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Grandparents Doing It Tough

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 **She Brisbane**



SheBrisbane spoke to Cathy Baker from Community Legal Centres Queensland about the growing number of Queenslanders being denied contact with their grandchildren due to family breakdown, parental drug use and domestic violence.

In addition to the traditional “babysitting” role tied to the high cost of childcare, grandparents are being relied on more and more by the Department of Child Safety as alternatives to parents who have substance abuse issues, experiencing domestic violence or are in prison.



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However, if grandparents don't have a formal parenting order in place they can't obtain financial family assistance, access Medicare, open a school banking account, obtain a passport or even be authorised to apply for a birth certificate.

The delays mean that grandparents either rely on their pension to support their grandchildren or have to find employment to supplement the expenses of the grandchildren.

Kirsty Mackie, Chair of the Queensland Law Society's Elder Law Committee said there were two sets of circumstances which generally brought grandparents to the community legal centre.

The first was when they were suddenly denied access to their grandchildren and secondly when they were trying to formalise parenting arrangements with grandchildren whose parents were in and out of prison or had a serious substance abuse problem.

"At least twice a week, at the Suncoast Community Legal Centre, I see grandparents who have been denied access to their grandchildren for no reason," said Ms Mackie.

"I also see clients who are caring for their grandchildren as their parents have disappeared with new partners or have spiralled into serious drug dependency and cannot provide a safe environment for their children.

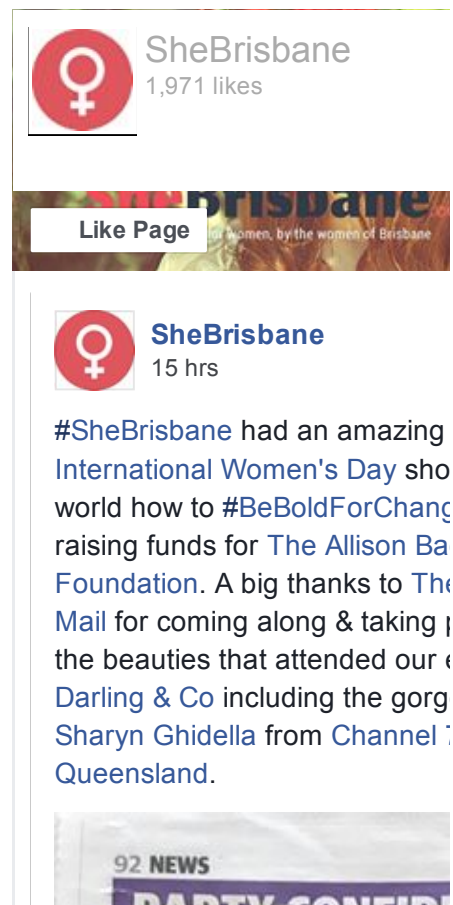
Ms Mackie said part of the problem was the growing issue of drug use in regional Queensland, in particular ice which caused parents to completely disengage from all activities including being a fit and proper parent to their children.

A further issue is the lack of resources of community legal centres in being able to assist these grandparents.

"Often they receive legal advice at a community legal centre and then are too busy with their childcare duties to complete the necessary paperwork. In the times that Community Legal Centres can open a case file for them and complete the paperwork, the issue is often settled quickly" Ms Mackie said.

James Farrell, Director, Community Legal Centres Queensland said: "It would be great to see seniors legal services expanded throughout regional Queensland.

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He said Community Legal Centres Queensland was calling on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to reverse planned 30 cuts to community legal centres across Australia to ensure older Queenslanders got the legal help they needed and the justice they deserved.

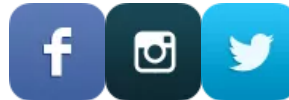


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