

Via email: committees@parliament.act.gov.au

26 March 2010

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services : Respite Care Services in the ACT

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Standing Committee.

By way of brief background, Communities@Work is a not for profit company limited by guarantee providing services for people of all ages in the Tuggeranong and Weston Creek Regions (where we are the local Regional Community Service) and across Canberra. Our services include children's services, parenting and family support, programs for youth, seniors and volunteers, outreach programs such as OzHarvest Canberra and SuperGrands and programs for people with disabilities. We are also a Registered Training Organisation. Further information can be obtained by accessing our website: www.commsatwork.org

In this submission we offer comment to the Committee on respite care services in the ACT based on our direct service delivery experience in implementing *Respite Options ACT*.

This program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs under the National Respite Development Fund component of the Mental Health Respite Program.

Respite Options ACT is a flexible program designed to meet the individual needs of carers and care recipients. We provide one on one respite and support services to carers of people who are experiencing severe mental illness and/or intellectual disabilities. The service enables carers time to recover from the stress of daily living, and to balance work and caring responsibilities.

Support services include assistance with shopping, meal preparation, support to attend leisure activities, attendance at appointments, companionship and understanding, information and referral.

We apply a person-centred approach within a whole of family environment and tailor the time and type of respite required according to need.

Respite Options ACT primarily operates under a 'brokerage' model whereby Carers Respite Centres broker the program to provide services to carers in the ACT. Communities@Work was also successful in receiving government approval to quarantine a small amount of allocated management funds for direct service provision to carers to enable a "no wrong door" approach.

This approach was highly successful with the direct service provision reaching full capacity within six months. Services have been provided to up to 43 clients per month with this small budget. Based on this experience Communities@Work strongly supports a flexible model in the future of brokerage combined with direct service provision as an effective and efficient method of delivery.

The program has a part time coordinator and a team of casual staff with experience and qualifications in mental health. Most have a psychology qualification and receive supervision, professional development and team support.

Staff retention is at a high level. A team of casuals was recruited to provide direct service delivery over twelve months ago and they are still employed at capacity for the hours they are available.

The Needs of Carers and Care Recipients

We have found from experience with implementing *Respite Options ACT* that there is demand for highly flexible, 'whole of family' models:

- families who have a child with mental illness or intellectual disability seek respite for siblings, whereas most long term respite services focus on catering for the 'care recipient.' Parents feel as though their children without disabilities miss out on the support they require.
- in-home respite, allowing family members to participate in community group activities or excursions, can meet the needs of the whole family.

Feedback from clients reveals the following:

- many desire respite to continue on a regular basis for six months with at least twelve months identified as the ideal timeframe
- they express concern with short term respite provision through which they 'get used to' a support worker with whom they can establish a good relationship and they then have to 'start from scratch' with someone new in a different service

- they regard fees for services as too expensive and consider Government funding should cover all service costs.

There is also a desire for education on how to build and maintain relationships with family and friends – identified as a particular challenge for individuals with mental illness.

There is a need for overnight and weekend services for families with children with disorders such as autism and ADHD.

Estimates of Demand

Research undertaken by Orima Research on behalf of Communities@Work in the Tuggeranong and Weston Creek regions indicates the following levels of demand for services in 2010

- up to 5,000 households require in-home care and maintenance services for the frail aged and people with disabilities
- up to 1,800 households require social inclusion and support services for people with disabilities
- up to 800 households require in-home support for people with dementia

It is evident that the demand is growing in our community for individuals and families to enjoy respite opportunities in order to maintain their health and well being over the longer term.

We recommend to the Committee that there should be emphasis on collaboration and exchange of knowledge with regards to Federal and ACT initiatives in this field in order to ensure the best use of available funds.

The Committee may care to note that Communities@Work is a member of the ACT Branch of National Disability Services and hence, supports their submission.

We would be happy to appear before the Committee at a public hearing and to provide further information as required. I can be contacted on 6293 6500 or by email: maureen.cane@commsatwork.org

Yours faithfully



Maureen Cane
Chief Executive Officer