

# State has 40 relinquished children

Carol Nader, [THE AGE](#), September 30, 2010

FORTY children with disabilities are in the care of state welfare services after being relinquished by parents driven to despair and no longer able to cope with the demands of a severely disabled child.

Disability organisations say parents make the agonising decision to relinquish the care of their children after many years of getting insufficient support to cope with the difficult behaviour of some children.

*The Age* yesterday reported the case of a young boy with severe autism who was voluntarily relinquished by his parents after they struggled for five years to cope with his behaviour. In the unusual case, the parents also relinquished guardianship of the boy.

But the state government says in these 40 cases, the parents have chosen to remain the legal guardian of their children and most still see their children, despite making the decision not to have their children remain in the family home. The government could not say how many parents had chosen to relinquish guardianship of their children, but said it was a rare occurrence.

Yooralla is one of the organisations caring for children with disabilities who have been relinquished by parents. Jo Hine, deputy general manager, said these parents did not have the capacity to continue to support their child at home. She said sometimes it could take up to 12 months for parents to get respite support just for a break, as there was a shortfall of services.

"People are trying to maintain a family, maintain a job and a home environment and without the supports around them to be able to manage their situation," she said. "It really does come to a point where they're exhausted, they feel alone, and we find when parents do get to that point, it's not because they no longer love the child or even feel they can provide them with a loving environment. They just physically or emotionally don't have the capacity to continue that relationship in the family structure."

Ms Hine said some parents who relinquish their children were still very involved with their children. But some parents were not. "I think a lot of it is to do with grief and loss ... as a parent it's the most heart-breaking, and probably selfless at some level, decision they'll ever make," she said.

Carers Victoria chief executive Maria Bohan said she had met families who had agonised over whether to relinquish a child because their whole family was under incredible stress.

A spokeswoman for Community Services Minister Lisa Neville said of the 40 children, 13 were in a family environment, nine were in respite while long-term arrangements were finalised, and 18 were in a disability accommodation home.

Opposition community services spokeswoman Mary Wooldridge said the government's lack of disability support and respite puts pressure on struggling parents "and can be the tipping point that forces them to relinquish their children".

**LISA Comment:-**

**"The Two Tiers of Disaster "**

Parents who agonise in desperation to release their family member to often unknown care quality, are moving to a new stage of desperation and frustration - the quality of care behind closed doors. "Will their family member receive meaningful quality of life care, or just basic minder care?"