

## Background Information

Gowrie NSW is a not for profit children's services organisation established in 1940 as the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, a demonstration centre for excellence in children's services.

We are a diverse children's services organisation managing four children's centres:

- Gowrie Child Care Centre
- Nanbaree Child Centre (Managed on behalf of NSW Premier and Cabinet)
- John Mewburn Child Care Centre (Managed on behalf of Corrective Services NSW)
- Gowrie Outside School Hours Care

Our other children's services programs include:

- Consortium Member in Adult Migrant English Services (AMES) along with TAFE NSW and Smith Family
- Child and Family Information Line (NSW Government Referral services)
- IPSP – Inclusions Support agency – Western and Central West NSW
- IPSP - Indigenous Professional Support Unit - NSW

## Our Purpose

Our purpose is to 'create happy, safe and nurturing experiences for children through quality education and care'.

## Our Values:

- We are diverse and inclusive in how we work
- Our practice is grounded in evidence and research
- We lead by example

## Key Issues of Importance to Gowrie NSW

### Provision of Quality Early childhood education services is not just a work force strategy

Birth to five years is the most crucial period of a child's brain development and should be recognised through government policy and funded appropriately.

We need to remember that productivity is one, but not the only, goal of Early Childhood Education Care (ECEC). ECEC services can and must deliver much more to children than a service that allows their mothers to be productive members of the workforce. We need to remember that our children should have the right to the best early education our country can provide. The commercial benefits to greater society of providing quality child care education from birth to five years have been well documented. The government has given assurances that they support the objectives of the National Quality Framework (NQF) in regards to children's learning, however the terms of reference and scope of the inquiry presents a perspective that demonstrates that the government is only viewing the ECEC sector through the prism of workforce participation and economic imperatives. (Ref: ECA NSW)



## **We endorse the current roll out of the National Quality Reform agenda and the current proposed timeframe**

The present National Reform Agenda for Education and Care must be upheld in order to continue the support for the strengthening of young children's learning and development in early childhood education and care. With over 1 million children accessing early learning services in Australia, it is imperative that all children have access to quality targeted services.

The NQF agenda is based on sound international evidence from research and practice and aims to:

- Dramatically strengthen young children's learning and development in early childhood education and care
- Raise the qualifications and competence of Australia's early childhood education workforce
- Provide positive and inclusive services for indigenous families, refugee and migrant families, support children with additional learning needs, and families facing economic hardship
- Provide peace of mind for working families that their children's emotional, social, physical and intellectual development are being promoted in early childhood services
- Minimise risks to Australia's future economy by ensuring Australia's pre-schoolers are ready to begin school with knowledge and skills to support academic success

(Ref: Gowrie Australia)

## **Capital funding for 'not for profit' children's services to establish new services and expand current children's' services.**

Capital funds are required to establish new services to ensure that families have genuine choice in the care and education of their child. The start up costs for establishment of a not for profit child care organisation are formidable. The number of 'not for profit' child care providers has been slowly declining over the past ten years.

The shortage of child care centres in the inner city areas of NSW is acute. Our centre in Erskineville (Gowrie Child Care Centre) alone has over 500 children on the waiting list with the majority of children never being able to access our service. The high cost of real-estate in Sydney and the high cost of commercial rent has reduced the viability for not for profit services to establish vital new services in this area.

There is a lack of genuine choice in regards to child care.

By providing capital assistance to not for profit groups, this would reduce the number of children on waiting lists and reduce the gap between the supply and demand of child care places in the Sydney region.

With increased number of child care places, families would have great access to child care services and be able to return the workforce without waiting for a child care place to become available.

The other difficulty is in the rural and remote areas of Australia where there are limited opportunities in some areas for children to attend child care services. Targeted financial assistance to not for profit community based services is needed for these services to operate on a more flexible basis to meet the needs of families.



Families in these areas have limited choice, if any, in choosing an early education centre. Many of the existing services currently located in these areas have limited funds to maintain their current premises or change their premises to meet regulation standard or adapt their premises to meet the needs in these communities. These services are vital for communities as central hubs for families working on the land. and in remote communities.

## **Increase places for birth to two year olds**

With the implementation of the NQF agenda, parents are increasingly aware of the importance of their child receiving the best early childhood education. There is still significant demand for child care positions for children aged birth to 2 years of age in most areas of NSW but increasingly so in the inner city and Sydney CBD areas. If examining a workforce strategy, providing funding for not for profit services to expand their child care service or develop new services would assist in the increasing the number of birth to two years places.

Many for profit services providers will provide child care for children aged from 2 years onwards as providing a two to five years child care service is a less expensive model of child care. The birth to two years age group requires higher adult to child ratios (best practice) and increased operation costs such as in establishing cot rooms, bottle preparation areas, nappy change and laundry facilities. The 'not for profit' sector have significant commitment to birth to two years care however if further capital funding was provided to 'not for profit' organisation, services could afford to make the building modifications necessary to increase the number of child care places in services.

## **Funding Review**

Gowrie NSW supports a review of funding for the education and care sector. The present fragmentation of funding streams for early childhood services is complex and confusing to families. For example: CCR and CCB as two separate payment system. Similarly, if women's workforce participation is to increase, solutions must be found for dual income families where one income is entirely committed to paying for the cost of education and care.

In our working with refugee families and newly arrived families to Australia, we have a great deal of anecdotal information supporting how difficult it is to navigating the complex child care fee system, limiting these families ability to access the workforce.

The extension of funding to Nannies is of concern. This form of care is currently unregulated and usually employed by high income families.

If this form of care is in receipt of government funding then consideration should be given for these operations to participate in the National Quality Framework and National Quality Standards and comply with the National Regulations and Law. If the extension of funding to Nannies results in less funding to families currently using approved models of education and care, the affordability issue will become a greater challenge.

For many families who have children with additional needs, their ability to participate in the workforces can be very limited. Although funding is provided for children with additional needs to attend services, this is a 'contribution only' and does not cover the full cost of employing an extra educator to support this child in attending the centre.



For a child to attend a full day of child care, the service is then required to cover the additional costs for an educator from their budget, thereby impacting on the fees for all families. Alternatively, we have anecdotal information that families themselves are covering the cost of the extra staff member on top of their daily fee. Many service providers are choosing not to enrol children with additional needs as an increase in fees makes them less financially competitive or reduces their profit margin.

We support the governments ongoing funding of Indigenous early education services as all Australian children have the right to quality early childhood education.

