

# RADIO NEWS & TALKBACK PRECIS



**Morning / Lunch Period (9am–1pm)**  
(Plus talkback items scanned from last night 6pm–6am)  
**Thursday, 11 March 2010**

## RADIO NEWS BROADCASTS

**Ann Bressington, Independent MLC, Chris Hamilton, Psychologist** (5AA 10.19-10.44)  
Criticism of Families SA

*(Byner: ... a story went to air on television last night, on 'Today Tonight', but in case you didn't see it Mary is the grandmother of two children who remain in foster care, even though she was approved as a carer in 2007. Her world changed when she reported abuse of one of her grandsons while in the care of Nannies SA. This is a mortal sin, you never complain about anything Families SA has their hands on, because if you do you will be in trouble ... this morning we've got Ann Bressington, MLC, and Chris Hamilton, who's a psychologist ... for those people who need to understand what this is about, and we actually got a rebuttal to this segment today before it went to air, probably based on what was on television last night, but just give us the story in a nutshell, and then the rebuttal from the Department, which itself is pretty interesting.)* **Bressington:** Well Leon, this grandmother was applying for permanent care of her grandchildren from early 2007, she was approved in 2007 ... as a relative carer ... sometime later while she was on a Nannies SA roster for 40 hours a week she was caring for her grandchildren ... unsupervised, she witnessed the physical abuse of one of her grandchildren aged three at the time ... she reported that to Families SA. After that she was taken off the roster, she was put on supervised access for 1.5 hours a fortnight and is now not allowed to know where her grandchildren live, what school they go to, she's not allowed to know anything about her grandchildren ... from 2008 to the end of 2009 there have been periods of six months where she actually hasn't been able to see her grandchildren. *(Byner: ... Chris Hamilton, why, what's the justification from the Department on this?)* **Hamilton:** ... I understand Leon that she's not considered a fit and proper person to do this, which is not what my psychological profile indicated when it was referred to me. *(Byner: But there's more.)* **Bressington:** Well there is more ... I have a document signed by the supervisor, the case worker and also the office manager stating that a section 14 recommendation was made ... on the 18/7/07 that this grandmother was a fit and proper person. She was then exposed to a psychological profiling that deemed her to be having anger management issues. *(Byner: Conducted by whom?)* **Bressington:** By a psychologist from the Department ... the profile, I've known this lady for three years, I've been working on this for three years, and there is no indication at all that she has anger management issues. *(Byner: ... just tell the people of South Australia, the Department sent us a document today trying to explain this. Tell us the purport of the document.)* **Bressington:** ... it's policy palaver ... *(Byner: Just read me the first line ...)* **Bressington:** DFC has a policy of placing children in the care of their relatives and kin when such care is available and suitable. Let me just make the point Leon that when the social workers came out to Mary's place they told her, on one instance, that she couldn't have the children because she had double bunks, the kids couldn't sleep in bunks. Then they came the next visit and told her that the house was too cluttered ... she lived in a place the size of a

matchbox. Part of their policy is to support families to relocate to get better accommodation. The third one was that there was supposedly a crystal meth lab over the road, which made the neighbourhood unsafe for her grandchildren. There were two children residing in that crystal meth lab at that time that were not removed, 66 other children in the street ... (*Byner: ... they wanna take the neighbour's kids away from the crystal meth lab, but not the kids that are living in the lab.*) **Bressington:** That's exactly right ... there are also 66 other children living in the street that if the meth lab blew would all be in danger as well, but that was irrelevant ... there is no trace of a report to the police by Families SA that that crystal meth lab actually exists ... they shift their civil responsibility to report criminal activity, they failed to remove two children that would have been at imminent risk, yet this grandmother is still denied her grandchildren. (*Byner: Chris Hamilton, what do you make of this ...*) **Hamilton:** ... it's interesting ... my job as a psychologist is ... to have empathy and compassion for the people that I deal with, but it's also to operate in an independent, objective and at arms length fashion, which is what I did in this case and administered an appropriate psychological evaluation, which indicated to me that the person was a realistic, rational and responsible adult. (*Byner: ... Ann, I think where you're going with this is because this grandmother had the temerity to make a complaint about the safety of one of these children, which happened to be in the care of Nannies SA, Families SA didn't like that, so it's really retribution, is that what you're saying?*) **Bressington:** ... yes it is ... this particular carer, who was witnessed abusing this child expressed to the grandmother and the great grandmother that she wanted to raise these two children as her own ... I have a question for the Minister, I wanna know why Mary, who has never been deemed a threat to her grandchildren, cannot know where her grandchildren go to school, cannot know who their carer is, and is on supervised access, which is normally for people deemed to be a threat to children, and cannot know where her grandchildren live. (**Caller Jean:** ... *I watched 'Today Tonight' last night and I believe that if that grandmother had lived the other side of Adelaide and could have avoided a QC her little grandsons would be back with her now ... I feel ordinary people do not stand a chance against Families SA ... I believe we need a Royal Commission into Families SA.*) (*Byner: ... we've had Robyn Layton QC talk about the fact that they're dysfunctional ... there was an inquiry in the Upper House, was there not Ann Bressington these very issues?*) **Bressington:** Yes there was ... two and a half year inquiry where professionals, workers from Families SA themselves, not one of them had a kind word to say about this Department and how it operates ... there wasn't one positive comment in two and a half years ... (*Byner: ... are we really saying that if you are in this kind of dilemma with children you love and care for and you feel that you're being trodden on or steamrolled, you or Chris really are best the advocates ... how is this Department accountable, where is the independent ability of somebody to look at this outside the square without any influences and make a determination?*) **Bressington:** Well there is no independent review process ... one of the recommendations of the ... Upper House inquiry was that an independent panel be set up to review these cases, parents, grandparents and other parents have no recall, they have nowhere to go to ask for an assessment of the decisions made. (*Byner: ... it seems to me that with the absence of anybody to independently review this, the only way to get it happening, this is the abuse of power, which is what you're talking about, is an Independent Commission Against Corruption. I can't see any other way.*) **Bressington:** ... I have 600 complaints in my office out of 2,000 children in care ... the Ombudsman can't handle it, the Commissioner for Health rejects these cases ... what I would also like to just make the point, I'm actually producing a documentary on Families SA this 12 months, it'll be an expose, all their dirty little secrets will be out there, there'll be no secrets to be had any longer. (**Caller Jan:** ... *I'm a grandma that looked after my grandchild for two and a half years ... I gave him back to Families SA and the lady that looked after him for the next 10 months ended up dying and I*

*was her respite person for that ... I had him back again and he had access to his brothers in my house from time to time ... they were allowed to babysit him while I went out, then all of a sudden I had a nasty asthma attack and I'm thinking I can't look after him anymore ... if I'm home alone and I have a nasty asthma attack and I've gotta go to hospital, what happens to the poor little devil. He's had enough people dying in his life as it is without me getting really sick and scaring the hell out of him ... Families SA now only let me have one day a month for an hour supervised access ... because I've given him back to Families SA and they don't think I'm capable of having him by myself ... I just heard Chris say they deem that we're a threat to the child ... all I've got is the best interests of that child at heart.) (Byner: ... Ann, give your phone number on air ... I think a lot of people are gonna call you about this.)*

**Bressington:** My phone number is 8237 9596. (Byner: ... we're getting an inundation of phone calls here ... I watched that segment last night, and I've been listening carefully to what you've been saying today, and it is clear that this is the tip of a very nasty iceberg ... would you just hold the line ...) [commercial break and news headlines] (Byner: ... Mary, you're the grandmother in question, you're determined to try and win this aren't you?)

*(Caller Mary: I certainly am. (Byner: ... what was the last thing Families SA said to you?)*

*(Caller Mary: ... that we can have access for Christmas on the day before for an hour and a half.) (Byner: ... you've heard nothing since Christmas last year?) (Caller Mary: ... I ring up and ask how the boys are and I get told they're fine, you don't need to worry.) (Byner: Ann*

*Bressington?) Bressington: ... this lady lives and breathes for her children and for her family, and to be cut out of their lives like this is cruel and heartless ... what's more there's no policy in Families SA that justifies this, and there's no legislation that justifies this action.*

*(Byner: ... what can we do for Mary Chris ...) Hamilton: ... the reality is we've identified Mary as being a person who is responsible, rational and reasonable adult. What has happened is that in the dysfunctional circumstances that she's been forced into it's led her to be anxious, depressed and angry, are we surprised? We have to keep talking about things like this because it is not fair on Mary, it is not fair on her grandchildren and it is not fair on hundreds of others who are exposed in similar situations in this State. (Byner: ... Ann Bressington, there's gotta be a lot of Mary's out there ... what are you trying to shoot for here?)*

**Bressington:** What I am trying to shoot for is the Minister to come out of hiding. It seems she has disappeared up her own backside over this issue. Step up to the plate and right the wrongs that have been done ... nobody expects a 100% record from child protection, but when a mistake is made, rather than cover it up and screw peoples' lives up, just fix the mistake. Review it and fix it. (Byner: Mary I can assure you there are a lot of people out there that wanna give you a big hug and are just wanting to say keep going ... good should win ... I think there's gonna have to be some determination ... a Government is gonna have to make a decision on this ... have the Opposition expressed any concern for Mary and people like her?)

**Bressington:** No. (Byner: I'm surprised to hear that.) **Bressington:** ... the Government boycotted the inquiry, for a start, and the Opposition, there were two members of the Liberal Party that sat on that with me. When we produced the report that we did, it was a derogatory document, but was a summary of evidence. The Minister dismissed it as a political ploy, rather than wanting to acknowledge that what was in that document was true.

*(Caller Trevor: ... I was very, very close to my grandparents ... I didn't see last night's TV, but I'm very disturbed by what I'm hearing ... I would like to put to you and your guests that is it possible that spin driven arrogant Governments create spin driven arrogant*

*Departments and Councils ...?) (Byner: ... all I can say is the document we got today from Families SA is just a whole lot of words that basically justify their position ... what that proves is that it's their way or the highway, there are arbitrary decisions being made and there was no independent assessment of this ... the person that did in the inquiry under the Minister's intervention was not independent ... until such time as people in the public office*

*understand the meaning of the word independence ... then we will not get justice.) (Caller Jo: ... I was actually in Mike Rann's Office last week taking in a letter about my abusive next door neighbours ... they wanted a letter from my doctor. While I was in there they actually said to me, and these were these words, you can do no more, shut your windows and turn your music up and ignore the abuse ... it breaks my heart that this is happening to Mary and that's where they're spending their time, and not on the people that really need the help.)*

**Bressington:** ... this is I think to do with the case that we ran on your show two weeks ago about the drug addicted psychotic parents that are witnessed abusing their children. Those children remain in that home ... (Byner: ... drugs are a lifestyle choice.) **Bressington:** Well that's right ... a week and a half after that went to your show I received a phone call from a person who witnessed that 12 year old child's head getting put through a wall, yet those children remain and Mary can't have any contact with her two grandchildren. (Caller

**Deborah:** ... I'm having a similar thing as a previous caller ... I've had dealings with Families SA, we're trying to get some assistance and some help ... I've actually had Families SA tell me about a week and a half ... ago that only the children in eminent danger of death do they have time for.) **Bressington:** Well that's not true. (Caller Deborah: And when I asked them how could they justify that sort of a thing, what about the children that are suffering sexual abuse, what about the children that are suffering all sorts of emotional abuse, distress, any forms of abuse, how can they only be interested in the children in eminent danger of death, and she told me that they did not have enough time, did not have enough funds, did not have enough people, did not have enough of anything, and when I said ... maybe I should go to my Local MP, she urged me to do so and said good luck ...)

(Byner: ... what an extraordinary response to witness abuse of children and be told ... just turn your music up, and now this. What kind of a State are we living in?) **Bressington:** ... it's not what State we're living in, it's what state Families SA is in, and it's in chaos and dysfunction and it needs to be fixed. (Caller Steven: ... I'm glad you can get an answer out of FaS ... about kids. We had one in our care for 22 months, I rang FaS three times for help, three times I was told you're not on their radar, we don't want to know about it, go away ... in the end we gave the child up to FaS ... we had a psychiatrist report that said she's a chronic liar, don't believe anything she says to you. They took all these lies from her and presented us ... the court papers ... I said to them ... this is all crap, we can prove it's all lies, FaS didn't want to know about it. The social worker wouldn't talk to us, wouldn't have anything to do with us ... it ended up going to court, the magistrate threw it out.) (Byner: Why would anybody be a foster carer hearing stuff like this ... the State is a rotten nanny ... the Crown is supposed to be the model citizen, sorry, we're not here ...)

**Bressington:** ... foster carers are treated just as poorly as grandparents and innocent parents who have been falsely accused. (Byner: ... given that we've got an election in eight days time ... what can we do ... Governments are supposed to right wrongs, we are supposed to have a thing called inclusion, but what we're hearing about here is exclusion ... what can we do?) **Bressington:** ... tomorrow between 1 and 3 o'clock there is a protest on the steps of Parliament House. I'm urging all South Australians, whether you're affected by this or not ... you could be, to show up to this and express your absolute dissent to the way that this Department is being run and operated. (Byner: ... I love the story you gave us today ... where you're told that children are in eminent danger because there's a meth lab across the road, but where the meth lab is there are kids in there, but they can stay.)

**Bressington:** That's right ... and the other 66 children in the street as well, but Mary's two grandchildren can't be exposed to that kind of danger ... I'd just make the point, I've actually had to relocate Mary, I've found her another home in a better area, if you like. What is gonna be their excuse now? The children no longer have to sleep in double bunks, they have their own bedroom ... when they say that this ongoing assessment has been occurring I had to beg ... eight months ago for this review to happen,

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they promised it would be independent, there was not going to be another assessment of this case, it was gonna be thrown on the rubbish heap and Mary was gonna be left out in the cold. (*Byner: ... give your office number again.*) **Bressington:** ... 8237 9596. (*Byner: And Chris Hamilton, your contact.*) **Hamilton:** ... I'm best contacted ... on 0418 263 952. (*Byner: Thank you both for coming in.*)