
Consultation Paper

Developing the Tasmanian Carer Action Plan

Sexual Assault Support Service Inc. (SASS) Submission

April 2017



Sexual
Assault
Support
Service

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SASS submission

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Introduction

Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) is a free and confidential service for people of all ages who have been affected by any form of sexual violence, including intimate partner sexual violence. We also provide counselling to children and young people who are displaying problem sexual behaviour (PSB) or sexually abusive behaviour (SAB), along with support and information for their family members and/or carers.

The range of support options available at SASS includes counselling, case management (including safety planning) and advocacy. We also provide information and support to professionals, and deliver training workshops and community education activities in a range of settings including local schools and colleges.

SASS appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of the *Tasmanian Carers Action Plan*.

Response to Question 2

Thinking about your experiences with the services and systems listed above, how do you think the Tasmanian Government can make its services more accessible and responsive to carers' needs?

In this submission, SASS will focus on the needs of grandparents who are the primary carers for their grandchildren, as this is the group of carers that SASS has most interaction with.

Data from the 2011 Census indicates that (at the time) there was a total of 46,000 'grandparent families' in Australia, defined as "households where there were grandparent-grandchild relationships in the absence of parent-child relationships."¹ Research indicates that the primary four reasons grandparents take on the care of their grandchildren are:

- parent's drug or alcohol problems (67%)
- child neglect (32%)
- parent's mental illness (31%)
- family violence (22%)²

Given this, it is likely that a number of children living with grandparents will present with trauma histories and particular behavioural and developmental challenges, and will therefore require parenting approaches, as well as therapeutic practices and strategies, that take this into account.

The Women's Legal Service Tasmania submitted to the Senate Inquiry, for example, that:

In many instances where the grandchildren are placed unexpectedly with their grandparents they arrive suffering from some degree of trauma. This is particularly the case where they have been exposed to family violence or substance abuse or where they have been subjected to child abuse, neglect or abandonment.

These are issues that many grandparents are simply not equipped to deal with and whilst the love and security the grandparents can provide will go some way in rectifying these issues, often it will not be enough and additional intervention and support will be needed.³

Some children, particularly those who have experienced sexual abuse, may be at a heightened risk of experiencing sexual abuse again, and/or displaying problem sexual behaviour (PSB) or sexually abusive behaviour (SAB) towards others.

Grandparents cannot be expected to intrinsically know how to handle the complex needs of children with a history of trauma. In their statement to the Senate Inquiry, the Australian Association of Social Workers commented that,

The level of knowledge, skill and support required to understand, assess and respond to the needs of children in care is substantial and crucial to positive and long-term outcomes. Caring for these children presents challenges, which are difficult even for skilled and experienced carers.⁴

It is therefore critical that grandparent carers receive support to:

- identify signs of possible child sexual assault;
- understand age-appropriate and age inappropriate sexual behaviour;
- manage behaviours of traumatised children; and
- respond appropriately and effectively to any of the above – including risk identification and reduction.

Given the speed at which digital technologies progress, grandparents are also likely to require support in managing online safety and potential technology abuse. Whilst young people aged 15-17 years have the highest rate of internet use in Australia with 99% being online), only half of all 65 year olds and over are online.⁵

How training and support is offered and delivered to grandparents is also critically important. The Senate Inquiry found two significant challenges to grandparents receiving the support they need, the first being that grandparents are not aware of or cannot access support services, and the second being that in some cases grandparents may actually choose not to access services, often “due to a fear that they will be perceived as incapable of caring for the children.”⁶ SASS supports the statements made by UnitingCare Tasmania in their submission to the Senate Inquiry, that;

Grandparents need to (a) know that [the training] exists and (b) know that they can pick up the phone and the person that they speak to is not going to be judgemental, is going to work with them in a collaborative way and is going to give them the respect that they deserve as people who know these children and who know the issues that their family has experienced more than any professional, any programmer or any worker does.⁷

Lastly, the APS has identified that the cost and waiting periods for accessing psychological and other allied health services – both for their grandchildren and for themselves in their role as carers – has been identified as a barrier by grandparents. Given the higher needs of this group, grandparents and their grandchildren must be better supported to access psychological and allied health services.

Recommendations

Based on the above, SASS makes the following recommendations to support the development of the Tasmanian Carer Action Plan.

Recommendation 1

Prior to or as soon as possible after being placed with their grandparent/s, each child is comprehensively assessed to ensure that appropriate support can be provided to the child and their grandparent/s. This will include an assessment of any particular support the grandparent/s may require to care for the child.

Recommendation 2

Based on the assessment, a case plan is then collaboratively created with the involvement of the grandparent/s and all involved stakeholders. All relevant information is to be captured within the case plan so that appropriate services and supports can be put into place.

Recommendation 3

Training modules are designed which are specifically targeted toward the needs of grandparent-headed families. Based on their grandchild's assessment and case plan, grandparents can then access this training on an 'as needed' basis, with appropriate ongoing support to facilitate its implementation.

Recommendation 4

The Carer Action Plan will identify how support will be provided to grandparents in a non-stigmatising, non-judgmental way, and how factors that may prevent grandparents from seeking support needed will be addressed.

Recommendation 5

Grandparents and their grandchildren are better supported to access psychological and allied health services to ensure that costs and waiting periods are not prohibitive.

¹ Submission 99, cited by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee. (2014). *Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra p.4.

² Senate Community Affairs References Committee, p.10.

³ Ibid, p.83.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 83-84.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2014-15*. Commonwealth Government. Accessed 10/04/2017 at <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs%40.nsf/mf/8146.0>.

⁶ Senate Community Affairs References Committee, p.51.

⁷ Ibid, p.54.