

AUSTRALIA v BRITAIN on ABC TV

The ABC again showed how Australia is failing its most vulnerable people, in comparison with Britain

The system of assistance for people with a disability in Australia is broken. Carers know it, charitable organisations know it and so do the governments. Now the federal government says something must be done. It's holding an Inquiry, with the intention of creating a new and fairer system. It's even considering a national disability insurance scheme. But will the system be reformed in time to save the families now at breaking point?

Here are some of the on-line comments following the ABC program.....

"Why do we, in Australia, fail our most needy?"

How very sad! So much for Australian values! Lets throw money at the Olympics and Fireworks - but god help the disabled carers - because our Government wont.

Or grass the Harbour Bridge for breakfast and contribute thousands of dollars to other projects that catch the headlines. People with disabilities do not catch headlines and they often do not vote.

Absolutely - who remembers the details of the fireworks on New Years Eve or even the day after? We all would remember the benefit to disability funding for a specific purpose (say a new group home for disabled adults) with perhaps just a \$5 note donation from all New Years Fireworks revellers - Get an honest charity to collect next Fireworks for 2011 in red plastic buckets then issue an arm band to donator.

The red buckets could stand for "Red Alert" - a disability crisis looms

"How can we help?"

I viewed the program and felt a deep sense of shame at being an Australian with the lack of support provided to both carers and the people with disabilities. What measures can be taken by citizens to draw attention to these issues and agitate for change?

We must do something. I really think many people in the community would have no idea that the situation is so dire.

"Residential Services"

Thank you to the parents who participated in your program tonight. I am so grateful that my own daughter had the privilege to attend a Special School as well as Residential accommodation when she was younger. I feel so frustrated in that we seem to have regressed with services though we are led to believe that we have progressed. I guess we

have made some progress, however, I feel this has been at the cost of those services that I was able to access when my child was younger.

I am now in my sixties and we are thinking about the future and the need for our girl to be living independently. I guess we will face that journey a bit later, however, I would like to participate and join any political group to bring about further changes to meet the needs of these very brave parents. Please let me know how I can join a parent group.

"How Do We Get People Who Matter To Understand?"

I have seen comments from the 4 Corners team that they were amazed by some of the things they saw while making this program.

One of the mothers campaigning in Canberra said that she saw many parliamentarians amazed at how severe the disabilities of the kids who came through with those campaigners were.

How do we - people affected by the disability system - get people in power, people who matter, to know what it's like to deal with disability? I am an adult with severe disabilities and I wish that I could get my local state and federal MPs, and the Victorian and Federal ministers in charge of disability things, to spend a whole day - morning to night - in my house with me. Not just a half hour appointment, or a brief meeting. Time to really talk and time for them to take in a tiny pinch of the reality of life with a severe disability.

I know that I have little chance of getting this to ever happen, but I really think that if people in power understood what the lack of services means in people terms that it would have an effect. To make them think about it as a personal thing, not just a number on a huge balance sheet but as this person that they know ...

I think that watching this program, for many people, will be a great step towards that and I am really glad that 4Corners have made the program.

I'm lucky - I have severe physical problems but I'm articulate and educated which gives me a huge advantage in terms of being able to explain to people what the systemic problems are and what the personal effect of those problems is. Perhaps I could convince a journalist or three to spend a day with me? Anybody up for the challenge?

"UK Funding"

There was no explanation of how the UK funds their Special Schools! How much is provided by the local authorities, and how much by central government. And why can't Australia afford the same level of funding?

It's about legislation. The UK has very strong legislation which is focused on

individualised support of people with disabilities and their carers. They too have a long way to go, but they certainly seem a lot further down the track than we are.

Right on while they are well on the way here in the Lucky Country are still peeping out of the front of the cave when it comes to care for people with disabilities so they have a quality of life.

I don't know what the UK do - but in Australia we just don't have the infrastructure at present. We need a huge injection of even more funding to achieve that - and I think there will be some opposition in Canberra to even more spending!

It's all funded by the government once you have proved that your child needs that particular school. Local education authorities fund it and it comes via the taxpayer which is what we'd like in Australia.

I hate the fact that we have to beg for what should be a human right- each child's needs should be met no matter of their parents financial status, religion or where they live. what is more important than a child? a child that doesn't have a government that worships them.

Professor Luke Clements explained that the UK system is funded the same way as the National Health Service - through general revenue. This was legislated for at the same time as the NHS in '47. In 1981 Maggie Thatcher brought in the statement of need, which required all local authorities to assess the needs of the person with disabilities. The local authorities have to provide services to meet the needs specified, irrespective of cost. Similarly there are carers laws which recognise that carers can be disabled by virtue of their care of the disabled. If a carer can't or won't provide the care needed, the government must. In contrast, here in Australia funding is not based on need, but a rationing of services because of an inadequately funded system.

UK system is based on rights not needs - because disabled people demanded it. I went to a rally in Parliament, taken over by wheelchairs, and saw people handcuffed to 10 Downing Street.

We just do not have this level of activism in Australia

Here in the UK, local authorities (ie. councils) have the powers and responsibilities of state governments .. They run schools, police, fire services, etc.

Re accessing services here .. it's a bit of a lottery as it depends on your local authority. Here in Bath (which is a wealthy part of the country) they take their responsibilities seriously, and fund some very good services .. it has two very good special needs schools (one of which is a boarding school for autistic kids) .. They offer after school / holiday

programs for disabled kids .. Bath is paying for a carer to look after Jonah 6 hours / week .. and we're in 'the system' for some regular overnight respite for Jonah.

Having spend 6 months here, we're now able to apply for a Disability Living Allowance for Jonah . it's a complicated system, but given the severity of his condition, we should get (not means free) just under £150 / week .. and Annette receive a Carer's Allowance of nearly £50 / week (means tested).

As well, we can 'cash in' the Carer's Allowance and lease a new car instead .. we save on repairs, maintenance, depreciation, and don't have to pay car registration and insurance. Under this system we get a new lease car every three years.

Our decision to move wasn't only about money! A big part of it has been planning about Jonah's later life but, as anyone with an ASD kid knows, it costs an arm and a leg to access pretty ordinary services in Australia.

It is amazing that how the service in the UK has helped many children/adults with disabilities. i am a young carer with two autistic brothers, and we also struggle with the same situation. the government is so slack when it comes to these things. If only we had the services that the UK have!

I worked in the UK care system and now work in the State system in Australia. The big difference is that the service delivery level of government (Local in the UK, State in Australia) has a mandated responsibility to provide for the needs of it's citizens, be they children, aged, people with a disability. So although the services vary widely, there is a much stronger commitment to meeting needs, than in Australia. Someone else has pointed out, that we are, very sadly, stuck with trying to ration the insufficient resources we have so that as many people as possible get a little support, and of course, that means very few!

LISA Comment: The million dollar question is: "Why can't Australia provide proper, meaningful and rights based services for all of its most vulnerable people - people with a disability?" Is it that the economy won't allow this? If not, where is the money currently being spent in comparison to Britain? We suggest its a complex equation, of which the most complex aspect is culture.

The Australian culture is that of a young bronzed country not needing social services - John Wayne country! Therefore, if the federal government held a referendum on funding a national disability insurance scheme, through a percentage on the Medicare levy, to provide full rights based care for all people with a disability - Would it get off-the-ground?

**Tony & Heather Tregale. Web: www.lisainc.com.au : www.lisa-aus.blogspot.com
LIFESTYLE IN SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION (LISA) INC.
Tel: 03-9434-3810: Email: vk3qq@optusnet.com.au**