

It is with pleasure I take this opportunity to address the Productivity Commission, my name is Alison Butcher and I am a group leader in a 3-4 year old room, working in a Long Day Care Centre. I have a Diploma of Child Care in Community Services. I have been with this centre for 8 years and previously I was working in Outside School Hours Care, for a total of 12 years in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector. I also have 2 children, who have used a mixture of Long Day Care, Family Day Care, Outside School Hours Care and family provided care.

The centre where I work is a 6.30am-6.30pm, Long Day Care Centre, this is not a 9am-5pm job. There are many out-of hours' expectations such as community events, staff meetings and professional development, quite often at our own cost. This cost can be paid by employers if they select to, but it is not included in the modern award as something employers must pay for. This includes mandatory first aid certification, with annual CPR updates, this is a condition of employment, that first aid certificates must be valid at all times and the cost to me is \$190.00, due at time of booking. Anaphylaxis and Asthma training is also at educators own costs and must be current, each of those is \$65.00.

I am committed and passionate about my work, and choose to involve myself as much as possible in the development of the sector. The reason for my passion is the children and families, the relationships we develop, and this is also what keeps me in the sector and striving to continually improve my understanding and professional skills and to keep my skills and certificates current.

Quality looks like the same educator when you arrive at the service, children engaged in learning, a calm feeling and confidence in the skill and abilities of each educator. To achieve quality, stability in the sector is required. This is because relationships are paramount to parent confidence and child attachment.

Statement from Samantha Anderson, parent of Indiana.

"Indi attended care for social reasons initially, I was relieved to discover the level of commitment from my educator, Ali, that my daughter would be well cared for in my absence regardless of her condition. Having support with Indi's diagnosis of type 1 diabetes and the extra time educators spent learning to "read" her behaviour and needs for this, made it much easier for me to be able to leave Indi with a settled mind. Indi and I still enjoy a warm lasting friendship with our educators, even though Indi finished care in early 2010". Samantha Anderson, 41, Roland, Tasmania.

There is a substantial amount of time and money spent for educators to reach a true professional level, and then they are leaving due to being able to earn more in another area of service provision, a teacher with a 4 year degree, earns more in a school based setting than in a Long Day Care setting, even though the qualification is exactly the same. Staff turnover is distressing for children and families and educators. Children are un-settled for months afterward and parents feel apprehensive about heading to work or study for the day, not being sure who is caring and educating for their child. They are distracted at work and less productive.

As an educator, I find it challenging to just build successful working relationships and then have someone leave and a new educator come. The paper work was daunting when I first started working within the National Quality Framework, but with self-funded professional development, my experience and understanding has grown to allow a comfortable level of achievement. When

services provide educators with the correct time and tools to work effectively, more time directly with the children is possible than ever before.

As an educator who is also a single parent, I can see both sides of the challenges in affordable childcare. However in the childcare and cost debate there are two things that I believe are lost, the first is quality. As more children are spending larger parts of their childhood in early learning settings, it is imperative that we, as a country, get it right.

The second is educators, while the debate rages and inquiries like this are done, educators are footing the cost for quality Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia. We pay, by not receiving reflective wages of our role and responsibilities, by working additional time without pay. We work additional hours to complete documentation, read recent best practices, new studies on development and regulatory change. Training is also completed in our own time, at weekends and of an evening. Some of this is due to the challenges of staffing to cover team members while they attend professional development and some of this is due to ensuring continuity for children and families. The out of hours expectations are reasonably significant, employers can select to provide time in lieu but often this is individually based on service policy as there is no provision for this in the modern award. We work many hours at home to ensure quality, our own families go without and struggle if we choose to stay in the sector.

I am saddened by the friends I have seen leave the sector, they were great educators and on leaving their words were "I can afford to live again and I'll get to leave my job at work". A role model for me, Carol, left Early Childhood Education and Care to work at Woolworths, as working 25 hours per week in the supermarket gave her the same income as working 40 hours in Long Day Care. She looked forward to and enjoyed the "coming home from work and leaving the job there", as when she clocked off, her working day was completed and her leisure time was restored to her. All her skill knowledge and previous training is lost to the sector, and it is a familiar story. I personally would love to attend university, but I am the sole earner in my home, the costs of study are just not worth it for me when, once completed and I would then need to leave the sector to earn money reflective of my degree.

As a sole parent, I receive income support from the government, if I was being paid on the level reflective of my training, skill and responsibility, I would not need much of this assistance. I am also concerned for what I might be facing when I eventually retire. I and many of my colleagues are "working poor" and as such live on the edge of poverty, we also face an old age of poverty due to our work. If every educator moved to a different job to make a living wage, where would the system be? Who would be caring for children so parents can go to work? Educators should be paid from the public purse the same as teachers, nurses and teacher aids; we too are an essential service. Community attitudes and respect has grown for educators and most understand that we are not a babysitting service and that we are no longer a "welfare" space. Sadly the wages have not kept up with our changes in the sector and its time they were.

I am an educator, my daily work is complex, challenging, emotional, heart-warming and physical. I meet national and state regulations every time I walk in the door for work. I support families to go to work with an eased mind, making them be able to focus on their work and be productive. I personally care and educate 10 three year olds on my own, and ensure every one of them is safe, happy, clean, well-fed and learning in ways that are relevant for their ages and skills. I empower them to be critical thinkers and be socially responsible and create a special place for children and families to be empowered about their abilities to create positive communities and sustainable life practices. I, am an educator.

With kind regards

Alison Butcher

Devonport, Tasmania, 7310

1.Standard 2.3- Tasmanian Licensing Standards, Centre Based Care, Class 4

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