

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning – Productivity Submission Capricornia Family Day Care and In Home Care

Capricornia Family Day Care and In Home Care is an education and care service based in Rockhampton Central Queensland. We provide Family Day care services to Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Emu Park, Gladstone and Blackwater.

Our In Home Care program provides care to families in the local area whilst also servicing families west to Alpha, North to Charters Towers and South to Theodore, in some instances a distance of over 800 kilometres.

Our office which is a local child care hub, consists of staff for the Family Day Care program, In Home Care program as well as our local Inclusion Support Agency, this model allows our team to be inclusive and effective in delivering care to the communities in which we service.

Our organisation values the importance of Excellence, Support and Inclusion and aims to ensure our service delivery model is reflected in these values in all of our daily practises.

ECEC Demand

Capricornia In Home Care is a capped program of 100 places, this cap does not mean we can meet the need for the service in our local area. At present the program has around 80 children on the wait list requiring care and many families who need access to the program are not on the waiting list due to the fact that service providers are constantly full with no ability to allow any new families access to places.

At present demand is high due to 65% of the state being in drought, these natural disasters put huge pressures on families who then require more support from child care services particularly those services that provide support to families in rural and remote locations and offer the flexibility they require.

An increase to the allocation of In Home Care places is required so that services are able to meet the current demand for places and flexibility into the cap when periods of natural disasters occur so services are able to support families in their time of need.

Families in rural and remote Queensland will continue to need more access to child care as parents return to the workforce to support their families, home school their children and work on their properties. We need to encourage families to stay on their properties and not move to town to access services which will then put further strain on existing child care services.

Families who work in the local mining industry also need access to flexible child care options in order to continue meeting their work demands. These families prefer home based options so that children are not in centre based care for long hours, capping programs such as In Home Care does not allow the flexibility these families need for roster work such as 7on 7off as the places need to be managed on a weekly basis. Managing the utilisation of the program is much more effective when done on a quarterly basis to reflect the nature of the care we provide.

Flexibility

Families accessing our Family Day Care service are regularly contacting us in the hope of gaining a more flexible service that can cater to their needs, many families do not want their children in long day care environments and are looking for flexible care that can meet the needs of their individual situation.

Due to this the demand for Family Day has grown as parents work demands change and services now need to adapt and cover larger areas in order to meet this demand.

We travel to Blackwater some 200 kilometres away to service this community so families have access to Family Day Care and flexible child care, with the ceasing of the Regional Travel Grant this will now put further financial pressure on our service and our ability to service these communities that are located some distance away from our office may suffer.

In order for rural communities to have access to Family Day Care funding needs to reflect the travel and time commitment services implement in order to allow these rural communities access to flexible child care options.

Childcare

We believe that the Child Care Rebate needs to be paid directly to the service providers as the current Child Care benefit is, this will then eliminate parents having outstanding debts with service providers while still able to receive their rebate from the government.

The concern of large amounts of child care hours being issued to families by the government, our program recently had a family issued with 120 child care hours per week, when families are given these hours they then have the expectation to use them. As a service we try to cater for the families needs but when do we draw the line and realise that children are in childcare more than they are in the care of their parents?

The monitoring of the use of hours by families is often difficult for services to manage, at present families are mainly given 24 or 50 hours depending on their needs, can this not be allocated more effectively to the actual need of each family and monitored accordingly.

We regularly see families continue to access 50 hours of care with no work commitments, a process needs to be put in place to ensure that child care hours given to families is a true reflection of their actual needs.

We also regularly see the issue of families who have multiple births twins, triplets etc and an illness in the family only being able to access 24 hours of care due to not working. Is flexibility able to be implemented to allow these families access to more hours in their time of need, if only for a short term period?

Options for Reform

We believe an increase in the availability for In Home Care is required as this would then minimise parent's requirements to employ private nannies, the current eligibility requirements for In Home Care suits its purpose and opening this up to anyone would then affect existing child care services.

Allowing families who employ private nannies access to the CCB and CCR would in fact move away from the purpose of the National Quality Framework and encourage "backyard" care which is unmonitored and could put children at greater risk.

The In Home Care program is monitored and effective and by simply increasing its availability through current service providers could lessen the demand for private nannies for the families who are most in need and then support other families to access more suitable services such as Family Day Care and Long Day Care.

Recruitment of Family Day Care Educators is often difficult and involves high costs to individuals in setting up their own business, these Educators are required to operate their business, abide by the NQF and work extended hours in order to make their business successful and meet all of the current demands.

We regularly see individuals resign from their position as Educators as the pressure to meet all of the demands is too high, staff working in centres have the flexible for the workload to be shared by many staff a luxury which is not possible in Family Day Care.

Incentives and start up grants would assist quality Educators to operate Family Day Care and increase the availability of flexible child care places in communities. We have seen these incentives have a positive impact on FDC places in the Gladstone community where local mining company Rio Tinto set up the Here for Child Care campaign and allowed new FDC Educators access to \$10,000 in start-up grants. This alone has allowed our service to now have 8 registered FDC Educators in this community where we previously had none.

Options for new models also need to be looked at including allowing services to set up mobile child care units a program we would love to offer but are currently not able to source funding for. If we could access funding such as limited hours care funding that has previously been used to set up mobile units we could offer mobile child care places to communities we regularly travel through which would decrease the demand on child care in larger communities.

Education and Care is just as important for families and children living in rural and remote communities and funding needs to be available so service providers are able to set up programs that are reflective of the child care needs in these communities. Incentives and assistance needs to be provided to these service providers in order for them to continue to maintain delivery in these communities.