

Singleton and District
Disability Advisory Committee
22 William Street
Singleton NSW 2330

Roberta Bausch
Inquiry into Disability Care and Support
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Ms Roberta Bausch,

Enclosed is a copy of our submission to the Disability Care and Support Inquiry. This submission has been prepared in response to the Draft Report for this inquiry. We have provided discussion and recommendations on key areas we believe need to be approached when introducing the new system to improve long term care and support, including: funding disabled people for integration into the workforce, assistance for carers and bringing State funding in to line with the Federal Government proposals. Our discussion on these topics is as a result of the personal experience of our chairman and his wife, as full time carers for their disabled daughter, as well as knowledge into what works best within the Local and State Government context. As an organisation at the forefront of this issue, we feel our submission provides valuable insight into areas of Disability Care and Support that are just not developed enough to support disabled people and their carers adequately.

If you have any questions and/or comments regarding the information provided in this submission please contact us using the details provided at the top of this page.

Sincerely,

Grace MacPherson *on behalf of:*
Singleton and District Disability Advisory Committee

Australian Government Productivity Commission Disability
Care and Support Inquiry

Disability Services:

Care and Support for Disabled Persons

Prepared by Grace MacPherson, on behalf of:

Singleton and District Disability Advisory Committee

18th April 2011

1.0 Introduction

The Singleton and District Disability Advisory Committee is a locally based committee who makes comment on areas related to Disability access, services, public policy and legislative changes.

The chairman of the Singleton and District Disability Advisory Committee has experience as a full time carer, as he and his wife are the full time carers for their daughter who has Cerebral Palsy. Therefore, as well as making a recommendation from a professional perspective, this recommendation also comes from a wealth of personal experience.

We have prepared this submission in response to the draft report for this inquiry, which was a report formed in response to the submissions received initially in June 2010. Disabled persons and their carers are faced with a number of financial challenges on a daily basis, and there are a number of things that need to be considered when developing a National Scheme to provide funding to disabled persons and their carers. Therefore it is our intention in this submission to address:

- Our response to the Draft Report
- The positives and negatives of a National Scheme to fund disabled persons and their carers; and,
- What we believe to be the main issues surrounding disability care and support.

2.0 Disability Care and Support

2.1 Analysis of the Draft Report

Over 17% of the population have some sort of disability ranging from minor to severe, but the Government in the past has not known how to address it. If the situation continued this way, the cost over time to the Government would be enormous. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is essential because long term care for people with disabilities will be in a dire state once the carers are not there to care for the disabled anymore; therefore it needs to be in place now before it happens. This scheme is vital, the current system of reliance on carers to address most of the issues is not working; the carers are unable to cope and subsequently the cost on the Government is expanding.

In the interim between now and the implementation of the scheme the status quo will stay the same, the disabled people and carers of these people will continue to do the job they do, and lobby for change to allow Government ministers and Government policy to better reflect what is happening in society. Government policy needs to be a more accurate reflection of society as opposed to what is on the agenda where they do the policy making. We need a system where the National, State and Local Governments are all aligned in their goals for a scheme which better reflects what disabled people and their carers truly need, as opposed to what our Government thinks they need.

2.2 Positives and Negatives of a National scheme

The draft report adequately addresses many issues that face disabled people and their carers today. One of the issues which it addresses which is of major importance is the current inadequate support services for housing. The system is disjointed within the NSW and Australian Government and the volume of services available should be more regimented, collated and streamlined to allow the carer to have a say in what they need, specifically in their home environment, as opposed to the people with disabilities fitting in to the Government system.

The Government, as outlined in the draft report, is now allowing for flexibility in order to fit in with the carer and disabled person, which is a significant change because a lot of people with disabilities do not fit the mould the Government has built. Long term care and housing, with registered and qualified carers needs to be established for when the primary long term carer has passed away or cannot cope anymore. The Government is trying to tailor make a system where the individual carer and disabled person is catered to as opposed to the Government making a mould and expecting the individuals to fit it, which is a step in the right direction.

The negatives of the NDIS seem to be scarce, but mainly that it may get bogged down in bureaucratic red tape and the people who the scheme has been introduced for will be forgotten, as well as the fact that it may become so big that people will slip through the cracks and miss out on any funding.

Another issue may be that if the Government needs to slash budgets it will be the first thing to be slashed as disabled people and their carers are a minority in our community. There is also the problem that carers do not have a lot of time to lobby for disabled issues, as opposed to the other smaller vocal minorities; hence when there is a problem it is difficult for the carers to find time to lobby or to voice their opinion. If the scheme works it will be a very positive step towards the future for Disability Care and Support.

2.3 Main issues with Disability Care and Support

Given the fact that the State and Federal Government are not necessarily aligned on disability support services, the NDIS is a step in the right direction. The Local, State and Federal Government need this alignment, as a lot of care and support services are based around local issues such as access, which is one of the main issues within Disability Care and Support.

If there is no access then the carers and person they care for have very limited options as to what they can do and where they can go. This needs to be addressed from an effort from Federal, State and Local Government, which should be passed down from the Federal Government and flowing down to individual disabled persons and their individual needs.

Another big issue is the supported housing for disabled people. The current state of development within Singleton does not address any of the needs for supported housing in any of the new developments in town.

The Government has tried to address issues in the past by putting money where it is not needed; with this money going into schemes that do not work and employing companies which do not have the infrastructure, knowledge or the right people doing the job.

The NDIS needs to employ a support base of qualified personnel to determine where the money is specifically targeted, how it is targeted and why it is targeted to a specific group. The State Government is currently changing their structure in order to look at specific funding and specific needs.

It will benefit the Government in the long term to look at specific needs simply because the Government can't afford to have people with disabilities go into full time Government care, the cost will be twice the set up cost of the NDIS and it will result in long term costs for professional people as opposed to the current state where the carers are paying the costs.

The main issues which need to be considered are integrating disabled people into the workforce and allowing them to work to their strengths, not to what the Government thinks are their strengths. Singleton is a prime example of how beneficial this initiative can be, through Cafe one oh one which is owned and run by the Chairman of the Disability Advisory Committees' family, with their disabled daughter Sophie working in all areas of the cafe and gift shop every day. This is a prime example of the way that integrating disabled people in the workforce can benefit both the community and the disabled person and their carer. The cafe is a very popular spot, being known as one of the best places to go for coffee and gifts in Singleton. Sophie works in both the cafe and gift area, and brings a lot of customers to the cafe with her beautiful nature.

Setting up specifically targeted businesses for people with disabilities in order to allow them to integrate into the community is a very positive step for the disabled community. They are in their own environment and it is something they know they will achieve, not something the Government hopes they can achieve.

Another issue is targeting the funding toward carers and assistants of carers, which needs to be considered due to the long term high necessity of these carers and the incredibly good job they do. Carers also save the Government an enormous amount of money every day, as every person who is being cared for privately is one less person the Government needs to find a suitable Government funded home for. The scheme needs to be targeted to carers and the people in their care, as well as specifically assisting those in the greatest need.

We need to attempt to introduce disabled people into the workforce and to challenge them in something they can do which will be empowering and rewarding.

The financial support under the scheme should be directed individually and specifically at the carers and the disabled people's needs and wants. The Government should mould themselves to the disabled people and carers and address their needs, not the other way around.

3.0 Conclusions

This submission has been prepared to address some of the issues surrounding the draft report which has been formulated by the Commission for the Disability Care and Support Inquiry.

We, as an organisation, believe that disability care and support should be significantly higher on the Government's agenda for reform. The implementation of a National Scheme would definitely be a step in the right direction for the care and support of disabled people and to ensure that the carers of disabled people have all the resources available to them.

By adding our personal experiences to this submission we hope that it will make it clear just how much of a difference the implementation of such a scheme will bring to the lives of many disabled people, as long as the funding is directed toward the right avenues.

4.0 Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the volume of services available to disabled people under the NSW and Australian Government form a regimented scheme in order to allow the carer and the disabled person to have a say in what they need, especially in their home environment.

Recommendation 2

That a large portion of the funding be put towards integrating disabled people into the workforce and allowing them to work to their own strengths and in an environment which they feel comfortable working in, as part of a team which appreciates the skills disabled people can bring to the workforce.

Recommendation 3

That the financial support be directed and tailored specifically for individuals and the needs of individual disabled people, as opposed to the Government deciding where they believe the funding should go and making this decision independently.