

To whom it may concern,

Lil' Antz Pty Ltd is Alice Springs largest privately run child care centre. We care for children aged 6 weeks to 12 years across 2 Long Day Cares and 2 OSHC programs. Currently we service 250 families and employ close to 40 educators. We contribute greatly to the community not only by providing quality childcare and offering job opportunities but also donating to local schools, sporting clubs, RSPCA and children's charities, in particular Variety NT.

I have been with Lil' Antz since 2006, leaving school to pursue a career in children's services. After 5 years of hard work and dedication to the company I was offered the opportunity to purchase the business. I took over sole ownership in late 2012. Over the last 8 years I have been a part of the significant changes that childcare has seen and in particular been involved in the process of service approvals, nominated and certified supervisor applications, rating and assessment etc. with Quality Education and Care NT.

The changes that have been made are a step in the right direction to show the public that childcare workers are not just babysitters, they are educators who care, love and teach children on a daily basis.

Whilst it is important to have qualified and educated carers, the requirements are simply unable to be met and maintained in such a small and remote community. At the current time we meet the requirements, however it takes one person to be ill or leave unexpectedly for our qualified ratios to be compromised. As a privately run child care it is not always viable to have relief staff on hand for staff illnesses and holidays, on a normal daily basis we are over staffed to ensure we are covered and can care for the children if the inevitable sickness that is going around hits the staff. From a business standpoint 3 weeks out of the month we could be spending close to \$1,000 extra a week on wages that would not be necessary, however in order to keep staff interested in a position at time of need they need regular weekly hours.

Maintaining qualified staff ratios also means a majority of our educators work a fulltime 38 hour week as well as attend weekly uni classes (usually a 3 hour block during the week) and attend weekend workshops on a monthly or bi monthly schedule which are 8-4/5 Saturday and Sunday. Others choose to study self-paced, which means committing to after work study time in order to finish a qualification in an acceptable time frame. Whilst this is not an unheard of measure for many people or industries these educators are faced with all this commitment for an extremely poor award wage, we value our employees and pay well above award wages, however the commitment and time they put in to meet the national requirements does nowhere near meet the award rate.

There are plenty of things people can go on and on about, however I think after many forums and discussions I have been a part of or read the most significant issue for child care operators and educators is the volume of extra paperwork the NQF and EYLF have burdened us with. Educators are continuously documenting what they are offering the children and how this is meeting quality standard ... that they are not actually engaging 100% with the children and enjoying the experience and allowing it to reach its full potential. Educators often question their methods and spontaneous activities quite often go by the wayside because it is too difficult to justify why we have done the activity or how it is benefitting the child.

From an administrative point of view, the volumes of paperwork we have to organise, submit, apply etc. could warrant 1 full time office employee to be hired just to keep track of what is current, what is needed and that we are meeting all the requirements.

Media coverage focuses primarily on making childcare affordable for families, perhaps we need to step back and look at what it is costing a centre to operate and discuss where costs can be cut or perhaps subsidies for centres allowing fees to be brought to a more affordable rate. As a child care business owner I am thankful for the government assistance we receive with quarterly subsidies and government grants when offered, the daily cost of running a centre will never get cheaper as the cost of living is ever increasing. We provide food, which increases. We need power and water to run the service, which increases. We need to freight in the majority of our supplies (craft, nappies, cleaning supplies etc) which increases. We need fuel to provide transport to our OSHC program, which increases. Our locations are all rented, which increases. Families and the public need to remember that it isn't just wages for staff that are paid from fees, there are so many other things that go into running a child care centre and without the fees increasing to cover the costs of the ever increasing living expenses the centre cannot function. As well as cost of living, educators are completing higher education and need to be paid accordingly. If families want to have their children cared for by appropriately qualified staff then salaries need to reflect that, paying staff what they deserve.

If Lil' Antz were to close tomorrow there would be 250 families within the community that would have no care. This would result in doctors, nurses, emergency service crews, public servants, retail workers, hospitality workers, teachers etc. all forced to stop working which in turn would result in somewhat of a halt in the community as the children need care somewhere in order for their families to contribute to the community.

If we were to review the relevant requirements for qualified educators and the costs of running a service the prices of childcare would not see the steep rises that we have been subject to over the past 2-3 years.

Regards,

Holly Seeley

Owner- Lil' Antz Pty Ltd