

Inclusion Support Agency Central West Fitzroy & Mackay Program Manager			
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Submission to the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Productivity Commission

By Tracey Victor

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This submission has been developed with a specific focus on the inclusion of all children, including children with additional needs.

Background

I am currently employed by Family Day Care Assoc. Qld as the Program Manager for the Central West Fitzroy (39) and Mackay Regions (43) Inclusion Support Agency (ISA). I came to this role 11 months ago, with experience in the Child Care and Educations Sector (approx. 15 years), Disability, Aged Care and State Health Sectors.

Inclusion – Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP)

The Inclusion Support Agencies (ISA) across the national make up 80% of the available IPSP funding. The ISA employ Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISF) to support and mentor Educators in a variety of settings, building their capacity to be able to be inclusive of all children including those with additional needs. These responsibilities are outlined within the Guidelines and identify an ISA's aims as :

- *promote and support access to quality ECEC services;*
- *help build the capacity of eligible ECEC services to successfully include children with additional needs;*
- *ensure inclusion support is delivered in a flexible manner, and is responsive to the*
- *needs and priorities of eligible ECEC services; and*
- *ensure inclusion support is delivered in an efficient and cost effective manner, and in accordance with these Guidelines and the Funding Agreements.”*

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/documents/ipsp-guidelines-2013-2016>)

Just as the world has changed for children and families, so it has changed for professionals who work with them. The notion of lifelong learning, reflective practice, researching with children, new methods of documenting and assessing children's learning, and collaborating across traditional service and discipline boundaries are examples of contemporary requirements for early childhood professionals.

Over the years, there has been a noticeable increase in the requests for support from ECEC received in our regions, alongside the increased reporting requirements and the roll out of the National Quality Framework. Government at all levels re-enforce this need for a more inclusive community in

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policy and by identifying services needs to demonstrated their inclusive practices on many levels (i.e. Disability, Multiculturalism etc.). I believe that this is clear demonstration of the need for the ISA and the work of the ISF.

Throughout these times of change and increasing demand, the funding for the Agency has not been reflected and there is a clear split of 25% administration and 75% for service support. Anecdotal evidence within our Agency indicates that ISF's role has become more an administrative role. ISF report a significant amount of time utilised in supporting ECECs with applications for Inclusion Support funding (IS); with an estimated of 65% of their time spent in office/administration base activities and 35% in support and mentoring Educators in their Child Care environments. It is believed that these time percentages need to be reversed to best meet the needs of the ECEC and Children with the potential to decrease the reliance on ongoing ISS funding.

The Portal application and reapplication process is complex, and there are times that experienced ISF's can struggle; with what type of application is appropriate in certain situations or settings. Services often only engage with the portal process a few times a year, so generally there will be a predictable need for assistance. They often report their frustration with the Portal system; identifying that if an application is not written in a specific way this can mean that it can be declined making the process protracted and approached with trepidation and at times avoidance by Educators.

The demand on the ISF to assist ECEC with this administrative role, thus draws their time and attention away from their ability to mentor and support Educators. ISF believe that to best achieve positive outcomes for children their time is more effectively spent in assisting Educators to build their capacity to include children and provide an environment which will enable children with additional needs to participate in the activities available in the service, and to have the same opportunities as others to participate, belong, develop and succeed.

A more cost effective approach could be that the ISF assists the service with developing an understanding of their need through their Service Support Plan (SSP) that outlines what strategies that are going to be put in place, by whom and by when; which will in turn determine if ongoing IS funding support is required. If this is required, then the ECEC service deals with the NISSP directly on a simplified system (with phone support for the on- line system) and leaves the ISF to continue their work that builds capacity e.g. links to resources and professional development, support visits, coaching and mentoring, assistance with networking etc.

The application would remain an agreement between the Service and the NISSP and the ISF spends valuable time in the service and assists in monitoring that the funding is being used for approved purposes.

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Alternatively the ongoing support could be achieved through the development of a new funded position (NISSP Liaison Officer) within the ISA, whose focus would be to support the application for IS with the ECEC.