

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN – BUDGET TIME!

A statement from Anne McLeish, Director Kinship Carers Victoria

As we approach each and every budget, vulnerable families, particularly kinship families, hope against all hope that this will be the budget that brings them some relief. They have always been disappointed.

Kinship families provide well over 70% of the care for children who are removed from their parents. The outcomes for children raised by their near kin, most often their grandparents, are astounding. So many of them carry emotional burdens as well as mental or physical disabilities, and yet these children are raised to have high expectations and to get on with life.

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Kinship families not only work miracles for individual children. Kinship carers keep children out of institutions and raise them in ways that help them become productive citizens, of whom Victoria can be proud. Thus, kinship carers make an invaluable contribution to the health and wellbeing of our state as well as to the health and wellbeing of their own families.

Despite the outcomes of their tireless work, kinship carers have been constantly ignored in state budgets. Submissions from the community and from government departments calling for urgent increases to the payments awarded to kinship carers have been met with stony silence.

The disdain for calls to increase funds available to cover the costs of raising children with multiple health needs has been particularly cruel. Let us hope that in the next budget, despite the likelihood of it being a tough one, there is some relief for kinship care families.

Also, of critical importance is the need for a well-resourced and trained child protection service, one that works in partnership with the kinship carers to ensure that our children are all safe and supported. Cuts to child protection services in recent years have caused kinship carers to feel abandoned by government, the community and, indeed, every voter who, in effect, allows government to render child protection of little importance. The incidence of carers not being able to reach anyone, even when an urgent medical matter arises, is rapidly increasing. It is not possible to reach someone when there is no one there!

All evidence, including successive years of neglect as well as recent utterances about the severity of this forthcoming budget, points to the likelihood that kinship families and child protection in general will pay an inordinate price. Are we going to be forced to hold street stalls and sell tea towels to raise the funds to support our most vulnerable families and children?

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