

National Human Rights Consultation Submission

AGWW-7NZCSF

Organisation: Autism Advisory and Support Service

Submission Text:

“Human rights are about equality and dignity for everyone in Australia. Human rights are important to Australia’s democracy...”

I am the proud mother of two beautiful boys who both have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Global Developmental Delay (GDD). I am also founder and President of Autism Advisory and Support Service (AASS), a service run by parents of children with Autism for families affected by Autism. We experience firsthand and hear from other parents the distress, frustration and heartache in raising a child with additional needs, in particular ASD.

From the moment something different is noticed about our children, we are at the mercy of service providers. First you need a diagnosis to access assistance. We have parents who go from one Doctor to another in search of assistance and are told there is nothing wrong with their child or even they are just bad parents. One parent went to 30 different Pediatricians before her child was diagnosed with ASD. By that time it was too late to access early interventions.

Once our child has a diagnosis we must rely on the system to show us where to go for help. Six months after my eldest son was diagnosed (I went through a period of denial as he regressed), I kept calling my local peak Autism body for assistance. We were placed on the back of a two year waiting list. When asked if there was anywhere else I could go for help they said no and referred me to another of their programmes which had a long waiting list or cost more than we could afford. This is not an uncommon story for parents with children with ASD.

There is no equality or dignity in begging for assistance for your child who CAN be helped. Children with Autism do not receive the basic constitutional right to an education, let alone a local one. We hear stories on a daily basis of children and assist children with ASD who are:

- Suspended from school for displaying Autistic behaviors.
- Not placed into a school until the day before they are due to start giving them no time to understand what is happening.
- Are put in a mainstream class where they cannot cope. They then disrupt the class and are sent home.
- One family moved homes and tried to place their son in a school closer to home. He spent nine months without an education as no school would accept him. With our intervention he was finally placed in a school that could accommodate his needs.
- Are placed in a special teaching unit with teachers who try and force the children to make eye contact when this is something they cannot do. One child came home with bruises to his face from being forced to turn his head to look the teacher in the eyes.
- Travel two hours each way to go to school, even though there is a school closer to home that can cater to their needs.
- Parents have no say where their children go to school. This is decided by a panel of people who have never met the child and rely on a one page report to place the child where there is a vacancy. Neuro typical children have the right to attend their local school. Children with Autism do not.
- There are not enough high schools for our children to attend therefore they are thrown in the deep end to a mainstream school where they are bullied and teased by students and in some cases even teachers. This leads to days at home, depression and suicidal thoughts. It also robs these children of an education.

During the school years it is difficult to access services and interventions which mean the child’s development and skills remain stagnant.

Each child with Autism should have the right to fulfil their potential.

They can only do this with access to interventions and an education setting to accommodate their needs. Just as one would not expect a child who is

short sighted to learn when they have no glasses and are placed at the back of the class, then one could also not be surprised when our children with Autism are thrust in inappropriate settings with teachers who do not understand their needs.

Many children with Autism have the potential to learn the skills to contribute to society in a positive way. Many can be the leaders of tomorrow. If only we could nurture their abilities and guide them to live in our world, earn a living, have a sense of self worth and perhaps meet a partner and start a family. This is the equality and dignity we should aim for with our beautiful children with Autism, not the shameful disgrace we endure today.