



SANDGATE & BRACKEN RIDGE ACTION GROUP INC

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4th August 2003

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee On Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry House of Representatives Standing Committee
House Of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No:908.....
Date Received:8-8-03.....
Secretary:

Dear Committee,

Sandgate & Bracken Ridge Action Group Inc (SANDBAG) is a community organization that works locally and developmentally in the Sandgate & Bracken Ridge area in the outer north-eastern suburbs of Brisbane. As part of our work we have done counselling and support for women who are survivors of domestic and family violence over the past 10 years.

From this experience of working with these women, we wish to submit the following on the Child Custody Arrangements Enquiry.

In summary the basic points we wish to raise are:

- The assumption of 50/50 shared care with parents does not take into consideration that a number of relationships breakdown due to family and domestic violence issues. Safety issues are exacerbated for women and children post family breakdown. (Over 95% of domestic & family violence perpetrators are male). Domestic violence and child abuse are interrelated issues (An Unacceptable Risk Women's Legal Service Report Nov 2000). Note also that from our experience, spouse abuse may be a significant factor in relationship breakdown even where this does not translate to legal proceedings relating to domestic violence.
- Custody arrangements are currently frequently not maintained or satisfactory. Many of these arrangements are never formalised with the courts due to the inability of parents to agree to an arrangement.



Where arrangements are ad hoc this is frequently not in the interest of children as there is no stability or security for them.

- A number of the women we have worked with, have had expensive stressful, custody battles which has put financial and emotional strain on them at a time when they are most vulnerable.

Based on these issues, we recommend the following:

That current custody legislation remain but be better resourced to ensure that custody arrangements work. Factors that would assist this are:

1. Immediate mediation to develop a parenting plan and custody arrangements that meet children's needs as outlined above. These need to take into account issues of safety for parents and children.
2. Settlement arrangements are made within a limited timeframe so that children know what to expect.
3. Access agreements be upheld, monitored and reviewed regularly & reflect the reality of the life of the children & what is working.
4. That costs associated with custody not be an unfair burden on women.

We trust you will consider these issues in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely



Susan Black
Director