

Nobody chooses to become a carer to make money, you choose to become a carer because you feel sorry for children who for whatever reasons are not given a good start to their lives, you become a carer because you care for the children, and you want to give them a better life than what they have had so far.

In our case as a kin/relative carer you don't have a choice, you are asked to provide a home for children who have been let down by their parents. As a kin/relative you have an obligation to provide a home for these children they are your family and who doesn't want to help their family. For a kin/relative carer who are unable to give the care to children from their family who need it the suffering making this decision would be enormous. As a kin/relative carer you are unprepared, but you have no choice.

So, you agree to take on the task of raising children, most of us have raised our own babies so we know what needs to be done but now we are much older past our childbearing days, and we are dealing with the aches and pains of ageing but now we have been asked to do a job that is usually done by people decades younger. You are faced with the practical challenges of having children such as needing bigger accommodation, you need a bigger fridge with all the extra mouths to feed, you need a bigger washing machine to cope with the extra clothes. You need beds for the children, you need clothes for the children, you need extra food for the children all the things you just don't have.

Now that you have agreed to take on the task you are hit with the onslaught of administration tasks that comes with agreeing to be a carer and so it should be to have reassurance that the system is checking that children are placed in the right homes, but the administration takes over and the department forgets about the practical side. We were not told that we would be getting a carers payment nor how much it was going to be, you have no idea of entitlements that you are able to access being a carer, you are not told that you will be under the guide of DCJ for a set period of time and then your case will be moved to an NGO. The process is frightening, you have to deal with lawyers, angry parents, sad children and all these people in and out of your home that have never been there before.

My suggestion to DCJ is when placing children with new carers prepare an information pack to give to carers. In the pack explain the process that will happen once all the checks and balances have been approved, explain the carers payment what you will receive and what it is expected to cover, what entitlements you can access from Centrelink. Explain what costs you may have to cover but can get reimbursements for. In the pack include gift cards for supermarkets and a gift card for K Mart for clothes for the children. These are the immediate concerns because children are likely to arrive with the clothes on their backs. Having these pre-prepared packs will go a long way to answering questions carers will have but once they have settled down from the overwhelming task in front of them. It will answer questions that you would normally have to chase the case worker for answers so that takes pressure off an already overworked caseworker.

Now that all the checks have been passed, the legal work has been done let's look at what we have, we have children who through no choice of their own have a multitude of issues, learning disabilities, trauma from separation and/or abuse and the complications that come with this, most of the children are fussy eaters because have been raised on fast food that is not nutritious. So, you need to re-teach the children and/or try and figure out how you can help them through their trauma. We are unqualified to do this. You may have to deal with angry children who physically attack children, teachers and even you. Schools don't want any responsibility their answer is to suspend the child, everyone doesn't want them but as a carer you are the child's last hope. While carers are managing this where is DCJ, where are the NGO's, they are telling you to make an appointment to see this

trauma counsellor or make an appointment to send the child to one specialist or another. In our case our own GP raised concerns for our own health having the added responsibility on caring for high needs children, our GP asked if we could get further help from the NGO for things like a cleaner or a laundry service, of course the response to that was no. We are an ageing group you want us to open our homes yet your prepared to do little to help us. No one talks about carers dealing with angry parents who abuse you, stalk you and generally make your life hell because you are trying to provide a safe environment for their children. So late at night when you are faced with an abusive parent DCJ and NGO's have logged off.

You mention how is out of home care delivered, out of home care is delivered by carers, it is not delivered by DCJ it is not delivered by NGO's the day to day of each child's life is delivered by carers. We can get help from an NGO taking a child to an appointment but at that appointment the specialist doesn't want to talk with the case worker the specialist wants to talk to the carer because it is the carer with the child 24/7 and sees what a case worker cannot see in a home visit. The specialist wants to talk to the carer because if a child needs medication it is the carer who needs to administer it. When the school wants to meet to talk about plans with the child again the school wants to talk with the carer because the case worker does not see everything that happens with the child. It is the carer who the children comes to find in the middle of the night because they have had a nightmare or they have wet the bed not the case worker, not the NGO and not DCJ.

All I have seen is NGO's paper pushing, they report to DCJ and are doing the tasks that DCJ set down to do. There is a lot of assumption that somehow the NGO via the case worker knows what the child will need in the future and submit funding for it. One of the children I have it has taken over two years to have him diagnosed with multiple learning disabilities, now the resources can be put in place to help him with his learning. None of us know what a child may need on an annual basis, more emphasis should be put on getting systems in place to help these children get checks and assessments expedited rather than having to rely on school councillors to administer tests and wait every six months for paediatrician appointments. This request for funding for the child's future should also include the carer's because carer's should know what they can access, this cloak of invisibility reinforces the myth that carer's do this for the money and it disrespects the role that carer's take in the process.

DCJ's website states that NGO's can receive a baseline funding package annually of \$47K per child. None of the children we care for would spend anywhere near that amount of money annually. For the children in our care this baseline package would pay our NGO close to \$250K per year. I am interested to know where this funding goes because it is definitely not to the children, any moneys we get other than the carers allowance is at the discretion of the NGO and even then if we need something for the children that is acceptable we have to buy it and get reimbursed. We have to buy this with what little money we get then wait and hope that the reimbursement is paid on time. What happens to the money that NGO's receive that the child it was applied for does not use? The child does not use the funds because no one tells the carer that the funds are there or what they can be used for. We just use our own money because every time you ask for help the stock standard response is your carers payment covers that. On some occasions the financial decisions you have to make is between choosing to buy something that the child needs to buying cheaper meals so you can afford both. Then you have to wait for reimbursement, and if the case worker has forgotten to do it then you may have to wait another fortnight before you see the monies reimbursed or on some occasions a month has gone past before you see it on occasions we have had to negotiate with our electricity provider continually asking for an extension to pay a power bill while we wait for reimbursement. How is this fair? In the end you just stop asking it is too difficult you spend more

time hoping you will be reimbursed or practically begging for reimbursement it is humiliating. DCJ asked us to help with children and we do but being a carer means you have to also grovel for any little morsel of help for the children, you practically throw us on the street to beg!

The carers payment does little to help the child all carers have to contribute their own money to raise the children. Some carers who are lucky enough to be able to work while caring have the ability to do this but a lot of carers cannot work either because of the age of the child, the emotional demands of the child or the carer themselves are not able to work because of age. Are we told that this is a possibility when we are asked to be carers, no we are not.

The carers payment is to cover food, clothing and footwear, daily travel, car restraints, gifts, household provisions and costs, hobbies and activities, general educational expenses, holidays, general medical expenses, and pocket money.

In our situation and the current rental crisis our carers payment pays our rent and that is it! DCJ asked us to obtain bigger accommodation for the children which we did, our NGO paid our bond, but we have to pay this back out of our carers payment, so rent and repayment on top there is nothing left for everything else. Food, clothing, utilities, school uniforms the list goes on. Uniform costs for one child was over \$700 when she started high school. School excursion costs for one year were over \$2000 we have no option but to claim financial hardship and ask the schools if they could waive the fees. I don't understand how any of this is reasonable this is what we are reduced to when we agree to help.

We have had medicine prescribed by a paediatrician the medicine needed to be prepared at a compound chemist, the cost was \$100 for a month's supply, we were refused reimbursement because it was considered an over-the-counter medicine. The list goes on the refusal to reimburse carers for out-of-pocket expenses with the stock standard answer that the carers payment should cover but let's look at the carer's payment.

This is how the current carers payment breaks down

Standard care rate	Daily rate	Hourly rate (24-hour care)
\$564 - \$854 per fortnight	\$40-28 - \$61.00 per day	\$1.67 - \$2.54
Care +1* rate	Daily rate	Hourly rate (24-hour care)
\$857 - \$1278 per fortnight	\$60.50 – \$91.28 per day	\$2.52 - \$3.80
Care+2** rate	Daily rate	Hourly rate (24-hour care)
\$1119 - \$1685 per fortnight	\$79.92 - \$120.35 per day	\$3.33 - \$5.01

*Care+1 – children assessed with health, behavioural and/or learning disabilities

** Care+2 – children assessed with high needs

Compare rates which are Industry Award rates guide for Community Home Care and Disability Services as published by the Fair Work Ombudsman.

Social and community services employee – Level 1	Weekly pay rate \$930.70	Hourly pay rate \$24.49
Crisis accommodation employee – Level 1	Weekly pay rate \$1,367.86	Hourly pay rate \$36.00
Home care employee – Level 1	Weekly pay rate \$921.70	Hourly pay rate \$24.26

Not only is the carers payment not enough, but the payment broken down to real time indicates exploitation of carers.

Your consultation paper talks about costs for training and insurance for NGO's I really would like to know training for what, they are not caring for the children carers are. My case worker drives around in company cars, when me and my children cannot even afford a car, how is this system fair, funding is provided to help children and the NGO's are receiving so much more help than the children are.

You ask why there is a shortage of carers, being a carer is soul destroying and not from the children but from the administration that runs it, the administration is running around justifying themselves using the funding that is meant to be helping the children.