

A national newsletter with news for, about and by grandparents

STOP PRESS
see pages 11 & 12

Election 2010

This is the third and second last of our election 2010 newsletters. A fourth one will be issued prior to the Victorian election in November.

The federal election has been called sooner than we expected. No matter to us because we had written to all federal MPs back in May/June. The response we have received to our campaign has been heartening with much sympathy for the role of grandparents reaffirmed. We have been told by people on all sides of politics to “keep going”. We will, irrespective of the election results.

This edition has a focus on federal issues related to grandparent carers because that was the main focus of our campaign. In 2011 we plan to also take up with “more gusto” the issues of grandparents denied access to their grandchildren.



There are action items in this newsletter. Please respond to them.

GRANDPARENTS AUSTRALIA MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

- ▶ Grandparent's & Grandchildren's Society (QLD)
- ▶ Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (TAS)
- ▶ Grandparents Victoria Inc. (VIC)
- ▶ Moreland Community Childcare Co-op. (VIC)
- ▶ Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren (WA)
- ▶ Grandpower for Grandkids (WA)
- ▶ Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SA)
- ▶ Grandparents for Grandchildren (SA)
- ▶ Starick Services Inc. (NSW)
- ▶ Canberra Mothercraft

In this edition		
▪ GRANDPARENT /KINSHIP CARERS ELECTION WISH LIST – WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?		2
▪ <i>A letter from the Federal Minister</i>		3
▪ A letter from the Federal Attorney General		3
▪ <i>A letter from the Governor of Australia</i>		4
▪ Flexible requirements to help vulnerable children and grandparent carers		4
▪ <i>The Greens call for a Commissioner for Children - just as grandparents have for five years</i>		5
▪ The Greens campaign for universal, free dental care		5
▪ New standards to help vulnerable children		6
▪ The fourteen new out of home care standards that grandparent carers would do well to note are.....		6
▪ <i>Children in out of home care have lower academic outcomes</i>		7
▪ CREATE to support children in out of home care		7
▪ <i>Grandparent carers recognised by Queensland Parliament</i>		8
▪ Mediation to be pushed in childcare court cases (NSW)		8
▪ The govt supports our kinship care conference		
▪ The election promises for children with disabilities		9
▪ The economic costs of child abuse and neglect		10
▪ Gillard govt. support for families with teenagers		10
▪		



GRANDPARENT /KINSHIP CARERS ELECTION WISH LIST – WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?



As a result of our campaign efforts, as well as the “warm up” efforts leading up to the campaign, some items on our election “wish list” have been affirmed and work on them commenced by the current Australian Government. Other items have received support from people on all sides of politics. However, some politicians are not in a position to act on them. The election results will determine that.

We trust that no matter who is elected these items will continue to be advanced. They are small ticket items in terms of funding required but are huge in terms of the effect they will have on the lives of grandparent carers.

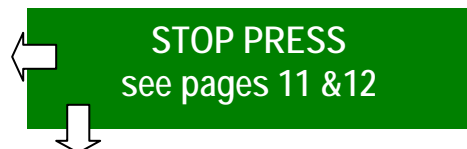
We also look forward to announcements closer to the election. If this happens we will publish any good news commitments in the next edition of the newsletter – after the election. In the meeting we had with federal Minister Macklin she expressed her own ideas about how the government might support carers in the context of the national framework for the protection of children. Therefore, we look forward to announcements of initiatives not raised by us.

Various articles in this newsletter provide a guide to the varied responses we received to our “wish list”. Accordingly, we have grouped our wish list items to show the detail of the support we received.

Much of this campaign was conducted in partnership with Families Australia, the peak organisation representing families and our close ally.

We requested and are confident of new work in the following items on our wish list:

- ✓ *Urgent joint efforts by federal and State/Territory governments to ensure that a uniformly consistent Carer Allowance is paid to grandparent and other kinship carers who are providing primary care for children (Federal and State governments will examine this issue in 2011– we will closely monitor progress)*
- ✓ *Placement of grandparents/kinship carer liaison officers within all major Centrelink offices (Minister Macklin was interested in this idea and suggested that we participate in the review of Centrelink which has been put on hold while the government is in pre election care taker mode.*
- ✓ *Emergency discretionary payments by Centrelink to assist particularly needy grandparent /kinship carers in cases where children are placed in their care at short notice (Minister Macklin was interested in this idea and suggested that we participate in the review of Centrelink which has been put on hold while the government is in pre election care taker mode.*



We recognise that we need to work harder to convince decision makers of the merits of the following items:

- ? *Additional sustained multi year funding for grandparent and other kinship carer support groups and access to respite services and local information*
- ? *National research into the effectiveness of whole of family conferencing as a strategy of support for grandparents raising grandchildren (refer to the letter from the Attorney General in this newsletter)*

We recognise the need to monitor and verify that the following items are modified to suit grandparents

- ? *A national information service such as a 24 hour telephone line and /or a website to make information about financial assistance, social support, family law and other legal matters more accessible (refer to the letter from the Attorney General in this newsletter)*
- ✓ *A counseling support program within the national Family Relationship Services program which specifically addresses the needs of grandparent and other kinship carers (refer to the letter from the Attorney General in this newsletter)*

We are not hopeful of reforms in the following item and will need to work very hard indeed to see matters changed

- ✗ *A review of legal aid income assessment processes for grandparent and other kinship carers providing primary care for children (refer to the letter from the Attorney General in this newsletter)*

A letter from the Federal Minister



Ms Anne McLeish OAM
Dear Anne,

I was pleased to meet with you and the Chief Executive Officer of Families Australia, Mr Brian Babington, on 12th May 2010 to discuss your proposed National Action Plan for Grandparents and Other Kinship Carers and priorities for action.

The Commonwealth Government recognises the important contribution grandparents and kinship carers make to our society, caring for children to keep them safe and well, often in difficult circumstances.

The recommendations contained in your submission call for action from all levels of government and across different government departments and will require careful and detailed consideration.

I understand that officers from my Department have met with you and Mr Babington and you have agreed to work together to progress this work. I look forward to receiving further information and advice as this work progresses.

As you are aware, under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, the Commonwealth Government, with the states and territories, has commissioned a project to explore options for improving the financial and non financial support being provided to grandparent, kinship and foster carers. The project will explore the supports and services currently available to non-parent carers (including foster, grandparent and kinship carers) to analyse current gaps in support and services.

I have asked my Department to ensure that the recommendations of your submission on a National Plan for Grandparent and Other Kinship Carers are taken into account when considering the results of this project.

Thank you for meeting with me to discuss this important issue.
Yours sincerely, Jenny Macklin MP

Postscript

We note from follow calls to the offices of local government members of parliament that the Minister Macklin's office had already been in touch with them. The Minister had reassured all government members that she was dealing with the issues we raised in our campaign letter and would be meeting with us.

Although we had a productive meeting with one of Tony Abbott's senior advisors and received a sympathetic hearing, we note there has been no policy release to date.

All responses made to our offices whether from the Labor, Liberal, National or Greens members of parliament have been appreciated and that all respondents expressed awareness of the issues and a determination to try to do something to alleviate the pressures on grandparent carers and the grandchildren they raise.

A letter from the Federal Attorney General

Ms Anne McLeish OAM
Dear Anne,

Thankyou for your letter outlining proposals for inclusion in a national Action plan for grandparent and other kinship carers.

I have noted your suggestio0ns, several of which fall within my portfolio. I agree that this is an important area ands accordingly I have asked my Department to work with you.

I welcome this opportunity to address each of your proposals that fall within my portfolio.

a) a review of legal aide

The government recognises the issues that grandparents may face in dealing with the legal system when they are unable to obtain legal assistance. Legal aide commissions have flexibility in considering applications for assistance to take account of any special circumstances that may apply in particular circumstances. Legal aide commissions have many competing demands for their resources and setting a separate means test form one group raises policy and practical issues.

The government funds state and territory legal aide commissions to provide legal assistance to disadvantaged Australians in matters which arise under the Commonwealth law. Currently, when assessing applications for aide addressing commonwealth law matters legal aide commissions must apply priorities and guidelines set by government.

These guidelines require a test of the merits of the matter and must satisfy an assessment of income and assets. Means tests are set by the legal aide commissions to ensure that limited resources are targeted to the most disadvantaged in the community. Commissions also offer free and non-means tested legal information, legal advice and minor assistance services and duty lawyer services which are available to all.

b) a national information system such as a 24hr telephone line

The Australian Government currently funds a number of services including:

- The family relationships telephone advice line established to assist families, including grandparents, affected by relationship issues. This services is available 8 am–8pm Monday to Friday and 10am–4pm Saturday
- Family relationships online providing easy online access to information about family relationship and separation issues. There is a separate page specifically designed for grandparents containing fact sheets covering a wide range of issues.

c) A counselling support program within family relationship services program

The government currently provides funding for family (including grandparents) counselling under the family relationships services



program. Further, grandparents are able to access services at the Family Relationship Centres

As you know in January 2009 I announced the development of support material to assist grandparents navigating the family system including:

- A pamphlet and DVD on the importance of children maintaining strong relationships with significant people in their lives, including grandparents
- An examination by the Australian Institute of Family Studies of the impact of the 2006 Family Law reforms on grandparents.
- An exploration of how parenting orders, post separation, can better include discussion about the importance of grandparents.

d) national research into the effectiveness of whole of family conferencing as a strategy to support grandparents raising grandchildren

There are number of models of whole of family conferencing that may be used and are being used by various government funded services. The involvement of grandparents and other kinship carers in processes such as family dispute resolution is quite often done on a case by case basis. However, the government recognises the importance of considering these issues in the context of the wider family law system and will continue to consider how emerging models can best be used to meet the needs of Australian children and families, including grandparents.

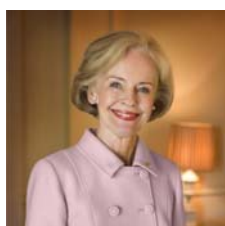
Thankyou for taking time to write about your concerns and I encourage you to keep in touch with the senior officers in my department/

Yours sincerely, Robert McClelland

Postscript

We will maintain close contact with the Attorney General's Department after the election, irrespective of the result. A senior officer has been appointed to work with us.

A letter from the Governor of Australia



When we met with the Governor General earlier in the year we requested that she open the kinship care conference to be held in Melbourne in October. During that meeting the Governor suggested that she wants to continue her support for grandparents. A recent letter that "ties up" these two matters

Dear Ms McLeish

The Governor General has asked me to thank you for your letter of 20th September 2009 inviting her to attend a national conference in grandparenting and kinship care. Ms Bryce regrets that full program of commitments prevents her from attending, but looks forward to hosting a discussion on issues facing grandparents later in the year.



Flexible requirements to help vulnerable children and grandparent carers

22 June, 2010

About 180,000 Australian parents, including many who support the most vulnerable children in our community, will have greater flexibility in their participation requirements for income support under legislation passed by the Australian Parliament.

Minister for Employment Participation Mark Arbib welcomed the passage of the *Social Security Amendments Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Bill 2010*.

Senator Arbib said the Rudd Government was fully committed to mutual obligation through participation and compliance measures, but it was important to have provisions that help children and parents in vulnerable families.

"Support for children in jobless families will now be better as parents will soon have more flexibility to balance their caring responsibilities with their participation requirements. Children in emergency, respite foster or kinship care as well as those in situations of domestic violence will benefit most," Senator Arbib said.

Parents will still be required to undertake 30 hours of suitable activities each fortnight in most cases, but will be able to flexibly combine work, education, training and volunteering to meet their participation requirements.

The changes include:

- new exemptions for emergency and respite foster carers, and for kinship carers who have the care of a child under a State or Territory case plan;
- extending eligibility for the 16 week domestic violence exemption to parents who have been subject to domestic violence in the past six months, regardless of their current relationship status;
- extending the existing 12 month exemption for families whose children undertake distance education to include eligible families with children aged up to 18 who are still completing secondary school and large families with four or more children, families providing home schooling; and
- more flexible arrangements over long school holidays, including up to eight weeks exemption for parents with term-time work who have a job to return to in the New Year.

This change to policy is repeated from a previous newsletter. If grandparent carers are still having problems in this area please contact the office.

The Greens call for a Commissioner for Children - just as grandparents have for five years

Wed, 12/05/2010

The Australian Greens have today moved to protect young Australians by introducing a bill into the Senate to establish a Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People, according to Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young.

Senator Hanson-Young, Greens spokesperson on Youth and Human Rights, says legislation is needed to protect the rights of young Australians.

"From children who are bullied at school, to the babies, infants and kids who are victims of abuse or neglect, to the thousands of children and young people who are homeless on our streets every night, we have a vulnerable generation of young Australians and we need to do more to help them," Senator Hanson-Young said.

"There is no national figure whose sole role is to stand up for children's rights - but there should be. That's why I am introducing a bill today to establish a Commissioner who would provide a voice for children, a means of communication with government, and a simple way to register complaints about how they are treated.

"Australia has international obligations as a signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it is clear that there is a long way to go to live up to these obligations. For example:

- In 2008/09, there were 32,641 Australian children who had a confirmed case of abuse or neglect.
- The largest single age group of homeless people in Australia is aged 12 to 18.

The bill was drafted in consultation with Save the Children, who have endorsed the legislation. Other groups such as UNICEF and the Human Rights Commission have previously strongly supported the need for a national body to protect children's rights.

"We call on all parties in Parliament to recognize the importance of this issue, and work together to provide greater protection for young Australians. I hope they will support this Bill," Senator Hanson-Young said.

"If we want to tackle serious problems such as child abuse, homelessness, poor education, poverty and social disadvantage, we must value our children more and the key role they play in our community.

"A Commissioner for Children and Young People would be a good start to achieve this goal."

Media contact: Erin Farley 0438 376 082

Postscript

Federal Minister Jenny Macklin is also investigating the feasibility of establishing a Commissioner for Children. This was suggested in the National framework for the Protection of Children released by the federal government



The Greens campaign for universal, free dental care

Mon, 24/05/2010 - 11:27

The Australian Greens will push for a national, universal public dental care scheme in the lead up to the federal election.

Around half a million Australians are already on waiting lists for urgent dental care, with a national average waiting period of over two years.

"Dental health is essential to good physical health and emotional well-being and it makes no sense for it to be excluded from our public health system," said Australian Greens health spokesperson Senator Rachel Siewert.

"The Greens will continue to campaign for a universal dental care scheme, operating as part of Medicare as a key priority in the lead up to and beyond the federal election.

Just to lighten the election mood a little

My sister and I are in our eighties and certainly not experts in technology. However, she bought a mobile phone and was determined to learn how to send text messages.

We went to a local phone shop, where she asked the assistant to show her how to text. "I'd be glad to", said the girl, "but I'm afraid you've brought in a TV remote control".

.....

A six year old goes to the hospital with her grandmother to visit her Grandpa.

When they get to the hospital, she runs ahead of her Grandma and bursts into Grandpa's room

"Grandpa, Grandpa," she says excitedly, "As soon as Grandma comes into the room, make a noise like a frog!"

"What?" said her Grandpa?

"Make a noise like a frog - because Grandma said that as soon as you croak, we're all going to Disney Land!"

New standards to help vulnerable children

From the office of JENNY MACKLIN
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs
7 July 2010

The Australian Government today released draft national standards to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of children living in foster homes and other formal out-of-home care across Australia.

Protecting children and their right to a safe and healthy life is one of the most important responsibilities governments have. These standards mean governments will work together to strengthen out-of-home care for children across Australia.

Currently, child protection systems vary markedly across the country with each state and territory having its own child protection policy, standards and legislation. Out-of-home care standards will provide a national benchmark for the care of children who are no longer with their parents, no matter where they live.

Developed with the states and territories, the 14 draft national standards focus on key areas, including access to health, education and training, increased support for carers and enhancing transition planning for all young people.

Under the draft standards:

- a comprehensive health assessment will be provided to children and young people entering care, with ongoing medical needs attended to in an appropriate and timely way, and children and young people will have their own written health record which moves with them if they change placements;
- individual education plans will be developed, implemented, and reviewed regularly for children and young people in care;
- carers will be assessed and will receive relevant ongoing training, development and support; and
- young people will have a transition from care plan commencing at 15 years old and reviewed at least annually which details the support to be provided after leaving care, and involves children and young people in its preparation.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report, Child Protection Australia 2008-09, there were more than 34,000 children living in out-of-home care at 30 June 2009. This is an increase of 9.3 per cent, compared with the number of children in out-of-home care in the previous year.

Over the next month, state and territory governments and non-government organisations will conduct further consultations to ensure that the draft National Standards focus on the key issues that impact on outcomes for children and young people in care.

The fourteen new out of home care standards that grandparent carers would do well to note are.....



Grandparent carers are asked let the office know their views about these standards which are designed to guarantee that:

- Children and young people are matched with the most suitable carers and the care environment, according to their needs, that will provide stability during their time in care
- Children and young people participate in decisions that have a significant impact on their lives
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are consulted in decisions concerning the placement of their children and young people and placements are made in accordance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placement principles
- A comprehensive health assessment is provided to children and young people entering care, with ongoing medical needs attended to in an appropriate and timely way, and children and young people have their own written health record which moves with them if they change placements
- Children and young people entering into care receive timely and appropriate therapeutic assessment and support needed
- Children, young people and carers are able to access objective advice, ask for help, have their concerns listened to, and have information and access to review mechanisms
- Individual education plans are developed, implemented and reviewed regularly for children and young people in care.
- Children and young people in care are supported to be engaged in appropriate education, training and or employment
- Children and young people maintain cultural, spiritual and community links that strengthen their sense of identity and help them feel loved and accepted
- Children and young people in care are supported to stay in contact with their families, friends, cultural spiritual sources and communities and have their life story recorded as they grow up
- Children and young people are supported to stay in touch with at least one significant family member or other person who cares about their future, who they can turn to for support and advice
- Carers are assessed and receive relevant ongoing training development and support
- Each child and young person has a case plan developed that details their health, education and other needs, which is implemented and reviewed regularly, with the children and young people supported to participate in both the development and updating of their plan
- Young people have a transition from care plan commencing at 15 years old which is reviewed at least annually: details support to be provided after leaving care and involves children and young people in its preparation

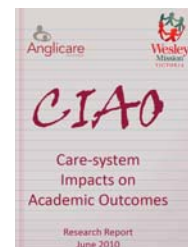


Children in out of home care have lower academic outcomes

Sarah Wise et al - Anglicare 01 July 2010

A Victorian report with national relevance.

This research matches the anecdotal evidence arising from conversations with grandparent carers and indicates the need for urgent reforms to education provision.



Children in out-of-home care are changing schools often, repeating grades, dropping out early and suffering higher rates of mental and physical health conditions which limit their participation at school. – So says this Anglicare report

Despite the importance of a quality education, children and youth who live away from the families of their birth parents are known to experience poor education outcomes compared to children and young people in the community generally. Although Australian research is somewhat limited, the findings are unequivocal; children in out-of-home care perform academically below what is normal for their age, are at risk of 'disengaging' or are disengaged from school and often don't achieve any academic qualification. Deficiencies in educational functioning places out-of-home care children and youth at risk for continued difficulties in adulthood, including low income, incarceration and chronic problems with employment and housing.

Research has highlighted several care-system factors that may operate to diminish children's chances of success at school. These include;

- lack of participation in school-based opportunities and extra-curricula activities,
- disruption to educational continuity and school stability (caused by factors such as court appearances, placement changes and parental visitation),
- lack of co-ordination and planning between significant stakeholders responsible for children's care, and
- inadequate commitment, encouragement and support for education among carers and caseworkers.

The quality and suitability of the school environment to manage, support and effectively engage children in out-of-home care in learning is another significant factor that appears to impact on education pathways and success at school. Therefore it is recommended that we:

- 1 Develop a fully resourced education-first approach to assessment and placement services which prioritise a child/ young persons education needs and aspirations
- 2 Provide ongoing provision of placement and support until young people in OOHC complete year 12 or an equivalent accredited qualification
- 3 Provide training and support for carers and relevant community sector and DHS staff focused on working with schools within a team response to trauma related behavior
- 4 Increase provision of choice of placement, including therapeutic placements equipped to deal with effects of traumatic experiences and events. Placements need to provide culturally appropriate support
- 5 Improve access to mental health services and specialised trauma services in OOHC and educational settings for all children who exhibit or are at risk of developing severe emotional and behavioral disturbance
- 6 Increase provision of teacher training and resources in both initial and continuing teacher education to assist teachers to respond to trauma-related behavior.
- 7 Improve the scale and reach of targeted education supports and evidence based alternative education programs and settings for children/young people across the age range whose learning is disrupted by the effects of trauma
- 8 Strengthen the child's individual education plan by ensuring that the entire care team is involved in its development and implementation, including the primary carer of the child. The plan should follow the child as they move home and or school
- 9 Implement a system to ensure that the children/young people who drop out of school and cease to be enrolled can be identified and located, and strategies put in place to secure their reengagement education.
- 10 Improve the integration of assessment, planning and support across the OOHC, education and mental health systems, to enhance the effectiveness of case management /support
- 11 Develop a single system, sitting across and owned by the government and community sector, to monitor and review education outcomes among children in OOHC.

CREATE to support children in out of home care

The Australian Government today also announced \$70,000 for the CREATE Foundation to support children in out-of-home care, particularly for improving support for young people leaving care. CREATE will use \$40,000 for their *What's the Plan?* campaign. This program empowers and mobilises young people transitioning from out-of-home care and their carers to work with child protection case workers to develop and implement leaving care plans. The CREATE Report Card indicates that 65 per cent of young people in out-of-home care who were surveyed in 2008 did not have a leaving care plan and were uncertain about their future.

Grandparent carers recognised by the Queensland Parliament



Queensland

The Queensland parliament has passed a legislative bill that recognises the role grandparent carer's play.

Called the *Grandparents Providing Care Bill 2010* it establishes a *Carers Advisory Council* to:

- work to advance the interests of grandparents who provide full-time care to their grandchildren; and
- promote compliance by decision-makers with the Charter; and
- Make recommendations to the Minister on enhancing compliance by decision-makers with the charter.

The Bill also establishes the Grandparent Carers Charter which states that:

- 1 The State recognises the effort and dedication of grandparents in our community and the vital community service they perform.
- 2 The State recognises that grandparents who provide Full-time cares to their grandchildren are primary care givers and deserve the same rights as other primary care givers.
- 3 The relationship between grandparent and grandchild should be honoured and respected.
- 4 Grandparents providing full-time care to their grandchildren should be respected by our community and supported by all levels of government, institutions and organisations.
- 5 The views and needs of grandparents, providing full-time care to their grandchildren, should be taken into account, together with the views, needs and best interests of their grandchildren, when making decisions that may affect either the grandchild or the ability of the grandparent to provide full-time care.
- 6 Grandparents should be recognised for the unique knowledge, love and experience they contribute to their grandchildren's growth through formative years.

THE GOVT. SUPPORTS THE OCTOBER 6/7 KINSHIP CARE CONFERENCE

Minster Macklin has awarded Grandparents Australia \$30,000 towards the costs of organising the *Supporting Kinship Families* conference to be Melbourne on October 7/8th 2010.

At the time the Minister said she would like to attend the conference but as the election date is unknown she was unable to make any commitments.

See page 14

Mediation to be pushed in childcare court cases in NSW

Sydney Morning Herald JESSICA MAHAR - June 18, 2010

MORE childcare and protection cases will be resolved through mediation and conferences, sparing vulnerable children and families the trauma of court hearings, the state government will announce today.

Alternative dispute resolutions will be introduced into the Children's Court so families and children can be involved in decisions that affect them.

The initiatives follow recommendations from the special commission of inquiry into child protection services conducted by the former NSW Supreme Court judge James Wood in 2008.

Advertisement: Story continues below

The initiatives will promote alternatives to court hearings at every step of the process, including family group conferencing, dispute resolution conferences and Legal Aid external child protection. Five new children's registrars will be appointed to four courts: Broadmeadows, in Newcastle; Wagga Wagga; Lismore; Parramatta.

Associate Professor Judy Cashmore, who was part of an expert working party into alternative dispute resolutions said: "It's really tough on families when a child is going to be removed from them, and if it can be done where they feel they are not being blamed or ostracized it does make a difference.

"The aim is to get the family engaged in the process and not get their back up because someone's imposing something on them that's completely unfair or unreasonable.

"These practices are actually consistent with a move pretty much across the Western world to work towards mediation both with family courts and across the board, trying to avoid getting to the court process, A, because it's adversarial and difficult for the people involved and, B, because it's expensive."

The NSW Attorney-General, John Hatzistergos, said the initiatives would empower children and families, leading to better informed outcomes accepted by all parties.

The family group conferencing will be run by an independent facilitator, allowing families, relatives and community elders to plan together for child protection concerns before a case is considered for court.

The Community Services Minister, Linda Burney, said: "Family group conferencing originated in New Zealand and variations of the model are operating in most Australian states and territories.

A neutral mediator would facilitate discussions between Community Services, parents or guardians, lawyers and other parties, Ms Beckhouse said.

"Particularly with care and protection issues, you're looking at people who are socially and economically disadvantaged; they might have impairments, like an addiction, and are challenging people to work with," she said.

The dispute resolution conference is an opportunity for parties to agree on an action to be taken and allow for family participation.

The election promises for children with disabilities

Action
Item

Grandparent carers of children with are invited to phone the office to let us know their views about these policies

PM pledges cash for disabled children

Children with a disability would be given \$12,000 to help pay for early intervention treatment under a re-elected Labor government, Prime Minister Julia Gillard has announced.

Labor would also fund an extra 150 supported accommodation places for people with disabilities and \$1 million to help them find work.

Ms Gillard outlined the measures during a speech in which she unveiled the Government's national disability strategy in Melbourne today.

Ms Gillard said early intervention services for children were vital.

"Australia must do more to help people with a disability," she said.

Under Labor policy almost 8,000 children under six would be eligible to receive up to \$12,000 of early intervention therapies and services. Those services would include treatments such as speech pathology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and psychology.

Parents could claim up to \$6,000 in one year from July 2011.

Ms Gillard also announced that another 20,000 children up to the age of 13 would be eligible for Medicare rebates on a range of treatments.

According to Government figures, 180,000 children under 15 live with a severe disability and by 2030 there will be 2.3 million disabled Australians.

Speaking at the MS Australia Nerve Centre in Melbourne, Ms Gillard said more work had to be done to improve the lives of disabled people.

"The status quo isn't good enough," she said. There is much more to be done in our journey of inclusion and reform. "I'm also delighted that the national draft strategy means support and mentoring to help people with disability become leaders," she said.

[More detail on page 13](#)

Coalition pledges Education card to offer choice for children with disabilities

CHILDREN with severe disabilities will receive up to \$20,000 a year towards their education under a Coalition government.

The assistance would come through the introduction of a new education card allowing them greater choice in where they study.

His \$314 million, four-year scheme would allow 6000 children with profound disabilities greater choice because the funding would be portable -- following them to the school of their parents' choice rather than being absorbed by bureaucracies.

"What we want to do . . . is to try to target the spending to people's real needs and, as far as is humanly possible, we want the people who will benefit to control the spending of that money."

The policy develops Mr Abbott's campaign theme of avoiding state government bureaucracies as far as possible by passing funding directly to communities, particularly in health and education.

At the policy launch, opposition education spokesman Christopher Pyne told *The Weekend Australian* the move did not indicate the Coalition would move to a voucher system across the education spectrum.

Sydney mother Heike Fabig said the best outcome for eight-year-old Kai and four-year-old Billie, who both have cerebral palsy, would be if the parties' policies were combined. "I've looked carefully at the policy announcements and I wonder why they aren't joined together. Can't we have both please?" she asked.

"Billie will hopefully be offered a special place in a government school next year, then in a couple of years transition to mainstream school. That transition would be so much easier if I could use this money to employ an aide to make the transition with her."

The Coalition's policy received strong support from disability advocates and independent schools, but the Australian Education Union warned the Coalition was "blinded by ideology" and schools would not be able to plan their programs for disabled students. Independent Schools Council of Australia executive director Bill Daniels said the Coalition's policy was "a significant and greatly appreciated reform in supporting the educational needs of students with disability".

The economic costs of child abuse and neglect

22 July 2010

According to the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGSP], 2010), in the year 2008-09 the following amounts were spent directly on providing services to children who had experienced, or who were at risk of experiencing, child abuse and neglect in Australia:

- Nationally, approximately \$2.2 billion was spent on child protection and out-of-home care services - an increase of \$123 million (6.0%) from 2007-08. Of this expenditure, out-of-home care services accounted for the majority (66.0% or \$1.4 billion).
- For every child aged 0-17 years real recurrent expenditure (expenditure that does not result in fixed assets) on child protection and out of home care services was approximately \$432 per child. This varied across jurisdictions, from just over \$300 in Victoria to over \$800 in the Northern Territory.
- Nationally, \$254.5 million was spent on intensive family support services for families at risk of child removal and for families already in the child protection system across all state and territory jurisdictions. Over the past 5 years expenditure on intensive family support services has increased in real terms each year from \$71.7 million in 2004-05. This represents an average annual increase in expenditure of 37.2% over the period.

GILLARD LABOR GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS FAMILIES WITH TEENAGERS

August 2nd

A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will increase family support by up to \$4000 a year per teenager, to help families meet the higher costs of older children and encourage more teenagers to stay at school. There are around 650,000 teenagers turning 16 over the next five years whose families will benefit from the reforms.

Under significant reforms from 1 January 2012, Federal Labor will increase the maximum payment rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A by more than \$150 per fortnight for teenagers aged 16 to 18 years who are in school or an equivalent vocational qualification.

But under the existing system, the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A drops from \$208 per fortnight to \$51 per fortnight when a child turns 16. Rent Assistance also stops when a child turns 16.

The new maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A for families with teenagers aged 16 to 18 years will be \$208 per fortnight, leading to total assistance of \$6,161 per year.

This is the rate that currently applies to families with teenagers aged 13 to 15 years. Families with a 16 year old currently only receive \$51 per fortnight, leading to total assistance of \$2,062 per year.

To attract the increased payment, children must be studying to finish year 12, or the vocational equivalent.

Under this initiative, families will also gain Rent Assistance for their 16 to 18 year olds living at home. This will provide an incentive for teenagers to continue living in the family home. Around 30,000 families will benefit from additional Rent Assistance.

The increased Family Tax Benefit Part A rate will apply until the end of the calendar year in which a child turns 18 years, or until a child finishes year 12 or vocational equivalent. When a child completes year 12 or the vocational equivalent they will attract the base rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A, if they remain eligible.

Families with teenagers who turn 14, 15 or 16 years old in 2010 will be the first to become eligible when the higher rates commence from 1 January 2012. Families with younger children can look forward to receiving increased payments when their child turns 16.

Every family's circumstance is different. The exact amount of benefit that each family receives will depend on the family's income, and the age and number of their children.

Family assistance will be the primary form of government support for children until they finish school, with Youth Allowance providing support to young people as they finish school and progress to further education and training.

THE LABOR GOVT. MAKES TWO IMPORTANT PROMISES TO GRANDPARENT CARERS

In her August 7th announcement *Delivering to Seniors*, the Prime Minister made two announcements related to support for carers.

Earlier that morning an advisor from Minister Macklin's office phoned our office to congratulate us on the fact that the government had decided to deliver on another two requests contained in our wish list. Here is an extract from the speech the Prime Minister gave.



SUPPORTING GRANDPARENT CARERS

Grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren make enormous sacrifices.

Grandparent carers can find themselves primary carers of their grandchildren unexpectedly and through family trauma or disruption. For these grandparents, particularly where the grandchild is not on a formal child protection order, there is little support or information available.

What we will do

The Gillard Labor Government will deliver more support for grandparents who care for their grandchildren by establishing a new peer support program specifically for grandparent carers from 1 July 2011.

The new program will expand the popular and successful MyTime peer support network with new MyTime for Grandparents groups. Twenty-five groups will be established initially, with an evaluation in 2013-14.

These groups will give grandparents the opportunity to share their experiences in a supportive environment, find out about available community support services and research based parenting information. The groups would meet, on average, once a fortnight during school term.

The funding supports a peer support group, including a facilitator for the group and a carer to supervise children while the grandparents participate.

And to ensure grandparent carers receive the extra care and understanding they need, a re-elected Gillard Labor Government will also provide three new dedicated grandparent advisors in Centrelink offices in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney.

The new advisors will focus solely on the needs of grandparent carers, working to improve their access to Centrelink payments and services. They will also provide information and referral to other government and community services. These advisors will build on the existing Centrelink grandparent advisor that has been operating in Perth since 2005.

Who will benefit

Across Australia, there are more than 14,000 families where grandparents are the primary carers of children.¹

The new MyTime Peer Support Groups will support around 300 families each year. Hundreds more will be able access the support of a Centrelink grandparent advisor.



PRESS RELEASE

August 7th 2010

ALL GRANDPARENTS WELCOME LABOUR'S SUPPORT FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Grandparents Australia is pleased to acknowledge that the Labor Party policy *Delivering for Seniors* released today (August 4th 2010) acknowledges the important contribution made by grandparents raising their grandchildren.

A solid foundation of understanding

"The policy initiatives announced are based on a stated understanding of the sacrifices grandparents make in raising their grandchildren. Equally pleasing is the long awaited for acknowledgment that there are many thousands of informal grandparent carers who are undertaking the role - unseen and unheard.

These two basic understandings are crucial to any understanding of the scope and depth of the problems the community needs to come to terms with before we can properly plan for the future", said Mrs Anne McLeish Director of Grandparents Australia and Grandparents Victoria.

The initiatives are well targeted

"It must be remembered by all citizens that those grandchildren being raised by their grandparents are in effect the nation's children as well. The whole community has a duty of care to ensure that we do not just hand these children over to their grandparents and then leave them to struggle alone. These families must be given every support necessary and we are pleased that the government has chosen to announce two initiatives we believe to be of importance to all grandparent carers and into the future", said Mrs Anne McLeish.

"Of the all the ideas Grandparents Australia has put to the government we are pleased to note that the Labor Party has selected to introduce two that received broad support from grandparent carers across the country and that will make a real difference relatively quickly once they are up and running. Also, these two initiatives – one access to more accurate information from professionals about their entitlements and the other one the ground moral and intellectual support through self help groups - will be accessible to grandparent carers whether formal or informal and from all walks of life", said Mrs Anne McLeish.

Grandparents Australia expects that the specially trained Centrelink officers to be placed at three main Centrelink offices will greatly improved the accuracy of information that is directed to grandparents. Further, we believe that these officers will over time become invaluable sources of information for decisions makers planning future support for families.

"This nation is short on empirical and anecdotal data detailing the profile of grandparent/grandchildren families needing assistance and these officers will be able to tell us some enlightening stories", said Mrs Anne McLeish.

A start to a better future for grandparent and grandchildren families

The trend towards grandparents raising their grandchildren is not going to slow down. Rather, it will grown and probably quite rapidly. Therefore, it is important to start now to make comprehensive plans about how we the whole community, is going to help.

"On the strength of today's announcement s we can see a brighter future because we have a clear benchmark understanding of what we can expect from government", said Mrs Anne McLeish.

Further comment from:

Anne McLeish

Director, Grandparents Australia and Grandparents Victoria

(03) 9372 2422 director@grandparents.com.au

INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY IN COMMUNITY LIFE

The Gillard Labor Government today announced three new initiatives to support people with disability and their carers participate in community life.

People with disability and their carers deserve the same opportunities as other Australians to play a part in their local community and access local facilities and public spaces.

The new initiatives are:

- **Accessible communities** – infrastructure grants of up to \$100,000 to local councils to make buildings and public spaces, such as playgrounds, swimming pools, public toilets, and town halls, more accessible for people with disability. These grants will be offered competitively and be based on a matched contribution from local governments, with the Gillard Labor Government providing total funding of \$5 million.
- An additional \$1 million will be provided for digital playback devices and improved access to digital content in public libraries around the country to increase the accessibility of print material, such as books and newspapers, for people with vision and physical impairments and learning disabilities that have difficulty reading traditional printed materials.
- **Leaders for Tomorrow** - a new national program to help people with disability to become leaders in business, the community and government through mentoring and leadership development. The new \$3 million program will provide 12-month intensive leadership support for up to 200 people with disability, including matching **them to a mentor in their field of interest.**
- **'Attitudes' website** – a new disability website will be created in partnership with the ABC to raise awareness of people with disability and disability issues. It will be developed and edited by people with a disability and provide them with a national voice. The Gillard Labor Government will provide \$500,000 to establish the website.

These initiatives are part of an \$11 million accessibility package to support the Gillard Labor Government's National Disability Strategy which is currently being finalised with the states and territories.


The National Disability Strategy will commit all governments to a nationwide approach to improving the lives of people with disability and create a more equal society. The strategy will set out a 10-year national plan for reform, focusing on better inclusion for people with disabilities.

These new initiatives are in addition to two recently announced Gillard Labor Government plans to improve access for people with disability:

- **The Livable Housing Design** initiative, developed with the residential building and construction industry, to promote new voluntary guidelines for housing built to meet the needs of older Australians and people with disability. The Gillard Labor Government is investing \$1 million working with industry to promote liveable housing.
- A new plan agreed with Australia's four major cinema groups to fast-track **new audio description and captioning** technology to improve cinema access for people who are deaf, blind, visually or hearing impaired. This will be funded in partnership between the Gillard Labor Government, through a \$500,000 commitment, and cinema operators.

The Gillard Labor Government's accessibility package to support the National Disability Strategy is fully provided for in the Budget. Costs have been met from within the Departments of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

MELBOURNE 24 JULY 2010 www.alp.org.au



Child Safety Commissioner
promoting the safety and wellbeing of children

grandparents
VICTORIA

the Government of
Victoria

Supporting Kinship Families Conference

**Thursday October 7
&
Friday October 8 2010
Melbourne**

Clocktower Centre
Junction Mt Alexander and Pascoe Vale Roads
Moonee Ponds

This venue is ideally suited and located beside a tram stop and near a railway station.

The conference will build on the achievements of the 1st kinship care conference held in 2009. It will bring together carers and the professionals working to support them. Key note speakers and workshops will address a range of issues such as:

- The power of family conferencing
- Latest trends in support for kinship carers in Australia and overseas
- The development of the new model to support kinship carers in Victoria

There will be minimal costs for kinship carers to attend.

Register your interest early as this conference is likely to be over subscribed especially as we expect to have interstate visitors in attendance this year.

Further information and early registration to:

Anne McLeish on (03) 98722422 or director@grandparents.com.au

or

Chris Galea on (03) 8601-5894 christine.galea@ocsc.vic.gov.au (Mon, Tues, Wed)