

06/04/2013

To whom it may concern,

I am a teacher of children who have special needs. My job is challenging, rewarding and a privilege. However, at the end of the day I can hand these precious children back to their parents and go home, have a glass of wine, prepare dinner and generally get ready for the night. Not so for many of the parents who have children with additional needs. There is no down time and often they are like leaky boats just trying to stay afloat.

I teach children of all levels of disability from mild to severe. With lots of extra input from parents, professionals and caregivers and of course time and money, many of these children make great progress; goals are met and sometimes exceeded, mainstream school is achievable and life becomes that bit easier. However, for some this does not happen. As the child gets older, life in fact can become more of a challenge. The child with additional needs gets heavier (in other words harder to manoeuvre and therefore more strain is placed on the caregivers' body, the child is disrupted, more equipment needed and it takes more time and effort), the child can become more frustrated due to changes in their body that they do not know how to handle or understand and all this takes a toll on the parents and any other siblings the child may have. Life is already difficult enough and then someone wants to introduce legislation to prohibit involuntary sterilisation or any sterilisation for girls under the age of 18. Therefore parents/caregivers will have to:-

1. Buy more and more (adult) nappies to put on their menstruating daughter.
2. Put more strain on their backs as they lift her to change her more regularly each month.
3. Take more time away from their other children as they do this.
4. Tear their hearts out as they listen to their daughter wail when she has cramps and has no understanding as to why she feels this way.
5. Give her the pill instead each day for 40 years or so and the effects this will have on her body.
6. Have an IUD put in every 5 years and put her through this ordeal that cannot be explained to her due to her cognitive ability.
7. Make sure that if the child(adult) is able enough to mix with others independently for part of the day that they are not being sexually active or being taken advantage of.

I believe we as a society need to support parents/caregivers of children with special needs and help them to be a voice for their child. As with categories of disabilities I believe we need to consider the severity of the child's condition before we make a blanket legislation regarding the banning of sterilisation of girls under 18 years of age. Every one of these children should be seen as individuals and treated accordingly. This decision should be made between the parents and the child's doctor who are in the best position to speak for the INDIVIDUAL child.