

27 August 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Review of Early Childhood funding – Draft recommendation on Occasional Care.**

I have read the Occasional Care section of the draft document, and have some comments that you may like to include in your discussions.

My 23 month old son has attended Crows Nest Occasional Child Care Centre (CNOCCC) for the last 13 months. He generally attends two days per week. The reasons I selected the centre, and continue to use it, are:

- the small, friendly and welcoming environment; when I was initially looking for care for my son, I contacted a number of centres, all of which were long day care centres (apart from CNOCCC) and none of which seemed to know what was happening in their centres. I called CNOCCC and they were clear and helpful, hence my choosing them initially.
- the flexibility of occasional care; I am a part time TAFE teacher and occasional care suits my casual work .
- the exceptional, caring, highly trained and qualified staff; in the 13 months my son has attended CNOCCC, there has been no change in staff. I highly regard the relationships he has developed with these wonderful women. My friends who use long day care always complain of high staff turn over.
- The staff know my son and give me constant feedback. We receive informal daily reports, as well as annual report books.
- the educational opportunities for him to develop through structured play and activities; Magnus takes part in activities that I do not have the facilities for at home and his development is excellent as a result.
- On entering the centre the activities for the day are clearly set out, they explain the types of learning that the children will be doing that day, e.g. social, emotional, physical, indoor, outdoor etc. This is very helpful as a parent, so that you can continue the learning experience at home.

Sections of the discussion paper concern me. Its assessment of what Occasional Care offers does not tie in to my experiences. I understand that the framework is a minimum standard, and our centre would be able to continue to provide the excellent service it already does, but my concern is that leaving Occasional Care behind in the NQF the sector is likely to be stigmatised by parents as providing an inferior service – which inevitably would lead to a decline in that service as it struggled for enrolments and funding.

The report states that the staff in Occasional Care are more qualified and experienced and this is our experience at CNOCCC, where all the staff have their qualifications and profiles on display. I am very reassured at the high level of qualifications of the staff and would not send my child anywhere that staff were not adequately trained. I believe it places workers and children at risk, to have under qualified staff working in child care environments.

Occasional Care is an essential service to parents, like me, who do not work regular hours. I believe my son is in the best day care environment that he can be in. I understand that it is more difficult to implement a structured learning path for children attending only for a few hours each week, but my son and a number of other children attend at least one full day per week on a regular basis. For those children who attend more regularly I believe something needs to be in place.

I also find it frustrating that we are not able to access the 50% Child Care Rebate; it will inevitably put the service out of reach of some employed people, thus not encouraging people (mainly women) back into the work force following maternity leave.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Williams