



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

SPEECH

Tuesday, 10 March 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 10 March 2009
Page 60
Questioner
Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (8.35 pm)—I would like to talk about grandparents raising grandchildren. The issues grandparents raising grandchildren face are complex and continuous. Indeed, stress is a significant health issue for many custodial grandparents. The compounding effects of financial, legal and emotional stress can lead to significant health problems. Unfortunately, the stress of meeting the demands and responsibilities of caring for their grandchildren, coupled with the grief, guilt or anxiety felt for the plight of their grandchildren's parents, often compromises the health of the grandparents and diminishes their ability to cope.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that in 2003 there were 22,500 grandparent families with 31,100 children aged between zero and 17 in the care of the grandparents. I would add that since 2003 I suspect those figures have risen quite dramatically. In Tasmania, the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania project is funded by FaHCSIA through the National Illicit Drug Strategy strengthening families initiative and managed by Early Support for Parents Inc. The project is in its fourth year and is funded until 30 June 2009. Before I return to this, I would like to point out that the Tasmanian Education Department statistics in 2008 recorded 494 grandparent families from prep to year 12. The Department of Health and Human Services child and family services identified 160 informal grandparent families in 2008. In Tasmania informal grandparent families are those families where the grandchildren are not under the care and protection of the state. Of 173 children in kinship care on 15 September 2008, at least 51 were being cared for by a grandparent. Unfortunately no relationship has been recorded for 99 of the children in kinship care. Other relatives are recorded as the carers for the remaining 23 children.

I am informed that the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania project in 2009 services a mailing list of 232 grandparent families. And indeed grandparents, as I mentioned before, raising their grandchildren experience a complexity of issues across both the state and federal jurisdictions and it is something that we will have to come to terms with more and more.

I return to acknowledge the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania project. This is a statewide

family support project sponsored by Early Support for Parents Inc. and funded by our government. This is a confidential, free service to grandparent families created in recognition of the growing numbers of grandchildren who care for one or more of their grandchildren in the effective absence of the biological parents. These families experience many inequities compared to other out-of-home carers because of a lack of recognition both legally and financially. These types of gaps in the system, as I have mentioned, add to the enormous stress these families are already experiencing on a daily basis.

The regional family support worker at the heart of this project can help by offering: support and counselling via phone contact, visits to service offices and home visits; assessment of family needs and the tailoring of assistance to specific needs; one-on-one advocacy—for example, assistance to communicate with services such as Centrelink, schools or health services, assistance with enquiries through child protection, and offering support with accessing legal processes; provision of relevant information particularly to grandparent family issues; provision of sessions around information on skill development, particularly strategies for behaviour management, conflict resolution, reducing stress and promoting self-care; referral to other specific agency resources or services regarding legal and financial matters; and a link to other grandparent families in the area who understand what it is like to be parenting again.

I am going to continue to raise the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren and to look to developing a national approach to this. It is something we have to do. It is something we have to deal with. They need all the support we can give federally, statewide and locally.