



Speech by  
**Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

Hansard Thursday, 7 October 2010

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**CARERS (RECOGNITION) AMENDMENT BILL AND SENIORS  
RECOGNITION (GRANDPARENTS PROVIDING CARE) BILL**

**Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (4.33 pm): I rise to support this bill and to speak in favour of the government Carers (Recognition) Amendment Bill 2010. Can I at the outset say that it is just wonderful sometimes to be a member of parliament and to be part of establishing a piece of legislation that actually puts into law the recognition of significant members of the community and in particular I refer to all our grandparents. Unfortunately my maternal grandmother is no longer alive but it brings back fond memories of the work that she did for us.

I congratulate the minister and her department on bringing this forward. I know that the Positively Ageless—Queensland Seniors Strategy 2010, which was launched by the Premier, includes a strategy to recognise and introduce Grandparents Day, which I think is fantastic. But I would like to just spend a little bit of time to celebrate the contribution that grandparents do make to our society and, in particular, all those grandparents who live in my electorate of Brisbane Central. I see them every day. When I visit the schools I see grandparents dropping their granddaughters or sons off, picking them up in the afternoon; helping their children out by caring for them. I think everyone in this House at some stage recognises the fundamental role that grandparents play in assisting many busy families these days to balance work and family responsibility. I often wonder whether sometimes these grandparents really are the almost de facto full-time carers of these young children. You can see the love in their eyes. You can see the attention that they take towards their care and nurturing. It is the same care and attention that was given to me by my grandmother who, I might add in this House, I was actually named after.

For those who do not know, Grace is the anglicised version of my Italian proper name and my proper name is actually Ignacia. That is what is on my birth certificate. Ignacia was the name of my maternal grandmother. Sicilians had this quirky thing that when they had their children it was tradition that the first child was named after the father's mother or father and so my poor older sister got the name Maria. I was lucky that I was not called Maria. As an Italian it is a very unusual name, I know. But she got the name after my father's grandmother. I was named after my mother's mother and Ignacia was her Christian name.

My mother worked extremely hard to balance the family budget. We certainly were not born with silver spoons in our mouths. They were migrants from Sicily. My grandmother was born into a large family in the little town of Castiglione in Sicily. She was the eldest daughter of the family. Being the oldest daughter she had to actually take charge of nurturing the other children in the family. She saw her younger sisters and brother go to school. Unfortunately my grandmother did not go to school. She migrated out to Australia after she married my grandfather and remained, unfortunately, illiterate all her life. She could not read or write but she was such a strong, intelligent woman. There is no doubt in my mind that she was the pillar, the matriarch, of the family and she drew us all in.

As we were growing up, when my mother was busy trying to make ends meet, I think de facto wise she was really the primary caregiver of Maria, me and Silvana, my younger sister. At the end of the day she was really the one who raised us and was the primary caregiver but clearly was not recognised under legislation for doing so. We were forever grateful that she was there. I remember whenever I got into

trouble the first person I ran to, whether I was wailing or whatever I was doing, was my grandmother. I will never forget those fond memories. She used to know I used to love a particular type of lolly or sweet from the local corner shop and she always used to have a little five cent piece hidden on the old Singer sewing machine that she had on the verandah of the place where we lived. That five cent piece was always there. I now have that Singer sewing machine in the hallway of my house just to remind myself of my grandmother, and I actually always keep a five cent piece on it just to remind myself of my grandmother. Back then you got a pretty big bag of lollies with five cents down at the local shop. This bill is bringing back some fantastic memories in relation to that.

Any indication from those opposite that we do not care about carers or that somehow they are not dear to our heart is so off the mark that it is not funny. I really appreciate this bill. It is amazing that the amendments that are proposed in the Carers (Recognition) Amendment Bill today would make Queensland—and once again we are leading Australia—the first state to legislatively recognise grandparents providing full-time care for their grandchildren. So once again we have a fantastic piece of legislation introduced by a wonderful minister that would see for the first time in Australia grandparents receive legislative recognition. The government proposes to extend existing legislation to specifically recognise the interests of grandparents, and I think that is fantastic.

There are approximately 14,000 Australian families in which a grandparent or grandparents are the main carers of their grandchildren, like my family. I take my hat off to those carers in my electorate. They do an unbelievable job, whether it is caring for their own children or their grandchildren. There are a lot of peak organisations in my electorate—the Cerebral Palsy League and ARAFMI—who look after people with a mental disability, and many others. They are such fantastic organisations. When I go around my electorate and see the work that those carers undertake, it is absolutely the best day for me. We really cannot do enough for them. They are the backbone and the pillars of our society. Wherever we can give them recognition, thanks and gratitude, we should be in this House applauding them for the hard work that they do.

A couple of couples come to mind. One couple in particular live in the city with a very disabled daughter and they do a fantastic job. As they grow older they are concerned about exactly how they are going to continue to give their daughter the wonderful care they have given all of their lives. I fear for their concern as well, but I know that the minister is addressing some fantastic initiatives in that area. There is extra money flowing to assist these families. We have Youngcare. The minister and I were at a couple of fundraisers over the weekend for Youngcare, which is a fantastic service headed by Marina Vit. We enjoyed that night where we raised excellent funds that will be put to good use so that these families can rest assured that their loved ones will be looked after when they can no longer bear that burden.

The government bill extends the definition of carers, as I said, to recognise grandparents as full-time carers for their grandchildren where the grandparent is the primary caregiver and decision maker of the child. The bill extends the functions of the Carers Advisory Council, which already exists under the provisions of the Queensland carers act, to include working to advance the interests of grandparents providing that much needed care for their grandchildren.

The expansion in the membership of the Carers Advisory Council is much welcome. The membership will include two positions for grandparent carers providing full-time care for their grandchildren or a representative body of grandparent carers. The bill amends the existing Queensland Carers Charter—again established under the Queensland carers act—to include recognition of the invaluable role, as I have mentioned previously, that grandparents providing full-time care for their grandchildren play in the lives of their grandchildren.

There will also be two new principles in the charter which will recognise grandparents providing full-time care for their grandchildren and, importantly—and this is a really important part of this legislation—will assure them of access to information that supports them in their role. Interestingly in the past they have not had access to this information. It is terrific that this bill now gives them the peace of mind that, if they require information on their grandchildren in providing full-time care for them, they will be able to access that information, and that will support them in that important role they are undertaking.

The bill closely aligns the Queensland carers act with the recently introduced Commonwealth Carer Recognition Bill in that it will require public authorities to apply the principles of the Queensland Carers Charter in their human resource policies. When we are talking about employing staff in this area, it is great that we have consistency nationally in Australia. It is great that we are aligning ourselves with the new Commonwealth bill. At the same time, as I said, Queensland is leading the way with this kind of legislation. I think we should commend the minister for doing that.

We have long recognised the invaluable contribution of carers of those who are in need. This bill will build on the legislative framework for the recognition of carers for people with a disability, frailty, chronic illness or pain, established under the Carers (Recognition) Act. That legislative framework has come about because of the valuable work and representation by carers and carer representatives. There are many groups in the community, as I have mentioned, but in particular groups such as Carers Queensland.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the valuable work of Carers Queensland. Carers Queensland is a peak body for carers in this state. It responds to the needs of carers by providing information, community development, counselling, support services and advocacy. It really provides the whole gamut of services when it comes to looking after, promoting and informing the interests of carers in this state.

Its services are many and extensive. They include information and resources for carers. I know that many in my electorate avail themselves of this information. It provides counselling. Many constituents have talked to me about how much they value counselling. Sometimes you just need someone to talk to, to have someone reassure you, because this is not an easy job, as those who are in the community caring for people with a disability or grandchildren or whatever would know. We all know that sometimes we need to receive some counselling and to have somebody to talk to.

It provides great referral services. People can go to Carers Queensland and be referred to services to address the needs that they have. It has a wonderful library of resources for carers. It supports young carers, which is very important. When you are a young carer you do need that support, and Carers Queensland provides that. It has accredited training to assist carers in their caring role, so carers can be trained. It also supports the no-interest loans scheme, which assist carers with financial support. We know that sometimes caring can also be a financial strain, and it does administer those much needed loans.

Carers Queensland has 12 offices across the state. So it is not just a Brisbane or South-East Queensland based organisation. Those offices stretch from Cairns in North Queensland—which the Deputy Speaker would be interested in—to the Gold Coast and out to Roma, for the interest of some of our country members. It offers the most decentralised carers support of any one carers organisation in Australia, and we have it here in Queensland. You can see from this that Carers Queensland is for all carers—those in urban areas, rural and regional areas and also for, and we must not forget, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and carers from linguistically diverse backgrounds, which is my background. Carers Queensland has also very recently launched a most informative DVD aimed at Indigenous carers.

The Queensland government, I am very proud to say, funds Carers Queensland to the tune of \$3.3 million recurrently. I note that the minister is nodding. I think we all agree in this House that it is money spent in the right area. It does provide a wonderful service.

Counselling services are provided through the Australian government National Carer Counselling Program and include both telephone and face-to-face counselling to help carers deal with the range of issues that they face. I will mention some of those: stress—and I know that some of my carers are stressed; coping skills—it is hard to cope in very stressful situations, particularly when you are sleep deprived; dealing with grief and loss; and transition issues. So they really do provide a holistic approach for these people who require help.

Caring for another—whether it is a grandparent caring full time for their grandchild or caring for a person with a disability, frailty, chronic illness or pain—is a rewarding but challenging role. It is a role that I think society applauds and one that is much valued and cherished. I think any organisation that makes those people feel wanted and needed and is there to assist them when things are not going so well is one that government should be spending money on, and I applaud the money that we do give that organisation to assist those carers.

Once again, Carers Queensland have advised me—and I have spoken to them in the past—that they will open up their services to grandparent carers as a result of this bill. This is fantastic for those grandparents who may need some help. I must admit that sometimes we were naughty when my grandmother was looking after us and sometimes she could have pulled her hair out. I know that members in this House will not believe that, but from time to time it did happen.

**Mrs Cunningham:** I can actually believe it.

**Ms GRACE:** I take that interjection from the member for Gladstone. She can believe that I was naughty as a child, but I assure you I was actually very good. If grandparents do need help, it is good to know that Carers Queensland will be there. As a result of this bill, they will open up their services to grandparent carers which I think is fantastic news. I am sure honourable members will join me in thanking their board and CEO for this move. I hope they will monitor the uptake of these services by this newest group of recognised carers and advise the government and possibly this House of that number. I hope that grandparents who do go to Carers Queensland for assistance will find that professional service and be able to obtain whatever it is they require—whether it be referral, counselling or the other things I have mentioned in this speech.

I am sure all members will join me in acknowledging and thanking Carers Queensland for their invaluable role in supporting our wonderful carers across the state. I think they do a wonderful job. As I said, I am proud to be part of a government and proud to be part of a team that has a minister like Annastacia Palaszczuk who welcomes funds going to this organisation that assists people out there who do such a wonderful job.

I cannot speak highly enough of carers. I have been to the Cerebral Palsy League and I have seen those committed carers and family members. I recently went to the Picnic in the Park with the minister and there were thousands of people at that huge fundraising effort. It was a wonderful day at Roma Street Parklands. There were so many dedicated carers, be they parents, friends or full-time carers. Whatever capacity they were working in, they were there helping those people in need and taking it all in their stride. They were so proud of what they were able to do to assist the person in need.

In closing, I will refer once again to my maternal grandmother, and I know my mother would appreciate me saying this. She was a wonderful Italian woman. In my career, I have realised that you often have to be worried about small European women. They have a fire in their belly and they have an unbelievable way of making their point crystal clear. I see the member for Hinchinbrook waving his hand in the Italian way. If you got out of hand, they clipped you around the ears and they sure made you know exactly who was boss.

My maternal grandmother was one of those strong women, a matriarch of our family. I miss her greatly and I think I could almost go to the point of saying that she was a full-time carer. My parents ran a boarding house in Spring Hill and my mother was taken away for many long hours; she worked extremely hard. If it were not for my grandmother, we would have been roaming the streets of Spring Hill when we should not have been roaming the streets of Spring Hill.

With those few words, and in recognising the role of grandparents and the wonderful work that carers do throughout Queensland, I thank the minister and her department for this piece of legislation. I commend the bill to the House.