

To whom it may concern,

I would like to submit my findings into respite care availability in Canberra. I'm writing this submission due to the inadequacy of respite services in the ACT. My family and I have always lived in Canberra, myself and husband were born here as were all of our children. We have 2 children with disabilities one 9yrs and the other 16yrs, and while our 2 children are blessed with being able to walk, talk and eat on their own it doesn't mean that their disabilities are any less significant. Children with serious behaviour issues, Autism, Asperges to name a few or maybe a blend of diagnosis's or even falling short of a diagnoses and between the cracks of a diagnoses but none the less demanding, stressful, time consuming and taking a huge toll on families.

Canberra we have found the following for our children and assistance for our family in the following ways:

Respite care is non-existent in Canberra, unless you are willing to wait for instance for some hours with formally Fabric now Tandem where respite is very limited and waiting periods long 12-18 months. While we did use this scheme briefly under the former name we were very unhappy with the service, inexperience of staff and an incident of assault from a worker with one of our children.

A few years ago now I had to leave university studies as I could not get a carer for my son in after school care as they said they were unable to get funds or even find staff qualified to look after him at school, and due to this unavailability and the incapability's of supervision within this service I eventually had to stop all studies as it was a safety issue for our child. I was being continually contacted to pick him up and while it was not a every day service it was too disruptive on me and the family not to mention the psychological implications for my son.

We have used 1 residential service for both of our children only a couple of times over the years situated in Queanbeyan . The period of time was only a couple of days so myself and husband could get away and have a short break our eldest at the time was 12yrs and the first time for us away. Another time we went away with our other children so they could have a rest from their demanding brothers. We also accessed their program during the school holidays one year, this program which was a day service and the children didn't sleep. the children were picked up and then dropped home which sounds all very good however the service was extremely expensive and you required assistance from an organization like Carers to be able to do that and obviously that time and assistance is very limited and really not an affordable option for a family to pay unassisted. The other issue with this service was staff smoked in the car with the children, they were not reliable and there was a major safety concern with the amount of staff taking care and working in this facility which was found out later with the death of a child.

In Canberra we have disability ACT which one would assume they could help out unfortunately this isn't the case as I have been referred and refused like so many so many for their respite care. Unfortunately if you don't fit a very clear criteria of disability you get absolutely nothing. I find this still very hard to swallow when you have a very demanding child and I believe this service to be the same for adults.

This service is not fare, inadequate for the majority of Canberran's who have children with disabilities and are unable to access these services or any services.

In conclusion if you have a child with a disability in Canberra, it's really bad luck as you cannot expect any fare available service to assist your family with any respite care and breathe of clean air for yourself or family unit, but I bet it's not the governments fault!

However while these issues are being ignored and not dealt with effectively, families are going to continue to break down and child abuse will sadly rise all a consequence of inadequate services and lack of responsibilities of our government.

Your Sincerely,

A very concerned, tired and fed up parent.