

Further Comments to support submission 6th October 2008:

1: Section 6

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The Uniting Care Comments here support my submission:

‘(A paid parental leave scheme) also sends a message to parents and the broader community that *parenting is important*, that it takes time to learn the skills to do it well and that it is okay, in fact, to make parenting a priority.’

In my experiences over the years in various welfare and education associated occupations, I have discovered the extent to which many parents are naïve, ignorant and quite scared of the responsibility and challenges of parenting. This is evident across the full range of socio-economic groups.

The reasons for returning to work within a few weeks of birth are given as economic: there is often also a hidden underlying insecurity about the role of parenting. The emphasis on work and career and social distaste for the unpaid work, (and ‘inferior’ role of women and mothers), has enabled this to become even more embedded.

The comments by the Women Lawyers Association, further extends this to an acknowledged insecurity about the perception of others towards parenting responsibilities (for both genders): ‘... the toughest barriers to overcome are attitudes based around the individual’.

The relatively recent venture of fathers into active parenting further compounds the need for supportive and informative, intelligent and explorative, training for parenting.

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‘Implementation of the Commission’s proposed model ... should lead to a greater acceptance within workplaces and the community of the normality of:

- People having, over their lifetimes, multiple roles, including as participants in the paid workforce and as parents
- Fathers having the opportunity of taking time away from work for family reasons. ‘

The normalising of what was once considered ‘natural’ (which has been lost by progressively vocational oriented and industrialised societies) is to address the imbalance and so offer our Australian society a healthier and more fulfilling personal life.

The benefits to the children, the families, the community and the overall welfare load (which is considerable) will be evident very quickly.

Toddler stress and behavioural difficulties prevent inspired and essential learning; truancy in secondary schooling is rife; adolescent antisocial behaviour is evident across all social groupings. The education and training of our young is dependent on the actions (and policies) of the adult community.

This proposal for the introduction of Preparation for Parenting Training addresses many levels of both social and personal difficulties.

Implementation:

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I support the proposal for a portable savings scheme which can be added to from Employment, Government Bonuses, Grants, gifts ... like the USA College Funds program. Private medical insurance companies may also offer benefits to tie in with this scheme.

Overall:

I support the development of the 'tribal elder' groups in our society – in all areas of our socio economic groupings.

There is a relatively untapped wealth of knowledge, wisdom and experience there.

If the training programs can be linked to specific age groups it will facilitate accessibility by the general public *and* the training teams. (Ref: <http://raisingchildren.net.au>)

Whilst there are programs and websites, books and documentaries to assist the curious and those naturally inclined towards learning and development – the real group experience with fellow parents, the actual presence of people with whom to share this vital journey – further develops the community. By offering these as part of the overall Parenting Support Scheme we send an implicit message to the wider community that Governance and social responsibility are not merely about laws, regulations and economics. Learning to more fully *enjoy* our various roles and stages in life is an *inherent human right*.

Localising these programs is wise for it allows for natural homogeneity of like folk. I suggest that such Courses have a basic simple framework and agenda allowing for exploration and creative development relative to each unique group. They can be offered 'seasonally' i.e. 4 times per year to coincide with the natural seasons.

These courses can be offered on various levels by Private Organisations, Commercial Enterprises, Community Groups supported by Government grants and Government Departments.

I refer once again to the precedents in Pre and Marriage/Relationship counselling. Likewise, the various models established within the legal professions.

If the commission can offer Preparation for Parenting in conjunction with the Parenting and Leave Support Schemes – the social and cultural development vitalises the nation's greatest resource (its people) and enhances the socio-economic structures *at the same time*.

Thank you and warm wishes for a grand new adventure!

Hilary Allen

Victoria.