

Legislative Council

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DISABILITY CARERS

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (12:00):

I also rise to support the motion of the Hon. Kelly Vincent, and to commend her on her consistency and persistence in bringing forward issues of the disability sector. I would like to start with two quotes: first, 'societies are judged by how they treat their most vulnerable', and, second, 'societies get the government they deserve.'

There is no doubt in my mind that we have an entire generation of people who believe that this is how government has always been, that this is how these systems have always been run. I can speak from personal experience in saying that that is not true. I had an older brother who had severe spina bifida, and when he was born my parents were basically told that he would never be any more than a vegetable. But he proved them wrong, although by the age of 14 he had had both of his legs amputated to the hip because of recurring instances of gangrene.

However, my parents never once had to fight for a service for him. In Queensland, he was able to go to a respite centre called Montrose where they provided him with education, living skills and support. He could go there for a month at a time and then come home for two weeks to be with his family. He received the medical attention he needed and my parents got the education they needed to be able to care for him in the best way possible.

I also had a niece who was born with craniosynostosis, which is where the skull does not expand with the brain. She lived for 18 months. Again, my sister did not have to struggle for services with this little baby. She did not have to struggle for the support that we are seeing parents struggle for now.

I would like to make the point that just after the death of Peter Eitzen hit the news I was contacted by a person in the community who had tried desperately to support this family, the mother and the little boy. I was told that in a very short period of time—from memory I think it was in a two-week period—Beverley Eitzen had contacted the former minister, Jay Weatherill, six times begging for help, and was told that there was nothing that could be done. After hearing this from the minister himself, or from his office, that there was nothing they could do to help, no wonder this mother had a breakdown, or a mental condition at the time, feeling so desperate, isolated and hopeless that she felt there was no other option—no other option for her, her family or her son—other than to put an end to this and suffer the consequences.

We can stand in judgement—and many people do—when we hear about parents, mothers, taking the lives of their children, but in this particular case I agree with the Hon. Tammy Franks that this falls in the lap of the government and its one-size-fits-all approach, its diagnosis versus needs approach to disability and mental illness. One size fits all has been proven time and time again not to work, and at some point in the policymaking and criteria setting of assessment for conditions such as we are discussing here today, the penny has to drop with government that the state is comprised of real people, real human situations, and running the state like a corporation is not workable. The people deserve better from their government.

I have no doubt that when the government responds to this motion we will hear how much the government has put into the disability sector, what reforms they have made, and how hard they have worked to move forward to support the community. In actual fact, we hear that all the time, and it is getting to be like water off a duck's back, because if the reforms that you make and the trouble that you go to are not hitting the mark, why bother? Why bother?

If you are not going to listen to the needs group that is saying what it is they need to be able to cope and you are not going to recognise that there are many conditions that we cannot diagnose that would come under the umbrella of a disability, and be able to take some sort of elasticity and pliable approach to offering support for these children and their families, then do nothing, because this whole approach of appearing to do something quite frankly is wearing thin with many people.

We need to develop policies and approaches that do address the problems and do hit the mark and do actually produce outcomes. I am sure some of us in this chamber remember what the word 'outcome' means. Not too many of us, perhaps. In saying that, we also have to understand that situations with families that could once provide the support for parents with children with disabilities have changed dramatically. Everybody is busy. We have a situation now where mostly both parents in a family work, which means that the brothers and sisters, and nieces and nephews of the people dealing with these children with disabilities are all working full-time and raising their own families—quite a different situation to what it was some 40 years ago.

That means that the people dealing with these problems are even more isolated than they were. It is on government's shoulders to get this right and to get it right soon, because this is not going to be an isolated incident. I remind members that some months ago I raised the exact same issue about a condition that was undiagnosed or unrecognised in South Australia called PDD-NOS. That turned into a football between federal and state government, not about what this state government could do to ease the burden of parents with children suffering from that particular disorder; no, 'It is not our responsibility, it is the feds and we are having a ministerial council discussion on this and we are going to wait and see what the federal government does.' Not good enough!

On that note I leave this. As I said, I commend the Hon. Kelly Vincent for her persistence. I hope and I know that she will continue to do this, and one day maybe guilt and shame this government into taking its responsibilities to the people seriously.