

SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL
SERVICES.

INQUIRY INTO RESPITE CARE SERVICES IN THE ACT.

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THE AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT, NO 3 OF 2009, MANAGEMENT OF RESPITE SERVICES IN THE ACT.

Although the policies and procedures appear up to standard on paper we have yet again a short fall of these being put into practice. There were numerous recommendations for DACT to put into practice and the accountability to a higher authority seems lacking. I find the report very revealing and disturbing, I wouldn't feel that placing my child into a DACT respite service would ensure his safety and that his care needs would be met. Why is it so hard to put these into practice, where is the responsibility? The example that the government is setting for other service providers is SHAMEFUL. If the government can't get it right how can we expect others to care whether they do or not, they have no incentive to see that the people they support are important.

THE NEEDS OF CARE RECIPIENTS (INCLUDING CHILDREN, TEENAGERS AND ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY, ELDERLY PEOPLE, PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND PEOPLE FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS) AND THEIR CARERS.

There is not enough flexibility within service provider's policies and care plans to allow the support worker to adjust their duties to provide the highest standard of care for recipients. There are support workers who have attitudes that include "if it isn't written in the care plan then it is not my job to do this task" or they avoid certain care needs because they don't want to sweep the floor after a client has eaten or change a soiled pad so it is left for the parent or the next support worker. Not providing fluid when consistently instructed that that is what is required, dragging out meal times because they want to avoid the next step. The needs of care recipients are not being met even when support workers are in place.

We already know that the needs of carers and care recipients vary depending on each individual, why say what is already known, the available respite services don't meet the expected needs of clients nor will they ever unless there is major change, not just a little here and there.

The needs of families and care recipients go far beyond just the support needs. Respite alleviates the pressure for families and enables them to live a life upon another degree. Support needs for individuals who require the support are only alive because their needs have been met. Needs which reach far beyond basic human needs of housing, clothing and food; there survival depends on their needs being addressed. These people also need socialization, stimulation etc to be able to live a complete psychological life.

Families who live with the constant intensity that caring puts upon a family unit will also develop psychological issues, risk family breakdown and poor health of the primary carer. Families need the freedom to be a family and to be themselves as each individual member.

THE NEEDS OF STAFF WHO PROVIDE RESPITE CARE, INCLUDING WORKING CONDITIONS AND TRAINING.

Staff training, conditions and wages all need to be reviewed and redefined to reflect the professionalism that is needed by these workers and the industry. Professionalism would build self worth and self esteem to reflect the level of importance of the service provided. Staff also need clear career paths so they can work through the ranks like other industries. Educating support workers concerning the direct impact that they have on peoples lives and that they are actually entering peoples homes, not just another workplace puts support workers into a separate and higher expectation range than other employees in other industries. With that being said respite support workers need to undergo personality and psychological profiling because of their direct impact on peoples lives, there should not be a place for incompetence, bossiness, complacency or controlling workers, who care only about getting in and out as quick as they can and do a little as they can.

THE RANGE, AVAILABILITY AND SUITABILITY OF RESPITE CARE SERVICES, INCLUDING ANY UNMET NEED.

The gap of available services and need is growing into an abyss that leaves many families without respite until crisis point is reached; due to the desperation they accept support that doesn't suit their particular situation or needs. They are also forced to access respite that they otherwise would not use because the agency is not up to standard. Agencies make the choice of who gets what care and waiting lists grow and in an attempt to shrink these lists other families are losing services to minimum so people on the list appear to get service until they find themselves dealt with in the same manner. Agencies also have the power to refer a family to another agency without concern whether the family can afford services from the other agency, when the original agency has wavered or capped fees, so the family has no choice but to forfeit precious support services. To decrease a families much needed care due to support workers moving on proves that there is no available staff to replace them so the family again lose care and many families must endure unsuitable times and workers. The range of available support workers is very narrow, so what minute amount of support workers are now available; the quality workers are the small percentage of this work force. This also applies to the few agencies that actually do a good job; they again are the smaller percentage.

The range, availability and suitability also include the agencies that are responsible for co-ordinating families and individuals supports. Having dealt with a number of agencies over the years I have found only one who holds to its policies and standards that it sets forth. Another agency has slowly over the past five years become less interested in peoples needs than their financial position. One particular agency has been the most pathetic agency I have ever dealt with and that is for about eight years. So due to agencies indifference to the care needs of their clients there really isn't much availability, range or suitability to chose from and many families are caught in the middle of this battlefield. This proves that it isn't only inappropriate support workers working in the industry but that the same problems also exist amongst managers, co-ordinators, schedulers, case managers and other similar staff.

Agencies need to examine the policies they have on paper and make sure they are being actioned. The way some conduct their services and the people they employ leave a lot to be desired. The accreditation standards need reviewing and be reviewed regularly, there also needs to be one standard for all agencies and services. Unmet need can be addressed by bringing a higher quality of service and professionalism into the industry, unmet need can also fall under the umbrella of a support worker showing up to a clients home but there is no one addressing the issue of whether they are providing the service they are being paid to do, agencies neglect this important issue, they seem more concerned that a worker has turned up; not the quality of service. An outside organisation needs to do regular assessments of all agencies support workers.

Unmet need is beyond measure and cannot be counted. If the government was serious about improving services including range, availability and suitability they need to develop benchmarks for quality of service, quality support workers and quality agencies and ensure they are being met by providing a watchdog that works. Improve the industry and you improve other issues.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND NON GOVERNMENT PROVIDERS OF RESPITE CARE.

As government and non government respite providers are really providing the same ideal there needs to be a joining of all disability services, currently the whole system is disjointed and every agency stands alone. Aren't we all trying to achieve the same goals? Non government and government providers need to work together so that when there is a shortfall within one agency another can pick it up, but the main agency cannot constantly broker out to other agencies so someone else needs to pick up the expense so families don't miss out. Networking the system will prevent families falling through gaps as available care and resources will be at all agencies finger tips.

THE EXPERIENCE OF SERVICE USERS WHO UTILISE GOVERNMENT AND NON GOVERNMENT PROVIDERS OF RESPITE CARE.

My experience of using respite services vary. In the past I had more positive experiences than negative, but within the last couple of years I have seen standards becoming extinct. I presently access a couple of agencies who put care recipients and their families first and they are proven service providers. The only time I accessed a government respite house, only after a few visits it became apparent to me that if I continued to access this service my son would be put into a situation where his safety wasn't a priority. I have never accessed government respite houses since and I never will in the future and the auditors report proves that nothing has changed within the eight or so years since. The non government agencies that I use vary in standards and values of care, one agency is gradually losing touch with clients and their needs while another is completely incompetent mostly in the way they run their agency and the small percentage of reasonable support workers they send to provide the service, if it was my choice I wouldn't give the majority of them a job caring for my son. If you request that a worker be removed they try to talk you into keeping them there because it makes their job easier not having to find replacement workers. Why do people with disabilities and their families deserve to be treated in this manner, isn't the disability enough to deal with? Agencies need to employ staff of high standards with not only

qualifications and experience which mean nothing if they don't have the right personality and attitude to do the job to a high standard. I will not accept a worker that I wouldn't employ myself and that doesn't go down too well with most agencies, but I have a right to quality service.

ANY OTHER RELATED MATTER.

Agencies need to not only uphold the policies and values they invoke but also the human rights act, the human rights commission act and the convention of the rights of a person with a disability. When service providers see clients as people and not names, numbers or shifts to fill they would provide a better service (eg: agencies neglect to match support workers to clients physical needs, some workers do not have the physical stamina to work with some clients. Agencies are neglecting to personalise their services and see clients as people, as long as the shift is filled to the required audited paperwork for funding). If they improved work conditions for employees (eg: the employee having their own life and not be at the agencies beck and call) they will attract better workers. Instead of trying to fix everything that is wrong, and everything is wrong with the current system with the exception of a few ideals that do work, develop a new one, from scratch with starting points from what is proven to work, build upon these and negate any temptation to reference any other service that exist now which is proven not to work. This is an immense job and it demands to be brought into being. So it is now time to roll up the sleeves, no more excuses, it can be done if one truly wants it brought into being. This inquiry and the many before and after this one and the many community, family and service provider consultations regarding the problems within the disability sector prove that the problems exist. Don't just use this as another smoke screen to make it look like something is being done to improve services, this time actually do it.