

**Submission  
No 31**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

**Name:** Miss Peta Thomas

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The Director  
Select Committee on Home Schooling  
Parliament House  
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Sydney NSW 2000  
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To: The Director,

Please accept my submission with reference to the inquiry into home schooling.

My interest in the inquiry is as 1) an adult who was home schooled for ten years from grade 3 until graduation from high school, 2) as an aunt to four home schooled children living in NSW, and 3) in the future I hope to home school my own children in NSW.

I write with reference to the Inquiry's ToR, under the relevant headings:

Inquiry into home schooling

(b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales including:

(i) outcomes of home schooling including in relation to transition to further study and work

As an adult who was home schooled for the majority of my education, my perspective on this is personal. Whilst growing up I heard adult's concerns regarding my future transition to the work force and their well-meaning suggestions to my parents that I complete high school in the public system, but I am incredibly happy they ignored such advice.

I was pleasantly surprised that when I was ready to look for a job, I was offered the very first one that I applied and interviewed for. The transition from home to work was a major change in my life, as home was a small country town and work was in the Sydney CBD. However I should not have been concerned as although this was the first big transition in my life, it was just one of many that I have managed and now come to embrace.

The daily routine of attending work came naturally to me, not because I was used to getting up and going out each day, but because I have lived a disciplined lifestyle. The very nature of home schooling requires that the parent and the child adopt an internal discipline to see that both academic and personal achievements are attained throughout the study. Whether it be applying myself academically or personally with entries into the local Country Show, the annual home schooling student conventions, or other personal achievements, I learned discipline. I believe I learned discipline far beyond what I would have had I attended a regular school.

Initially upon graduation from school I did not choose to attend university as I was not interested in the courses on offer. Instead I worked full time and filled my spare time with outside interests including community service. This interest in helping others eventually became my primary focus after I received a voluntary redundancy and I took up an opportunity to volunteer overseas.

I began as a self-funded volunteer and later undertook the AusAID funded volunteer programs Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) and Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID). I was awarded these two highly competitive programs despite not having attained a tertiary qualification. Such was the strength of the references and my previous experience, achieved because my education afforded the freedom to pursue my interests.

I have since completed a Bachelor degree through external study, an attainment that I credit to my experience in home schooling. The self discipline required for such study has been admired by peers and seniors at university, not only was I an external university student, but I was studying part time whilst working and living in a developing country. During this course I was also awarded a scholarship to study in Indonesia. Such adaptability and inner driving motivation is not commonplace amongst my generation, and again I attribute much of this to my experience as a home schooled student.

(iii) demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children

My family consists of two parents, two older children and myself the youngest child by 12 years.

As the youngest child, my education took place completely separate from my siblings who were already graduating high school by the time I commenced primary school. This brought both challenges and benefits to my situation. As I was unable to travel the distance (two buses and a train) to the private school my siblings had attended because I was too young, I attended the local public school. The opportunities available at this school were sufficient when teachers had the time to invest in me; however by grade 2 after I completed the gifted and talented assessment and the results indicated I should be placed in a higher class, that teacher refused to accept my enrolment. Such an arbitrary response by a single teacher resulted in my parents seeking an alternative education pathway for me.

(vi) comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education

Home schooling afforded me the opportunity to learn at my own pace. My parents fast tracked my education so that when I showed ability in certain areas I was able to move quickly. Other times when I struggled to grasp concepts, we focused on those until I fully understood. Such a tailored education permitted me the opportunity to learn a wide range of topics, both about Australian issues and about a broader global perspective.

It concerns me that the process of registration in NSW today requires parents to submit lesson plans one to two years in advance. Such restriction on parents would in my opinion remove the freedom that I enjoyed in my education. Home schooling families are able to adapt and respond to the needs of their children at any given time. They are able to take advantage of opportunities to learn, and benefit from this freedom.

For example

- I've always had an interest in the needs of children overseas in developing countries. My involvement in fundraising and supporting aid organisations was able to be incorporated into my school studies, and as a teenager I was able to spend a month living overseas and volunteering with an organisation helping such children. Now I am an International Aid & Development professional, and I greatly value that this interest was fostered as a child.
- A day trip out with my parents always resulted in us discussing the environment, the history, or the culture in the area where we were traveling. By making the connection between book-learning and reality, I was able to understand the world around me and have found this grounded experiential learning to be a life-long learning habit that I hope to pass on to my own children one day.

Thank you for your interest in the experience of home schooling families. Please contact me for any further feedback.

Sincerely,

Peta Thomas