

This submission is from a mobile service operating in a rural and remote area of South Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS RE THIS SUBMISSION:

- A *longer lead-in time* would have enabled a more comprehensive and collaborative submission.
- To give an *overview of mobiles*, an understanding of their operation and their position in regard to recent changes, I have attached the *following submissions*:
 - The Early Years Framework (30.9.2008)
 - National Quality Framework (possibly 2010-11)
 - BBF Program Review/ NAMS (21.9.2012)
 - BBF Program review /SA Mobiles (27.9.2012)

Though some of these were submitted 5 years ago, it is probably indicative of the need for this Inquiry in that the challenges and concerns remain, with little changed for mobiles.

- Mobiles models of operation provide varied forms of education and care. *Other organisations and bodies* which know and appreciate the valued, responsive service we provide for rural and remote families and children *may mention "mobiles" in their submissions*. I refer to our colleagues and friends in ICPA (Isolated Children Parent's Association), MCSA (Mobile Children's Services Association, in NSW), CWA (Country Women's Association), and NAMS (National Association of Mobile Services for Rural and Remote Children and Families).
- I am a passionate, experienced early childhood educator who knows the *critical importance of early brain development*; and acknowledges the *longitudinal research from Canada*, which indicates that getting it right in the early years will mean a better trajectory for the person as a contributing citizen. This impact in the early years diminishes the need for government spending in support, as a person ages. Therefore I think that the belief about 'spending within present parameters' needs to be re-examined, with the emphasis instead on *making certain that children and families receive appropriate assistance, support, education opportunities in the first 3 years of a child's life*.

Mobile services may offer occasional care, play sessions (where parents stay with children), toy libraries, health services and consultations, preschools and long day care. There are other variations of delivery (as seen in NSW). A general description of the CCOWS services is taken from the CCOWS Annual Report (2011-2012).

Overview of the service

The CCOWS office is located at the Robe Council.

The CCOWS service presently operates at four different venues over a five day week.

- ❖ **The Robe RSL Kindergarten** on Monday, Tuesday and Friday from 8.30am until 5.15pm.
This venue is licensed for 25 children, with not more than 5 being under two years of age.
- ❖ **The Robe RSL Hall** on Wednesday and Thursday from 8.30am until 5.15pm.
This venue is licensed for 15 children, with not more than 5 being under 2 years of age.
- ❖ **At Beachport Primary School** in the CPC room on Wednesdays from 8.45am until 5.00pm.
This venue is licensed for 15 children, with not more than 5 being under two years of age.
- ❖ **And the Kangaroo Inn Area School** CPC Center on Thursdays from 8.45 am until 5.00pm.
This venue is licensed for 12 children with not more than 4 being under two years of age.

Since beginning operations in 2002, more than 250 children have been cared for at CCOWS. There are 132 possible places available each week, with a current waiting list for 108 places.

DISTANCE is an *outstanding difference* between offering long day care with a Mobile service, compared to that of a traditional Centre. Distance presents challenges to the service in both communication and the nature of a day's work.

COMMUNICATION

- The Manager is at a different location from the service operation sites.
- The staff members live far from each other, the venues and the office.
- The families travel long distances to reach the service.
- The challenge for *staff* to find an opportunity to meet together and exchange information and ideas is *always* apparent in Child Care, where attention to children is the first priority. *But* in a working week where staff do not all work on the same day, nor at the same site, and the Manager is in a different location it takes persistence and ingenuity to maintain a bonded, enthusiastic and committed staff team.
- Informing and interacting with *families* is a challenge when children do not attend consecutive days in care, and parents work in remote locations e.g. at sea, in vineyards, on farms. Having blank spots in mobile phone reception adds to the communication challenges.
- We constantly aim for improvement in communication between staff members, families and staff, staff and Manager. Newsletters, communication books, message pouches, e-mail links, slide-shows and family visits are some of the methods with which we communicate.
- Distance affects timely communications between stakeholders, government departments, training organisations, and the service. This can leave a short lead in time for administration.

NATURE OF A DAY'S WORK

The staff drive long distances to;

- meet at the CCOWS shed
- load activities into a vehicle / or trolley (if needing to use the trailer).
- hitch the trailer to a vehicle (when required)
- drive to a site
- unload and set up premises for the day (temporary fences, changing tables, portable cots, activities and administration needs)
- then care for the children
- pack up
- leave the premises as they were found
- put equipment/trolleys back into the vehicle/or trailer/or small shed
- return to the "home" shed (sometimes 55kms, through kangaroo country)
- park the vehicle and unload the activities.....that makes a LONG day.
- after that many staff have a long drive home.

Adequate breaks are taken so that fatigue does not become a risk factor.

Though mobiles may have some differences in their system of operation, they share many things in common; these include the *benefits* this model of delivery provides and the *challenges* experienced.

BENEFITS

- Children's social and emotional development is enhanced by interaction and communication which they would otherwise not experience.

A Kangaroo Inn parent asked if her child could be on the waiting list, as she would like her child to learn manners and sharing (like her child's friend who was attending CCOWS).

- Children's developmental status is appraised by professional educators, who are able to recommend intervention services when needed.

With educator's direction and assistance, X has been diagnosed as having 'autism'. Parent has been supported by CCOWS staff member, in CDU meetings with health officials. The service has been able to obtain assistance for educational integration, and Inclusion Support from Inclusive Directions.

- Educators act as mentors for parents.

Robe CCOWS is able to release the Team leader to make family visits. This enables confidential discussion about their child's development and allows the opportunity to mentor and demonstrate effective strategies for problems which parents may identify eg "eating at the table", "settling to sleep". "Learning through play" is illustrated through viewing children's journals and sharing observations.

- Families and communities are empowered. Community strategic planning includes children's needs.

Mahalia Layzell, from Mahalia's Coffee in Robe says "My husband and I could not have set up this business if we had not been able to send our boys to CCOWS". Mahalia now roasts her own coffee from imported beans, and has set up National distribution.

- Service is accessible. Children are able to interact with others. The mobile service is the only child care facility/organisation in the area. Parents do not have a choice of services.

Having access, still means an hour's drive for some parents to bring their children to the site, which means 4hours out of their working day. One of the CCOWS sites is in an Area school. Children are unable to use the school bus system, which means some families put older children on the bus, then drive the younger ones in.

- Local people are employed and receive training.

This has meant the ability to supplement and retain staff numbers, as attracting city people to rural areas is challenging, where there is difficulty in finding somewhere to live, where there is seldom fulltime work on offer, and a very different lifestyle experience compared to that of cities. Please see the example in the attachment , *Budget Base Funding Program Review, SA Mobiles Submission :Administration example (3)*.

- Fees for the child care service are kept as low as possible. This service could not operate without Budget Base Funding.

Robe CCOWS has a tiered *fee system*, taking note of parent's income. However some families still struggle to meet those fees. If children's services are to give equal opportunity to all children to experience care and education, then it follows that we need to acknowledge that the contribution to operational costs from parent's fees is not going to be significant.

From NSW, *Tim Keegan* (CEO, MCSA NSW) declares that "Mobile *operation is cost-effective*. But it is not cheap". The ability to sustain a viable operation becomes *mission impossible* when funding does not keep pace with the CPI index, and thus does not acknowledge the rise in costs of salaries, freight, consumables (gloves, wipes, toilet rolls etc), staff training, fuel, vehicle maintenance. Decisions regarding funding need to be made with consideration of the benefits and values the service operation brings to children, families, and communities.

CHALLENGES

Challenges are ongoing because of the nature of this model of care.

- Distances travelled by staff.

*At Robe one staff member travels 99kms to get to the service, he works 4 days/week, so that's 792kms/week. He has hit 3 kangaroos in the last 3 years.

*The ability to have all staff together for reflection/meetings is difficult, as they live away from each other and at distance from the service base.

- Distances travelled by parents

*As detailed in the dot point above (reBenefits: Service is accessible), parents still have a considerable distance to travel.

*If enrolled children are absent, it may be impracticable for parents on the Standby/wait list to bring their child in to use that spot. Parents are already in the paddock, out at sea or too far away to bring the children to care. Utilisation numbers will therefore be affected.

- Remoteness affects operations.

* Water needs to be taken to some sites and rubbish removed.

* Weather conditions affect operation. At Kangaroo Inn, during school holidays we do not operate on Extreme fire danger days as there is no community to support the service. In hot weather at that site we ring and inform the CFS that we are present. Catastrophic fire days mean cancellation of the service, we inform parents by phone/text the night before.

- Confidential discussion with parents.

*The mobile does not own the premises at which it operates and access to office space or withdrawal area is not possible at some sites. This means special appointments need to be made with parents for confidential conversations.

* Staff needs to pack up everything and travel back to base, this inhibits the opportunities to extend their day/ stay for meetings, reflections and conversations with parents.

CHANGES AS RESULT OF RECENT INTRODUCTION OF EDUCATION REFORM AGENDA.

- Staff Salary Costs.

There has been a marked increase in the salary component of expenditure in the budget. Because of the number of qualified people and ratio of staff:children, and because of implementing quality measures(eg having a meeting time for team leaders to correlate and coordinate programming and transfer of resources). CCOWS has tried not to pass that cost on to parents, as many are having difficulty meeting fee expectations, even though they appear reasonable in comparison to city centres. See attached fee sheet/Confidential

- Implementation of Universal Access .

The unforeseen impact of this policy has been the unavailability of some sites for the use of mobiles. Where mobiles have used kindergarten premises, and those kindergartens have extended their hours of operation, there has been a reduction in available time for use by the mobile service. This has affected CCOWS at Robe and also the COGS mobile at Lameroo.

- “Approved and Registered” services.

Both these classifications have not helped the understanding of parents whose children attend mobiles. They do not have a choice of services, there is only the mobile. They are confused, and think that our service is not offering appropriate quality of care if we are neither registered, nor approved. The parents do not receive CCR (Child Care Rebate) as we are a BBF service, (not CCB funded). Though not being in the Quality Assessment arena as yet, the mobiles in South Australia were required (by the former regulatory body) to meet stringent regulations regarding physical environments and administration and delivery requirements. This compliance needed to be met before we were granted a licence to operate at each site. So in some sense we have been within a system which determined that we were registered.

- RTO's

With the assistance with staff training costs being announced by the Government, there was a noticeable increase in RTO's. Some have had an aggressive / assertive promotion, assuring participants that they could acquire qualifications in a short time span. CCOWS and several centres in the South East of SA, have been concerned that students who have not completed satisfactory on-floor work experience at our services have been granted a Diploma status from an interstate training organisation. This is not improving quality, just the numbers of pieces of paper. ACECQA will need to monitor RTO's to ensure that this does not recur.

- Online training.

I think that students really miss out on clarification, stimulation and confidence with professional language, if they do not have at least some contact, interaction with other students and lecturers. In a recent training day with the 15 CCOWS staff members, the difference was noticeable between those who had been “in class” compared to those who had an isolated distant education experience. Much responsibility seems to be handed to on-floor team leaders and supervisors to provide the interaction, education and professional development. This needs to be balanced with provision by training providers giving opportunities for discussion and interaction with colleagues and lecturers/ mentors. Mobile staff members have a great challenge to access appropriate, effective training. Some are unable to take up traineeships, because they do not have employment for a sufficient number of hours per week.

- South Australian Change to single entry for school and kindergarten.

This will have a big impact on the waiting list at CCOWS. This will be stationary, and children will wait even longer than they do at present. Some parents are placing children on the waiting list before they are born, so as to “be in the system”. Some have been on the list for over 2 years. The other consideration is that children will now be staying in care until they are more than 5 years in some instances. This will be a challenge for mobile educators as there are not separate streams of children, children of all ages are in the same room/ or space.

- Suggestions for strategies to improve some aspects of implementation.

Please see: The Early Learning Framework Submission (30.9.2008)/ A Summary of Considerations.

STATISTICAL EVIDENCE OF CCOWS IN THE COMMUNITY.

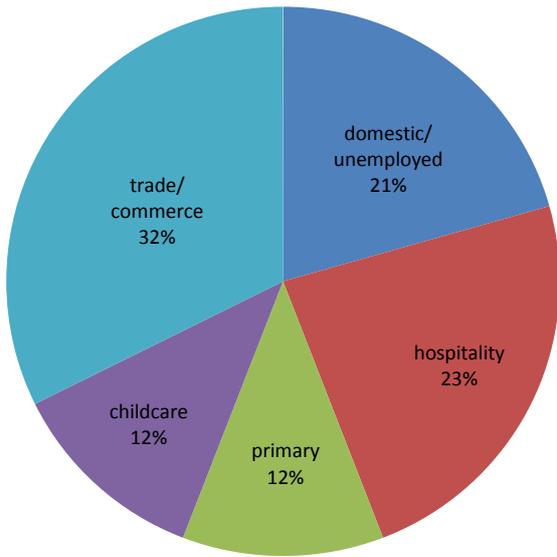
- Site Demographics, (see pie diagrams following)

Each site reveals the difference in parental employment at each location. The responsibilities of rural women have changed over the last decade, Drought and difficult times see women more physically involved on the land, assisting with farm administration, or working in town to help ‘cash flow’.

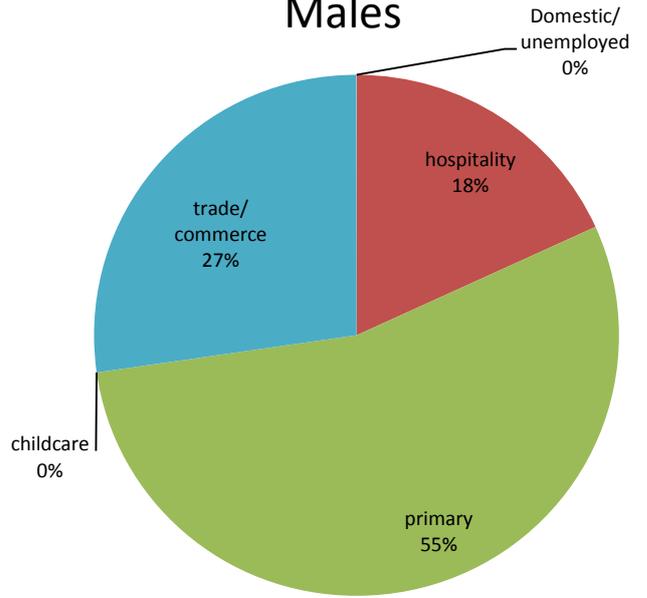
Please see National Quality Framework attachment :Some General Comments section.

Robe

Females

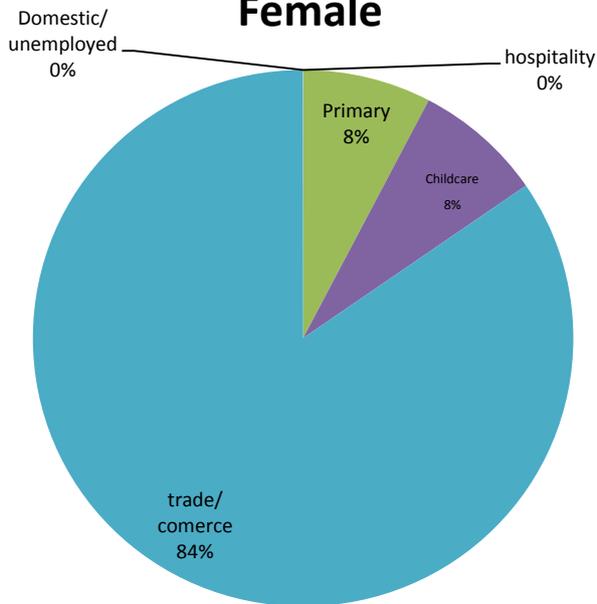


Males

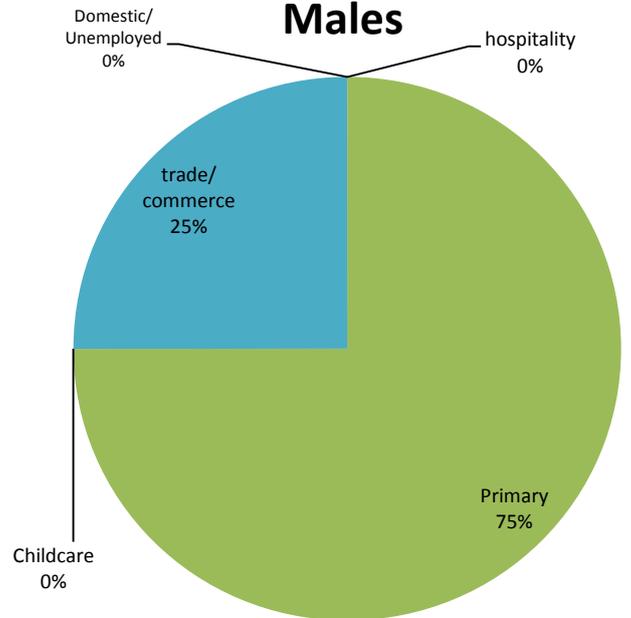


Beachport

Female

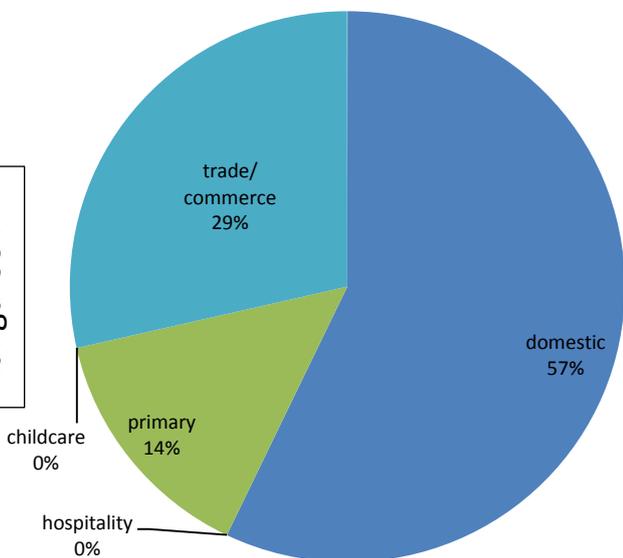


Males

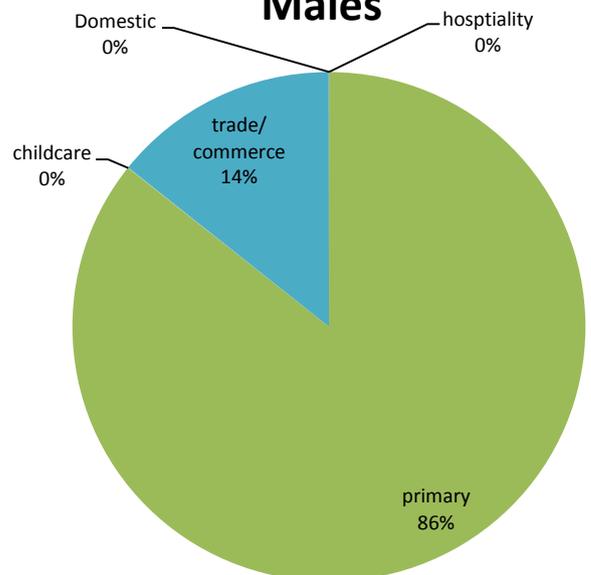


Kangaroo Inn

Females



Males



- Growth.

In April 2002, CCOWS began operation with 3 days a week and a licence for 15 children.

In January 2014, CCOWS operates at 2 sites in Robe across 5 days of the week (with licence for 25 at one site and physical capacity for 30 children at the other, though this is capped at 20 for staffing reasons), one day at Beachport (licence for 15 children) and one day at Kangaroo Inn (licence for 12 children). There is a waiting list for 107 places across the sites.

- Staff details

*A combination of 17 permanent, permanent part-time and casual employees.

* 1 Director, 6 educators with Diplomas, 4 educators with Certificate 3, 3 educators studying Certificate 3, and 2 on maternity leave.

* 3 educators are mothers with their children attending care, and another educator is a grandmother with 3 grandchildren at care.

* 3 educators have experienced working in child care centres.

- Meetings and Training

*Staff meetings and Management meetings are held monthly.

*Team Leader meetings are held fortnightly for 1 ½ hours.

*Each site supervisor has programming time each week.

*CCOWS staff meets for a training day at the beginning of the calendar year. This is supplemented by individual training. The interest and need for this is determined during staff professional appraisals which are conducted twice a year.

- Children's ages.

*CCOWS is busy adjusting enrolments with changes made at the beginning of the school year.

*Across sites the present enrolments are 13 children under-2 years, 44 are aged between 2 and 3 years and 40 who are 3 years or over.

*Across sites there are 67 spaces required for under 2 years and 40 spaces requested for over 2 years.

- Duration of time children spend at CCOWS.

The time children spend at CCOWS each week, varies between ½ day/week and 4 days/week(just 4 children). The normal attendances are 1 to 3 days a week.

- One educator works with 48 children /week.

- Funding Agreement

An Incorporated body is needed to receive, monitor and audit the funding provided by the Federal government to CCOWS. Robe District Council is an Incorporated body and carries out those responsibilities as "sponsor" of the service. The CCOWS staff is classified as Council employees, which means they have the advantage of coming under the Council Insurance scheme and under the Municipal Officer's Award for salaries. The salaries are more generous than Child Care Award rates, this has assisted the retention of staff, but it also means that salaries form the largest part of budget expenditure.

- Itinerant nature of the community

Less care is needed for locals in July/August as 59% of homes are vacant, our service works through Christmas as this is the busy tourist season in Robe. CCOWS has a 2 week break in July.