

I wish to address the productivity commission as a parent, an educator and a working woman. I am a family day care educator, and I am passionate about what I do. I recently wrote to Minister Susan Ley regarding the current changes to funding for our sector and said the following. “Up until recently I have been a Jill of trade and a master of none”. That was until recently. I have devoted many hours to highlighting the benefits of Family Day Care as a premium child-care option. I have taken a dive right out of my comfort zone and written letters to various Ministers about the detrimental effects, proposed changes will have to our sector. I have engaged the media in a positive manner to put the word out there that Family Day Care is in jeopardy if at least two things do not occur. The first is the current guidelines for funding for Community Support Funding Program (CSF), must not be changed until we have had more time to consider the outcomes on existing services. High quality childcare is the result of dedicated educators, support staff and schemes. Without adequate funding something must give, and while many quality educators will continue to deliver childcare services, quality will be compromised.

The key points I would like to address here today are:

1. That of women participating in the paid workforce.
2. Family Day Care as a competitive option. Child care of choice.

Family Day Care contributes to work force participation by women in two ways. The first is allowing mothers to return to the paid workforce by making childcare available. We provide a home like environment for children, so the transition to formal education like kindergarten and school can be done in a gentle manner. In many cases we have more availability for children under two, which is the hardest for long day care to cater for. Families’ feedback from my service has been that they are less stressed about the return to work. Children enter our care environments with small ratios, one educator, and home like environments that consist of things that may be found in the child’s own home.

The second way women are contributing to the economy of not only their families but also the Australian economy is through the running of a small business. Personally, my income supports our family with all of life’s extras. Many educators I know rely on the income of their Family Day Care business to support their whole family, ensuring they can pay their mortgage, pay bills and put food on the table. As a childcare service provider it should also be noted that all resources within our service come from our own income. We do not have the luxury of being funded for equipment or training. However, we are resourceful. Recently Woolworths featured a campaign for schools, kindergartens and childcare centres to participate in the Woolworths Earn & Learn Program. It was not widely known, but Family Day Care educators could participate in this. From collecting the stickers through to selecting educational products, community involvement was paramount. In my service I was able to obtain a set of giant teeth with a toothbrush and involve the children in my care in an awareness activity on the benefits of healthy eating and oral care.

If not for the income we generate from our small business, many educators may work in other industries, placing even further burden on the delivery of childcare services. Prior to the introduction of the new Regulations for children’s services, many Family Day Care providers were unqualified. But with the introduction of these regulations, all educators have been required to upskill their qualifications. For many this meant returning to the classroom, for some this meant returning to study after 20 years, and gaining new knowledge and the relevant qualification. As a result many have gone on to do further study and complete their Diploma in Children’s Services. The commitment to professional development, particularly for those who have not been in a classroom for a long time and for those of which English is their second language cannot be overlooked or underestimated.

For me personally, this type of paid employment has given me more than I have given to any family. I was a stay at home Mother of two children under the age of 5. After working in another industry, outside the home for a year, we discovered that the financial gain was \$100 a week after childcare and family tax benefits were considered. In short, it was easier to work out how to save \$100 a week rather than continuing on. However, in that time our family had been using Family Day Care. As parents we felt re-assured knowing our child was with a Carer that supported us as a family in returning to work, and welcomed our little girl into their home like she was one of the families. They acted as surrogate grandparents. Ten years on and our daughter still recalls her Carer with great fondness. After having such a positive experience as a parent I considered if this could be something I could do. Eight years on I have never looked back.

What I have gained from being a Family Day Care Educator cannot be measured. At the age of 5 my son was diagnosed with High Functioning Autism. Being at home was going to make a difference to him. It has allowed me to be available to him after school to support him with his additional needs. The start of High school last year provided us with yet another challenge. With limited high schools in our zoned area, Quinn was enrolled in a high school some distance away. This meant the use of public transport, with 2 services each way. While our son was able to navigate it, the energy used to get himself to school on time meant that he had no brain power left to participate in the classroom. The fact that I am able to drive him to school with my Family Day Care children means that he is able to arrive at school refreshed and start the day ready to learn. The children enjoy the experience and there is a lot to see and talk about on the journey. My son has taught me patience beyond belief; however my role as an Educator has given me confidence. I am a valued member of my local community, having looked after at least half of the children in our surrounding streets, attending kindergarten pick-ups and drop off has provided me with the opportunity to network with families and other Early Childhood Educators.

Had it not been for the opportunity that becoming a Family Day Care educator gave me, I am sure that I would still be a stay at home mother, as I did not have the confidence or the skills to do anything else.

My second area for discussion is that of Family Day Care as a competitive childcare option with premium benefits to all concerned parties. It should be considered that Family Day Care Educators make up a significant portion of the Early Childhood Sector. We provide quality care in home environments. The following data is from the Family Day Care Australia website, Source: <http://www.familydaycare.com.au/index.php/main/About%20Family%20Day%20Care#M39>
Did you know that across Australia?

- **Family day care has operated for over 35 years.**
- **Over 80,000* families use family day care.**
- **Over 125,000* children are enrolled in family day care.**
- **There are over 18,000** family day care educators.**
- **There are over 450* family day care coordination units.**
- **Family day care is the major provider of regulated, flexible, non-standard hours child care.**

Ongoing media exposure about the childcare crisis and unaffordability means that with careful and considered media exposure, Family Day Care can finally be given the credit it is due. The fact is, children thrive in nurturing and supportive environments, and you will not find better than in the home of a Family Day Care Provider. Parents who have experienced high quality care with an Educator often state that Family Day Care is often the preferred child care option. It offers flexibility, is often more affordable and life long bonds are formed between Educators and families.

Initial reactions to the introduction of the National Regulations were met with some resistance. After all no one really likes change. However, many educators have risen to the challenge, obtained and

updated qualifications and overall professionalised our industry. We are no longer viewed as babysitters. This is something I am very proud of. As an industry we have a peak body which represents us, provides insurances' and resources to assist us within the industry. Family Day Care Australia also delivers a regular industry specific magazine "Jigsaw". This provides up to date information about regulatory requirements, highlights best practices, discusses upcoming events and recognises excellence within our industry by holding "Excellence in Family Day Care Awards" for both schemes and individual educators. Each year they also host a professional development conference to discuss ongoing and upcoming issues that affect its stakeholders.

Under the assessment ratings recently undertaken by the Australian Children's Education and Care Authority, Hobson's Bay was rated as Exceeding in all seven key quality areas. This happens because we have quality educators that are not driven by the dollar, but rather extend their homes and hearts to the families we provide care for.

My belief is that in recent years the flood gates to funding in our area have been opened. The introduction of the start-up funding for schemes has seen many private schemes open. Unfortunately, as with other rushed through decisions, oversights have been made. While for the most case, Schemes and educators are doing the right thing, a few bad eggs are spoiling it for the industry as a whole. I feel that if funding is based more on standards and quality rather than location and economic vulnerability, better outcomes will follow.

Recommendations:

1. Get detailed figures on women's workforce participation, both as educators are working mothers who use our service to determine the effects that will occur when Family Day Care is significantly reduced after funding changes.
2. Work closely with our peak body Family Day Care Australia to establish how our industry can better meet flexible, cost effective childcare and education.
3. Look at in home service provision, which currently has very limited use because of the strict guidelines, and use this system to deliver a Nanning service, that is regulated in the same way as Long Day Care, Family Day Care, After School Hours and Occasional Care. In essence the system is there, it simple needs some refinement.