question 1

Question reference number: SQ20-000536

Senator: Hollie Hughes

Type of Question: Spoken. Hansard Page/s: 28

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 21 August 2020

Question:

CHAIR: Can you explain to me what the children and parenting support program is that DSS fund?

Mr Broadhead: You are referring to our submission?

CHAIR: I am.

Mr Broadhead: I'm just trying to find it: page 13 in our submission. I think there are two parts to this. There's a mention in paragraph 4.6 of ours of the \$330,000 in funding that was provided to Aspect for the provision of parent education, but that was particularly in Richmond Valley and Tweed Heads in New South Wales. And then there is a broad program, which is designed to provide early intervention and prevention support to children and their families. It's not autism specific, but it's meant to increase the capacity of parents, carers and grandparent carers to improve children's wellbeing and development.

CHAIR: So it wasn't autism specific, but it was run by Aspect? Is that correct?

Mr Broadhead: The service in New South Wales I think was, but, for the broader program, I'm not so sure.

CHAIR: Can you take that on notice for me as to where that program is run? One of the concerns I have around that program, and I guess take it on notice if you can for me as well, is the fact it is run by Aspect. We've taken other submissions and heard evidence even today that there are clinicians and organisations who are still running parenting programs as if somehow better parenting will address issues around autism, and that actually feeds into the old refrigerator mother mentality that somehow or other mothers being cold made their children autistic. It is an outdated, absolutely offensive, disproven theory, yet, by teaching parents to I don't know what, somehow or other their kid's autism is going to be cured, or whatever the point is. If you can take that on notice and provide some significant information about who ran it, why they ran it, who it was targeted at, whether or not parents of children with other disabilities were included and targeted and if the program is still ongoing. I also want to talk about Aspect. Do you know how many programs you currently fund Aspect to run?

Mr Broadhead: I couldn't give you an exact figure right here, right now, because the department funds a range of programs. I would want to check to be sure the information was accurate.

CHAIR: If you could take on notice for me how many programs Aspect run on behalf of DSS.

Mr Broadhead: I'll take that on notice.

Answer:

Children and Parenting Support (CaPS) Program

The Department of Social Services (the department) funds CaPS services to provide prevention and early intervention services aimed at improving the wellbeing of children as well as providing support and education to parents and carers. CaPS services build the capacity of parents, carers and children through activities such as community playgroups, supported playgroups, parenting courses, home visiting, peer support groups, school readiness programs and web-based services or resources. Organisations also provide information and resources about children's development and about parenting skills. Services actively seek to identify issues affecting child or family outcomes and provide interventions or appropriate referrals before these issues escalate.

CaPS funding for Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)

Aspect has been funded since 1 July 2015 to provide CaPS services in New South Wales, specifically in the Statistical Areas of Richmond Valley – Coastal, Tweed Valley, Richmond Valley – Hinterland. The current grant agreement with Aspect ceases on 30 June 2021.

Under the CaPS grant agreement with the department, Aspect works in partnership with early childcare services, parents, schools and carers to provide targeted support to vulnerable children who are identified as presenting with difficulties or concerns in their early play skills, and their parents and carers. The services are not specifically targeted to children with autism. Services include home visiting, parenting skills and support, and peer support groups for Family Day Care providers.

How many programs does the department currently fund Aspect to run

See answer to SQ20-000537.