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**SUBMISSION TO THE WELFARE REVIEW**

The Home Education Network (HEN) is a non-profit support group for home educating families. Home education is a valid educational option in every state of Australia.

We note that one of the ‘pillars’ of the review is ‘strengthening individual and family capability’ and have concerns that too much emphasis on paid work could lead to unpaid work being devalued, weakening the self-worth of individuals and families.

It is important to recognise that monetary reward is not analogous with intrinsic value and that a lack of income does not make a person a ‘ leaner’. We maintain that voluntary work of all types is valuable to society. In particular, home educators give up an income for many years in order to educate their children. This constitutes a considerable commitment over an extended period of time – both in terms of time and foregone income. Some home educators do this because the school system is unable to cater for the needs of their child.

Where parents are eligible for Newstart, at present, registered home education is a valid exemption from the Welfare to Work requirements. We are concerned that ‘simplifying’ the welfare system does not result in this consideration being lost with an over-emphasis on full-employment. Home educators are not free-loading; they are performing a valuable service to society in an unpaid capacity.

We draw your attention to the fact that changes to the FTB Part A criteria in January, meant that Victorian home educators with children over 16 were no longer eligible, these students are also ineligible for Youth Allowance as Centrelink does not recognise Victorian home education registration as meeting the YA eligibility criteria. To compound the problem these students are now ineligible for a Health Care Card as a result. Such changes mean that home educated students are financially disadvantaged despite the fact that they are learning and working towards taking their place in adult society.

Furthermore, the budget proposal to limit the Family Tax Benefit Part B to families with children under six will have a detrimental effect on home educating families. As home educators receive no educational funding, the Family Payment is a valuable resource for home educating families to pay for educational activities and resources.

We also have concerns that if Family Tax Benefits are tied to school attendance, home educators could be further disadvantaged. Home education should be considered equal to school attendance – our children are learning, just not in school.

Home education has long been shown to be effective with many home-educated students going on to excel at university and careers. It is unfair to financially discriminate against families who have invested so much time and care in their children’s education and future. We therefore urge the government to:

* Consider the contribution home educators make to society on a voluntary basis;
* Ensure home education continues to be a valid exemption from the ‘Work for the Dole’ program;
* Continue the Family Tax Benefit part B payments for school-aged; and
* Reinstate the Family Tax Benefit Part A to Victorian home educated students 16 and over.

Yours faithfully,

**Susan Wight**

Coordinator

Home Education Network