

Author name: J. DIPIETRO

Date of submission: Friday, 13 September 2024

Your submission for this review:

we are raising our grandchildren due to DCJ not doing their job and the children were removed by a judge. DCJ were involved and closed the case as they knew if kids came to us they would be well looked after. 4 years down the track \$250 a fortnight from Centrelink and we are struggling. Kids need therapy but we can't afford to send them. Cost of living has skyrocketed we don't know how much longer we can do it. DCJ carers and Foster carers get an allowance so why don't we... Kate Washington is all about DCJ children! She doesn't care about any other children saved by grandparents. All children and carers should be treated equally. DCJ carers get respite rent paid holidays paid for dental optical computers for kids uniforms school fees and swimming lessons paid some have even been given cars! What do we get NOTHING. You need to be looking into this if our grandchildren went into care the government would be paying a lot more for them. How far does \$250 a fortnight go... No super left no saving left... HELP US

Hello, my name is Jodie, and I am here today to speak about the little support informal carers receive. My husband and I have raised 4 of our own children and have raised two of our grandchildren for the last four years. Lilly who is 9 and Mason who is 6.

Paul and I had plans to become semi-retired and travel worldwide. These plans are now gone as we have sole responsibility for Lilly and Mason until they are 18 years old. These two were born to both parents being ice addicts with criminal records.

Our son, decided to turn his life around and become clean so he could see both his children and attempt to raise them. However, the children at this time were in their mothers care and refusing to allow him to see them despite her continued use of drugs all because DCJ were assisting the mother to keep the children. However, the children would have been removed if DCJ were proceeding under their guidelines. There were multiple ROSH reports, welfare checks serious incidents reported to police. But not enough to remove the children. When we heard about Mason aged 2 at the time, down the road, no clothes on being picked up by police as the mother was too high to realise he was gone, we knew it was time to step in.

Our son, was already in a court proceeding to have access to his children regularly. During this time the judge asked for both parents to complete hair follicle tests. Father passed his and the mother refused to complete it. DCJ knew the mother was returning positive tests however, they continued to support her even tho a clean father was attempting to reconnect with his children.

During the case, the judge saw, heard and acted on everything that was going on. She suggested that if there were grandparents, they needed to join the party as the children would be removed and placed into foster care.

My question to you is, What would you do? Well, we stepped up, had our whole life turned upside down and were offered no financial support. We did what we felt was right. But it turns out, this was an uneducated, reactive response. All because these two beautiful babies were brought into a world where the partners were users. DCJ removed themselves from the proceedings knowing that carers were willing to take the kids to a safe home. What did that mean for us? No government financial help. 2020, was the year the kids were placed in our care and the year that DCJ decided not to stay around and support us.

We lived in a one-bedroom unit which was not sustainable for two little kids and two adults. We decided to sell and buy a house which took most of our savings to do.

Lilly and Mason are well-looked-after children with trauma backgrounds. However, Centrelink does not see this as a reason to provide as it is not classed as a disability. How do I support them in navigating their trauma when a session is \$290. They have nightmares, flash backs, and

questions I cannot answer without re-traumatising them. How is this fair. Our little saving account we have left after buying a home won't last for all four of us.

I was told about the DCJ payment when I decided to join a rivergum grandparents group to get some outsider support for the situation and that is what I got. Other people going through the same situation as us. They suggested I look into it but I had no success as the children were not formally removed.

I spoke with David Gillespe who told me that it was a state issue not federal, Ombusman, couldn't help, Kate Washington. She stated that when she got into government, she would help. Did we get help? No, instead we got hit with more barriers and no contact.

We are now currently receiving \$250 a fortnight. It is lucky to cover their food. Lilly who is passionate about her gymnastics and currently training three nights a week in level four may have to stop training as we cannot continue to support this due to the cost of travel, training fees, uniforms and competitions. We were lucky enough to get a scholarship which I applied for and this has allowed her to continue to excel. How can I tell a child who uses this a safe space, that she may have to stop because we cannot afford it?

These are just issues we are facing now. Our future holds more costs and higher living expenses. Both children have been told they need braces, will need counselling, uniforms for school, money for camps, excursions, music and other sporting activities they want to participate in, they will need ipads for school, money for holidays, computers, cars, tutors. All normal things that a child should want and should have access to but may not because of financial issues that neither we nor the children should be faced with.

DCJ pays for all these things plus helps out with housing, rent cost, respite, cars purchased, food vouchers. How is that fair to these children to miss out? We want to do our best for them but some days it feels so far out of reach with all the hurdles we face.

We are not asking for a miracle; we are just asking for some financial support so the children can live their best lives and achieve what other out-of-home care children do.

We are saving the government millions of dollars by having them in our care and not in a out of home setting so why shouldn't we be able to get support. What will happen when we can't afford to keep them in our care? These are all things that can be prevented if there was a little bit of financial support for informal carers. Someone needs to step up and help carers like myself before it is too late. Where is the equality in this?

If a member of parliament were in the position many of us informal carers would be looked after. Change needs to happen and it needs to happen soon for the sake of these children!!