

Three Springs Childcare Inc Submission

The Three Springs Childcare Centre is small centre licensed for 12 children and found in a small rural community 3.5 hours north of Perth. The centre opened in September 2012 and is run by a volunteer committee. The committee struggled to find a qualified carer to fill the position of Supervising Officer and was required to offer sponsorship under the regional migration scheme to fill the position. As we are only a very small centre, we can not afford to employ a non contact director so a large amount of the administration duties fall on myself the President to complete in my own personal time. The introduction of the NQS and EYLF has placed significant pressure on the volunteer committee. The centre has also had to apply for waivers in regard to the staff requirements for 2014. The centre is unable to find an Early Childhood teacher due to isolation. The committee is also concerned that the employment of an Early Childhood teacher remotely will place significant financial burden on the centre as their time will not be included in the educator to children ratio so will be additional staffing costs.

We currently have two qualified carers (one casual and the nominated supervising officer) and one who recently completed their Cert III in Children's Services (paid for by the service). This carer has just enrolled in her Diploma. We have 4 other casual carers who work on an irregular basis covering the nominated supervising officer's time off the floor, lunch breaks and sick and training leave. Two of these are enrolled in their Certificate III but are making slow progress. With the new requirements of a minimum of Cert III (or working towards) we are struggling to get carers to work for us on a casual basis as they do not receive a lot of work and therefore are not keen to study.

The committee understand that quality care is extremely important but feel that the NQS and EYLF is a significant burden especially on small centres in rural areas who already struggle to find staff. We also do not understand why the staffing arrangements for an ECT are the same throughout the country when kindergarden and Pre Primary in Western Australia is attended by children at school not in child care centre programs and feel that diploma trained staff are more aware of the needs of our younger children than ECT's.

I think small rural community centres are very different to larger run centre in regional or urban centres. Of our 35 children enrolled for 2014 only 4 children are attending for 3 or more days (8-5pm). The majority of our children only attend for 1 or 2 days and some of them only attend on an irregular basis which makes programming, observations and reflections on child progress difficult. Despite asking for guidance from numerous sources in terms of how many observations we should be doing for different children based on their attendance no one can give us an answer. We want quality programs at our centre and want to ensure we meet the requirements for Quality area 1 Educational Program and Practise but question the paper work/admin side of this as it takes our only full time qualified carer (nominated supervising officer) off the floor for a significant amount of time when we feel she should be on the floor mentoring the unqualified staff and interacting with the children. A huge amount of time is spent on developing programs and completing observations which are displayed for parents who unfortunately show very little to no interest in. Most of the parents are under families pressures themselves and have made it clear what they want from the centre is socialisation for their children, they want them to be safe and rest, spend time outside doing active play and comfortable with the carers. They do not have time or want to be asked to review policies and put in their input to the policies, contribute to the QIP (which has been on display all year and despite asking parents to have a look and provide input) it has remained on the display folder. We struggle to maintain a full management committee, let alone get parents to attend meetings etc. We have offered parent interviews and not a single parent has taken up the offer, they just comment as long as their child is happy to attend that is all they care about. A lot of centres are probably facing the same problem with parent involvement but the committee worry about our rating in terms of Quality Area 6.

The committee are also concerned that in future years we will struggle to maintain a management committee as parents see how much time and effort we put in and have commented that there is no way would volunteer to be on the committee. Comments such as 'we do not go back to work to take on another unpaid job as well'. The committee would like to see a review of the NQS to ensure the administrative burden placed on volunteer committees is reduced, that the NQS is more flexible and recognises the vast differences in services, especially between small rural centres and larger regional and urban centres. The committee do not want to be under constant pressure to raise funds to improve the centre building to compete with larger privately owned centres. We have spent a lot of personal time and effort into improving the centre building (which was provided to the committee by the local shire on a peppercorn lease and an old infant health centre building) but know we can't compete with larger purpose built centres. The building is clean, safe and we have fundraised to get lots of toys and equipment but know that the layout is not ideal but at the same time we and parents are just so grateful that we actually have a child care centre in our community and are able to return to work knowing that our children are cared for in a safe and loving environment and would hate to see our community lose our centre in the future because of the administrative and financial burdens placed on the centre and staffing pressures due to to the NQS and EYLF.