



GALBIRI CHILD CARE AND PRESCHOOL CENTRE INCORPORATED

123-125 Bundock St, Belgian Gardens 4810
Phone: (07) 4772 3099 Fax: (07) 4772 3100

29 January 2014

Dr Wendy Craik AM and Jonathan Coppel
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2600
E-mail: childcare@pc.gov.au

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning public inquiry

Dear Wendy and Jonathan,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to offer up this submission for your consideration for the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning public inquiry.

Galbiri Child Care and Preschool is a small community-based, not-for-profit centre that is licensed for 75 enrolment places daily and currently services more than 92 families in the Townsville north Queensland Community. Our Centre provides a safe and secure learning environment for children aged from 6 weeks to five years of age.

We support the public inquiry on Childcare and Early Childhood learning, and our submission from the centre's staff and its parents focuses on the following:

1. Qualified early childcare educators are necessary for delivering quality care outcomes for children
2. Higher staff-child ratios provide safe and better learning environments for children and their educators
3. Continuity of care is necessary in delivering quality of care – high staff turnover in the childcare sector must be addressed if quality of care is to be achieved
4. Assurances of quality of care combined with affordability will achieve higher workforce participation

1. Qualified early childcare educators are necessary for delivering quality care outcomes for children

Galbiri has worked hard over the last two years to meet the quality standards associated with the National Quality Framework, and the children, staff and parents are now reaping the rewards of our efforts. All parents have noticed major improvements in the contentment of their children with and we strongly believe that educators/carers who are cognisant with our child's individuality and responsive to his/her care and learning needs are extremely important for the wellbeing of our children. Qualified educators/carers demonstrate their skills through their programming, quality of interaction with children, the children's learning stories and the paper work associated with reporting learning targets and outcomes. The centre's Director's and educators/carers have worked hard to put the necessary policies and procedures in place, and parents are able to access these easily to understand how the centre operates and how children are supported to learn at their own pace and be guided in their development. Parents can see how their child is progressing and this provides reassurance and comfort on the activities being undertaken and the children's exposure to a wide variety of learning opportunities.

Parent Anne Caillaud – "It is great to see the detail of the activities that are set out for my daughter at the beginning of the day, and I love seeing the photos of what she and her friends did at the end of the day when I pick her up. The learning stories also give me great insight into how she is progressing and developing at the centre, and the extra



GALBIRI CHILD CARE AND PRESCHOOL CENTRE INCORPORATED

123-125 Bundock St, Belgian Gardens 4810

Phone: (07) 4772 3099 Fax: (07) 4772 3100

detail gives me greater reassurance that she has enjoyed her day and learnt interesting new things. Seeing the end of day reports and the details of the activities set out for her and the other children in her class gives me much comfort in the knowledge that she is learning while having fun in a safe and happy environment while I'm at work. It is important for me to know that she is happy, learning new things and is interacting comfortably with her educators/carers at the centre. It would be difficult to leave her and go to work if I was not able to see this detail, or feel that she has established a trusting relationship with her carers."

The skills Galbiri's early childhood educators/carers have developed through their qualifications are enabling the delivery of quality outcomes for the children at the centre and parents are clearly more at ease with leaving their children in care. The programming and reporting skills have made way for well thought-out, quality play-based programs which are integral to the development of the children's sense of self, social skills, and self-confidence giving children tools for learning. Development and learning takes place during play as the children explore, develop interests and make meaning of the world around them.

2. Higher staff-child ratios provide safe and better learning environments for children and their educators

Our centre currently provides more on the floor staff than is required (above and beyond the new requirements) and we have seen the benefits. Children have more quality interactions with staff, this is very important as implementing a child led play based program requires staff to play with children, observe their interests and scaffold future learning through play based experiences. The center's current staffing arrangements provide a relief person for each staff member's 10 minute breaks twice daily as well as 1 hour lunch cover for each staff member in each room, again this is beyond current requirements. Our service feels these extra ensure staff are not stressed and have higher job satisfaction. Turnover in staff numbers has also reduced, with a major reduction in carer's stress and sick leave. Importantly, these lower ratios ensure children are safe and can be adequately supervised. Play-based learning activities are also more easily achieved and monitored as a result. As parents, we can feel satisfied that our children are able to receive more one-on-one time with educators/carers, and thereby can build a trusting relationship and bond with them. Parents and educators/carers at the centre feel this is a crucial aspect of higher-quality childcare and important to ease the mind of parents when they leave their children to go to work.

Mental health experts also attest to the benefits of higher staff-child ratios with the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMHI) backing this up. The AAIMHI's Position Paper 4 on Childcare, issued in October 2013 states, "*childcare for infants (0 – 3) must be of high quality and children should be encouraged to form secondary, secure attachment bonds to their caregivers. To facilitate this, staff-to-child ratios should be high (preferably one staff member to every two infants in their first year) and staff turnover should be minimised.*" The AAIMHI's position is based on new evidence that shows that early relationships significantly shape brain circuits and lay the foundation for later developmental outcomes, from academic performance to mental health and interpersonal skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). The AAIMHI position paper also states, "*Children's attachment needs must always be met, monitored and maintained; and warm responsive, care giving relationships are the foundation of early childhood care and education.*"

The OECD's research brief, titled *Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care sites*, states that many childcare experts agree that higher staff-child ratios (smaller number of children per staff) are found to enhance early childhood education and care and facilitate better developmental outcomes for children (Burchinal et al., 2002, De Schipper et al., 2006; Huntsman, 2008; Toquati et al., 2007).



GALBIRI CHILD CARE AND PRESCHOOL CENTRE INCORPORATED

123-125 Bundock St, Belgian Gardens 4810
Phone: (07) 4772 3099 Fax: (07) 4772 3100

3. Continuity of care is necessary in delivery quality of care – high staff turnover in the childcare sector must be addressed if quality of care is to be achieved

At Galbiri we think if you spoke to any parent this would clearly be common sense. Ask any parent who has taken their child to a centre on that first day and they will convey the anxiety both they and their child felt for that first day dropping their child off to be cared and looked after by someone new. The experience is an anxious one for all concerned, but most of all for the child. This experience is then repeated if an educator/carer leaves and a new carer takes their place. In these instances the child again has to move through that anxiety, build a new relationship, establish trust again, and the new educator/carer has to naturally take extra time to get to know the child and guide him/her through their developmental journey. Clearly this impacts the quality of care. Nonetheless – continuity of care and high staff turnover is the major issue for child care centres all across Australia. The AAIMHI sees continuity of care as essential to the well-being of children aged (0 – 3). Their position Paper 4 on Childcare states, *“Working conditions, training, development and support (In centres) should be reviewed regularly to reduce staff turnover and ensure continuity of care.”* They are not alone in this thinking, with many experts sighting continuity of care the biggest factor impacting quality of care in the child care sector. We are aware that staff wages are outside the scope of this inquiry, but we would still like to reiterate that this is the number one factor impacting this industry. Lower wages see this industry being utilised in many cases as a temporary work arrangement. Only the very committed stay for the long haul and these individuals go above and beyond what they are required to do, because they are passionate about their work. We can no longer take these passionate professionals for granted.

Nicole Frisken who cares and educates the Tweens at Galbiri says – “We are all in our jobs because we love our work, we love the children we look after but good quality workers are leaving the industry in droves or doing it tough because they can no longer afford to keep working in the industry. Most of us in the industry are already fully qualified and continually seek out professional development and training opportunities. We are professional staff being paid as unskilled workers. Quality of care in the industry is already suffering because of high staff turnover due to the lack of pay – continuity of care for children is a major issue.”

This is an issue everyone wants to ignore but that we feel particularly strongly about. The elephant in the room is glaringly obvious:

- The Government wants to increase workforce participation
- Parents want quality of care and education that is stimulating for their children and be assured their children are receiving this in a safe environment – while they work
- This will only be achieved by having qualified trained professional staff that are paid appropriately.

Who is going to pay?

4. Assurance of quality of care combined with affordability will achieve higher workforce participation.

In most cases parents can't pay any more than they are already paying for childcare without rethinking working altogether, however the wages for these dedicated educators/carers can't stay at their current levels if quality in childcare is to be achieved.



GALBIRI CHILD CARE AND PRESCHOOL CENTRE INCORPORATED

123-125 Bundock St, Belgian Gardens 4810
Phone: (07) 4772 3099 Fax: (07) 4772 3100

Not-for-profit centres like Galbiri and private centres are not in the position to ask parents to pay more for staff wages as well as keep up with annually increasing operational costs through the form of electricity, food, phone bills and education materials. For many parents, higher childcare fees would make the option of childcare unaffordable. This would require at least one parent to stay home full time, probably leading to more pressure on the government coffers through additional family assistance support to cope with a loss of a wage earner. This is also a loss for Australia's productivity, equality in access to work and careers, and use of skills acquired through Australia's secondary and tertiary education.

However, it is equally unfair and inequitable for a whole sector of the workforce to be paid as unqualified workers, when the service they provide is so important for society as a whole– not only caring for our children in their early years, but educating them and preparing them for life-long learning in mind and body. The first five years create the foundation for any child to accomplish key advances, as the brain undergoes its most dramatic growth, unequalled at any other time of life – a fact now widely accepted. On top of this the dedicated professionals in the childcare sector don't just care and educate our children; they also provide a loving home away from home.

The government is at a cross roads in deciding where to take our childcare industry and we would like to urge Australia to finally acknowledge the importance of this industry for its whole society and take the right step forward – i.e. to decide for government intervention on a national scale to subsidise the wages of staff in the childcare industry. Greater workforce participation will not occur until quality is guaranteed. Affordability for many will not cut it alone – the cost on children is too high and many parents would rather make financial sacrifices than see their children in inadequate caring arrangements.

It is an upfront cost for the Government with a long term gain. Pay now for the tax the Government will get back in the long-term through the continued wages of the parents whose children need to be in care – who also need and want quality care for their kids while they're away at work.

The men and women who work in childcare are dedicated, amazing professionals who need recognition for the work they do in the form of fair wages and parents cannot wear the cost of this alone.

Thank you for taking the time to read our submission,

The staff and parents of Galbiri Child Care and Preschool.