

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care

Deniliquin Children's Centre Limited
17th July, 2023

Deniliquin Children's Centre is a not for profit, community-based company limited by guarantee operating centre based and mobile early childhood services in the Southern Riverina of NSW. Our services provide preschool and childcare to over 394 children from 300 families in our rural communities.

Workforce issues are the largest challenge affecting our ability to provide early childhood education to our families.

Demand for places exceeds demand.

While we have sizeable waitlists, the organization cannot fill licensed places due to the inability to recruit qualified educators- particularly bachelor trained early childhood teachers. This workforce shortage is exacerbated in rural areas by distance and population.

Pay and recognition affect the recruitment of educators and teachers to our sector. In particular, recognition of Bachelor trained teachers for their qualifications by paying them on par with their school-based colleagues. Providing flexibility for educators with leave, particularly providing study leave for educators increasing qualifications. Paying an annual market loading above award wages to compensate early childhood educators for long hours, high demand, little work flexibility and limited leave provisions.

Services operating in small population centres must recruit from outside townships. Financial assistance with relocation and rental costs, even support with finding housing are additional costs for services.

Cross border complexities also need to be considered. Teachers who work on the Victorian side of the Murray River receive a large cash bonus over those on the NSW side. Each state has a separate Working With Children Check system, adding cost to educators. Requirements for training vary with the regulatory body.

Recruitment of professionals from outside Australia to address workforce shortages is also complex. Some overseas qualifications are recognized by different some jurisdictions, others are not. While application to ACECQA for recognition of qualifications can be made before relocating to Australia, application to the NSW Education Standards Authority cannot be started before the person is in the country/

Lower populations mean increased operating costs per child, particularly for mobile services, with large distances travelled to venues. Many services in these areas are small, not-for-profit centres without the economies of scale, and without the financial ability to offer competitive conditions with other settings.

We support The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2031 in the six focus areas of:

- Professional recognition
- Attraction and retention
- Leadership and capability
- Wellbeing
- Qualifications and career pathways
- Data and evidence

A targeted approach to support the implementation of the National Workforce strategy for rural and regional areas is required. **This will involve both state and federal governments increasing funding and child care subsidy.**

Without this targeted approach, access to early childhood education for children in rural and regional communities will become increasingly limited, impacting on future populations. This also influences the economic viability of these communities as it limits people's ability to participate in the workforce. Other community services such as health are impacted by the lack of early childhood education places in these communities.

Thank you for your consideration

Kind Regards

Felicity Michael

General Manager