

Submission
No 46

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Organisation:

Name: Ms Debbie Matthews

Telephone:

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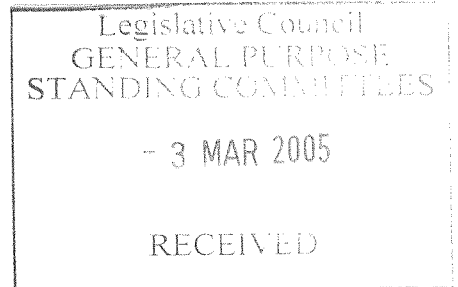
Subject:

Summary

Attention: Inquiry – Post School Disability Programs

General Purpose Standing Committee Number 2

Fax No – 9230 3416



Submission for Inquiry into the above.

Total pages including this sheet – 5

Would you please call _____ on receipt of this fax. Just so I can ensure it arrived.

Many Thanks

Debbie Matthews

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GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 2
Inquiry into Changes to Post School Programs for Young Adults with a
Disability.

3 March 2005

The Hon Patricia Forsythe MLC
Committee Chairperson

Dear Ms Forsythe and Committee Members

I write to you to address issues that have arisen since the program changes into ATLAS and PSO were announced by Minister Tebbutt.

I have a daughter Leanne who is 21 years of age and has Down Syndrome. Leanne attends, and has for almost 3 years attends The Junction Works at Liverpool 5 days/ 30 hours per week.

Let me commence by telling you the changes in Leanne since attending this program.

When it came time for Leanne to leave school, she was very scared at what lay ahead. She was unsure of herself and very hesitant. Through the dedication of the staff and the funding level (\$16999), enabling Leanne to attend 5 days per week, she has grown into a confident young woman, who is learning skills to enable her to become a productive member of society. I need to ensure Leanne is taught and well equipped to face whatever challenges come her way. I often say it is not she I worry about, but society. I need to know Leanne can do the things you and I take for granted, and complete them to the best of her ability, but more importantly safely. ATLAS and The Junction have provided that platform.

HAD provided may be more apt, as despite Minister Tebbutt's assurance "it is not my intention to provide lesser service", Leanne's program hours will be cut from 30 hours per week to 12 hours per week.

I am a single parent, who works full time and while I do not earn a high salary, it enables us to live in a very safe neighbourhood and have a few luxuries. With the reduction in hours comes the prospect of me having to give up work and obtain a Carer Pension from Centrelink. This does not even cover our rent. Needless to say I have been extremely stressed since this funding cut announcement.

I know Leanne is my responsibility. I am doing my very best, without government assistance, to care and support her. Giving up my job, which I have been at for 14 years, brings with it not only the socio-economic problems, but also the question of who will teach Leanne on the 3 days she is

not going to be able to attend her program? I am a mum not a qualified worker or teacher who can teach Leanne what she needs to know.

I have contacted Minister Tebbutt's office numerous times by phone (approximately 40 calls) and fax to obtain an appointment to speak with her. The Minister stated she would meet with families who had concerns. Why was I told in December 2004 that she would not meet with me? Surely the Minister is answerable to the public who voted her into this position? I have approached DADAC numerous times. I was always promised someone would return my call. When finally, three and half weeks later, someone (not the person I was told I needed to speak to), called they were unable to help with any questions I had and I was advised to "Accept the changes and money and move on".

I wrote a letter (copy attached) to accompany Leanne's provider choice form and also faxed a copy of this letter to Mr Brendan O'Rielly, Director General, DADAC. Within three days of faxing this letter I had 2 senior Manager's from DADAC South West office contact me and request a time to meet with me. They came to my home and asked me about mine and Leanne circumstances and told me that someone from the DADAC hotline would contact me. I have since spoken with Thomas Ross and had an assessment over the phone. I am now awaiting an assessment appointment to see what may be offered in ways to help Leanne.

I have approached The Junction with the offer of myself borrowing \$3 500 (\$16999 current funding less \$13500 new funding equates to \$3500) to ensure Leanne remains learning at her centre 5 days a week. This will create an enormous financial strain on me, as it needs to be repaid within 12 months in case the need arises to borrow again in 2006.

The only person I have found helpful, such as finding out about this inquiry is Mr John Ryan, Deputy Leader Liberal Party and Shadow Minister for Disability. Mr Ryan, has been helpful, compassionate and empathic.

In Summary –

- The dramatic reduction in Leanne's hours from 30 hours per week to 12.
- I have received no help at all from the Ministers office despite over 40 phone calls requesting information. I have noted the majority of the calls in a log with the name of the person I spoke to, date and time.
- DADAC initially ignored my phone calls. I only received information after I complained to the Director General.
- I was asked not to speak to the opposition or the media by DADAC, until they "could sort something out".
- Leanne has expressed a type of depression, yet when I approached DADAC about counselling services I was advised no funds had been set-aside for this purpose.
- Concerns over one provider I met with telling me that DADAC were pressuring them to make their client to staff ration at least 8 to 1. Who will take responsibility should one of these special young people be injured or worse?

- I am facing the prospect of having to resign from my job of 14 years to go on a Carer Pension should the Provider not be able to accept my offer of \$3500.

It infuriates me that a change affecting so many people can be implemented with no forethought or consultation. Don't ask agencies for information; ask the young adults, the parents and caregivers as to the affects of changing programs. Work with them hand in hand, don't shut them out.

Is it simply that the NSW government has such little regard for these very special people.

I will and have done everything to ensure my daughter has her chance to attend her program and learn 30 hours per week. I truly see this as a Minister who has no idea the far reaching consequences for parents and their children her actions have caused.

This is plain and simple, discrimination in its purest form.

I ask you as a committee to consider these young people, their future, their right to the future and to be a part of our community confidently and safely. I ask you recommend the immediate reinstatement of the \$3500 per client to restore the funding to what it is now.

I am not asking for more, but I assure you, I will not accept less. I also ask that Minister Tebbutt be held responsible and accountable for this debacle. Surely the money that is being used for this inquiry, which has arisen from the Minister's inability to perform in her position, should be given back into the program.

Thank you for allowing me the chance to voice my situation, I can assure it has been an extremely stressful 6 months for myself and my daughter, where at times I have felt like giving up. But I have fought for everything Leanne has achieved, such as the right to attend a preschool to completing a TAFE course, so I will not back down on this, the biggest struggle of all.

I am extremely passionate about this and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the Committee to discuss this further.

Yours Sincerely

Ms Debbie and Miss Leanne Matthews