

CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

RESPONSE TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

Draft Report – July 2014

Submitted by

Victorian Inclusion Support Managers Network

September 2014

The Victorian Inclusion Support Agency Managers (ISAMs) Network consists of managers representing the 17 Commonwealth funded inclusion support agencies under the Inclusion Professional Support Program (IPSP). There are eight agencies across the state.

Through this network the ISAMs representatives bring a strong knowledge of the needs of families with children who may have additional needs, through disability, coming from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background (CALD), coming from a Refugee or Humanitarian background or being from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.

This paper only responds to those questions in the Draft Response paper to which participants felt they could provide an informed response.

Challenges for services including children with additional needs into their service

- ❖ Uncertainty or lack of experience or skills in including children with additional needs
- ❖ Balancing the inclusion of children with additional needs with the need to ensure the provision of quality early education and care to, and ensure the safety of, all children enrolled.

Working with children with additional needs is rarely included in the course content of entry level and other early childhood qualifications. As a result, many early childhood educators are poorly equipped to work with children with additional needs. A lack of confidence by all levels of qualified educators, including educators who have worked in the sector for some time, when working with children who have additional needs.

There are two subjects that **might** be included in a Diploma course:

CHCIC511A – Implement and promote inclusive policies and practice

CHCIC512A Plan and implement inclusion of children with additional needs

There are others that allude to inclusion such as :

CHCPR303D - develop an understanding of children's interests and development al needs

CHCOSH401A – Support participation in Outside school hours care

CHCCS400C – work within ethical and legal frameworks

CHCRF11A work in partnership with families to provide appropriate care

CHCPR502E organize experiences to facilitate and enhance children's development

CHCFC301A Support the development of children

Some of these are core competencies and some are elective depending on the qualification. The issue is that the quality of training delivery is not adequate, because if these subjects were delivered well then students should have an understanding of inclusive practice

- ❖ Additional cost of including children with additional needs, particularly to employ an additional educator to increase staff to child ratios.

If a child with additional needs is enrolled in a service and it is deemed that the service could access funding from the Inclusion & Professional Support Program (IPSP) for an additional educator through the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS), then the service is expected to make up the difference in costs as the ISS is, and always has been, a subsidy. Anecdotally, it has been suggested that over the course of a year, some services have outlaid more than \$40,000 for their additional educators.

Currently, there is no Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) funding for children with high medical needs. Services cannot apply for ISS funding when it is linked to supporting a child's medical needs (eg PEG feeding). IPSP Guidelines do not allow for the funding of additional educators to support these children on a one to one basis even if only for short periods of time. As a result, services have to totally fund an additional educator if required, which limits the choices available to parents of these children.

Waiting lists for Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) can impact on children's ability to access mainstream services because of the limited specialist support available to educators.

Allied health professionals, who generally work one-to one with children often lack an appreciation of the challenges/logistics facing ECEC educators working with children with additional needs within a group setting with ratios of up to 1:15.

There should be a consistent funding criteria for Commonwealth & State programs that fund additional support for services that have children with additional needs enrolled. In Victoria children in childcare settings who may have been eligible for funding under the Inclusion Professional Support Program (IPSP) for the years leading up to their enrolment in the centre's funded preschool program may not then be eligible for the State Government Kindergarten Inclusion Support Subsidy (KISS) funding'

- ❖ Difficulty in arranging uninterrupted time, or arranging replacement staff to maintain ratios, while educators are involved in planning and capacity building activities (including developing or evaluating Inclusion Improvement Plans)

There are some services that have above ratio staffing levels which allow them to be able support rooms where additional support is being sought. However, this comes at a cost that the majority of services cannot afford. Even though Flexible Support Funding (FSF) can provide a subsidy to enable educators to be backfilled whilst they prepare Inclusion Improvement Plans, it is difficult to find someone to backfill for a short period of time, so educators are forced to do it during their own planning time which can impact on the program being offered.

A further difficulty can be the hours of support approved for an additional educator. Approval can be for up to five hours per day, but if the National Inclusion Support Provider (NISSP) only approves three hours per day, this further puts pressure on services to be able to employ someone for that period of time.

We support the Commission's recommendation that funding hours for ISS are extended to 100 hours per fortnight, but note that for this to occur there would need to be a significant increase in overall funding so the number of children supported is not reduced due to lack of funding. Otherwise there would have to be more restrictive criteria in the funding Guidelines relating to this funding.

- ❖ The Australian Government should continue to provide support for children who have a diagnosed disability to access ECEC services

Families of children with additional needs, including disabilities, should have the ability to choose the type of service that suits both the child and the family's needs. That is, for the child to attend a specialist early childhood intervention setting or a mainstream setting where the children with disabilities can be in a group of typically developing peers who model for them and challenge them and assist them to participate in all aspects of the service's program. Typically developing children also learn tolerance, patience and knowledge that there may be physical differences but underneath they are all children.

- ❖ The Commission seeks information on whether there are other groups of children that are developmentally vulnerable, how they can be identified, and what the best way is to meet their additional needs

Children from a Culturally & Linguistically Diverse background can benefit from having Bi-cultural Support to facilitate the settling in process. This support can help the children but also support the families to come to understand the concept of childcare which may not have been in their realm of experience previously. Some of these children also suffer from trauma induced challenges that can be supported across the environment.

Additionally, support for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children can be provided to help build the capacity of the educators in building their cultural awareness and, more importantly, their cultural competence.

The Guidelines relating to Flexible Support Funding (FSF) should be amended so children without a diagnosis who present with challenging behaviours or extreme anxieties can be supported through the IPSP in order to facilitate a positive commencement at the service selected by their parents. . This group could include children from a vulnerable family situation, children who have suffered trauma and/or children who have an undiagnosed disability (eg autism). The short term funding could be for all services, including preschools, in order to support the orientation of children with additional needs.