



# Springwood Neighbourhood Centre Co-operative Ltd



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**Chairperson: Janet Mays**

**Secretary: Amanda Webb**

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The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP  
Minister for Employment Participation

Dear Minister,

Thank you for providing the Kinship Care Regional Project the opportunity to present a submission to your review of the employment services system and participation requirements.

The Kinship Care Regional Project is auspiced by Springwood Neighbourhood Centre Co-operative Ltd. Kinship care is when children or young people are cared for by their relatives or family network. In NSW, kinship care is more common than foster care and indicates an increasing trend in out of home placements (Paxman 2006).

The Kinship Care Regional Project provides support and information to families with full-time care of a relative's child. This is achieved through monthly support groups for carers and regular events for the whole family. Through these, the project has obtained insights into the complex issues kinship carers and their children experience. In addition to this there are inconsistencies between the resources and support available to foster carers and their children compared to kinship carers and their families. These exacerbate the challenges kinship carers experience and decrease their capacity to cope.

There are inconsistencies in the federal and state government's recognition of kinship or relative carers as foster carers. This is problematic for carers who are struggling to navigate their way through bureaucracies such as Centrelink and the Department of Community Services. Specifically, the requirements in regards to the Welfare to Work program have caused immense stress and confusion for kinship carers.

At support groups carers discuss their fear and concern about the participation requirements expected by them to ensure the security of their current payments. Their reality is that when children are placed in their care, whether formally by DOCS or through an informal family arrangements their families experience major disruption. This can involve legal proceedings and Apprehended Violence Orders with relatives, and supporting children who have been victims of child abuse and neglect. In one scenario an aunty is too scared to leave the local area in case her niece's parents appear at her school. Other families work constantly to enhance their child's wellbeing and future prospects by travelling after school to appointments with counsellors, tutors and therapists. Often carers need to attend counselling and medical appointments for themselves due to the impact of the turmoil their family is experiencing. These factors prevent kinship carers from participating in paid employment.

It is unreasonable to expect these carers to participate in the Welfare to Work program. Kinship carers provide an enormous community services by preventing

children from entering the out of home care system and remaining in abusive environments.

I understand that temporary exemptions may be granted in the above situations. I would recommend however that this still involves a stressful and challenging process for carers particularly those with limited access to transport who are required to attend regular meetings at a Centrelink office.

As a worker who advocates passionately for this target group I strongly recommend that kinship carers be given the same exemption from the participation requirements for the Welfare to Work program as foster carers receive.

Yours sincerely

Jane Ley  
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Kinship Care Regional Project