

# IMPORTANT NOTE - PLEASE READ BEFORE USING THIS DOCUMENT

The author of this document has required that any information in this document which would allow another individual to be identified be redacted. Therefore, reasonable efforts must be made to remove all personal information (such as name, address, other contact details) and other information which could reasonably be expected to identify any other individual.

SUB.0002.0028.0513

Adriana is a mother of 4 primary school aged children, living in Melbourne's north western suburbs. Adriana was working as a legal secretary for about 5 years before going on maternity leave with her fourth child in 2016.

Her [REDACTED] child was born 3 months pre-term and needed to spend a lengthy period in the ICU and neo-natal unit of a Melbourne hospital. Witnessing her baby so sick and close to death, she describes as a traumatic experience. She explained that at this time she was struggling to come to terms with how the birth had worked out, why it had worked out this way, along with the practical considerations of how she would care for the rest of her family and visit her child in hospital 45 minutes drive from her home.

The family received support from the medical staff at the hospital and she said she also met a few families who were in/had been in a similar. She said she had tried to access counselling support but that her time, energy and focus were squarely on what had to be done immediately (visiting and caring for her children) that it didn't eventuate. "My key focus was how we were going to cope".

Adriana's husband was working in warehousing during this time. He was working reduced hours to allow him to drive his wife to visit their daughter, however he 'lost his job' because he could no longer take the time he needed to care for his family.

Whilst her fourth child was in hospital, Adriana's [REDACTED] daughter experienced the first episode of what was eventually diagnosed as a rare genetic disorder. This disorder causes her daughter to experience a temporary paralysis of her body from the neck down. Her daughter was 9 years old at the time. This condition was and obviously still is a huge concern for Adriana and her husband. She says there is little information and understanding of the condition and accessing supports (such as the NDIS) has been incredibly difficult. The condition has had a significant impact on her daughter's mental health. Adriana said she has gone through periods of being desperate to find more information about her daughter's diagnosis and has trawled the internet for whatever she can find.

Adriana initially assisted her daughter to visit a GP for a referral to see a counsellor via the Better Access program. She said they exhausted the allowed number of referrals and could also no longer afford the gap fee. Apart from losing the family's main income, the family's expenses had increased due to the medical needs of the children. Adriana said she had to rely on the school to provide a mental health intervention and apparently she has some access to a school counsellor and psychologist this way.

Nearing the end of Adriana's maternity leave, her [REDACTED] daughter was experiencing some developmental difficulties, which lead to her eventually being diagnosed with a number of mental and behavioural disorders related to the autism spectrum. Adriana said her employer was "wonderful" and allowed her 4 extra months on top of her maternity leave and sick leave and other entitlements. By this time her [REDACTED] daughter had shown great improvement, however, due to the ongoing needs of her oldest daughters, Adriana decided not to return to work.

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Since making the decision to care for her children as a priority, Adriana and her husband also decided to sell the family home to support this decision. They have been renting for a year or so and have recently been given a notice to vacate.

Adriana's daughter is now [REDACTED] and is increasingly showing signs of mental distress, which concerns Adriana. She said this also has a big impact on the family and Adriana's own mental health. Adriana mentioned she finds her husband, her family and her friendship network very supportive.

Before her children's diagnoses Adriana said she was very social and enjoyed connecting with others. She said that her experiences and the associated difficulties have made her more introverted. She said the family doesn't go out as much now for reasons related to her children's conditions but also because of financial constraints and other stressors.

As well as her family, Adriana finds support from carer groups, including an online Facebook group for mothers/families of other children with the same condition as her oldest daughter. She said she has made friends through the group. Adriana said she has been offered a respite service through a carer agency she is involved with, including movie tickets for her and her husband to have a night out. She spoke glowingly about this. She said it was the first time she had been out with her husband to the movies in 3 years. The carer agency also gave her tickets for her to take her family on an outing to Healesville Sanctuary, which she says was an amazing experience for them.

Adriana spoke about her drive to care for her children and see them meet their potential. She said she would do anything to help them to be their best. She said she will continue to work hard for them and keep fighting, even when they get knocked down.