

24 April 2023

## **Early Childhood Education and Care inquiry**

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to make a submission to the Early Childhood Education and Care inquiry regarding the *issue of early childhood trauma* and the urgent need to address it. Trauma in early childhood can have devastating and long-lasting effects on a child's development and wellbeing. It is critical that we prioritise not only *prevention* strategies but also early *intervention* to help mitigate the impact of trauma on young children.

### **Who we are?**

Be Centre Foundation is an Australian non-profit organisation that provides early intervention and support for children who have experienced trauma or other emotional difficulties. The organisation's mission is to help children and families build resilience and positive relationships through a range of therapeutic programs and services.

Be Centre Foundation provides individual and group therapy sessions for children aged 3-12 years who have experienced trauma or other emotional, behaviour, psychological, and social issues. The therapy programs use a range of evidence-based interventions including play therapy, expressive arts, and drama therapy.

### **Identifying and responding to trauma-impacted children**

Early childhood education and care services are essential for identifying trauma in young children. However, early childhood educators and care services don't have the expertise to be able to respond to children identified as having experienced, or experiencing, trauma.

Children's mental health practitioners including play and other expressive therapists have the necessary expertise to support early childhood education services. Establishing referral pathways or having play therapists located within early childhood settings would provide much-needed 'early intervention' support.

### **What is play therapy?**

Play therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses play as a means of communication and expression. It is primarily used with children. Play therapy is based on the belief that play is the natural language of children, and that through play, children can express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Play therapy provides a safe and supportive environment for children to explore their emotions, work through their trauma, and develop new skills.

Play therapy is not the same as 'free play'.

**In conclusion**

The inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care *must take into consideration* that many children have experienced trauma *before* attending childhood education and may be experiencing trauma while there. Trauma can include parental separation, domestic violence, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, parental mental health issues, parental alcohol/drug abuse, and/or natural disasters.

How can early childhood educators be supported to *identify* trauma? Once identified, how can that child be supported so they are able to heal? Mental health workers are in schools, why not early childcare settings? Is the inquiry acknowledging that trauma may already be present when a child arrives at Early Childhood Education and that if left unaddressed, that child will very likely become an adult with physical and mental ill-health?

Kind regards

**Michelle Carlyle**

CEO

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