



Connect4Care Pty Ltd
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SUBMISSION

TO: Productivity Commission on Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

A new innovation to help families

The current crisis in childcare can be addressed in part by encouraging families to help each other out with informal childminding arrangements on a mutual (two way) no charge basis.

Connect4Care is a website that makes it easy for families to find another family in their area for this purpose. A pilot will be conducted with the support of three public schools in Sydney soon. Based on feedback from that pilot, the site will go live shortly thereafter.

We have sent you a link on a separate page to the site. As the information on the site is not yet public, we ask that you treat that in confidence and do not release the link or copy the pages on the site.

In some respects, Connect4Care is simply a reflection of the informal care already provided by families and friends. However, it extends the opportunity to participate in such arrangements to many more families, particularly those who are isolated from the community, such as new migrants.

Safety of the children

The safety of the children is paramount in designing a business model such as this. The website incorporates appropriate requirements for Working with Children Checks and Police Checks, as applicable in the relevant jurisdictions.

The site also provides guidance on a range of safety issues affecting children, from child restraints to swimming pools, and a Code of Conduct which members are encouraged to adopt in the arrangement they enter into with the other family.

The regulatory regime

In designing the website, we have researched the Children (Care and Education) National Law and State laws governing home based care. Whilst reciprocal childminding in this form is permissible in most States, we have identified some issues in Western Australia, as noted below.

In all States and Territories except WA, the National Law excludes from the definition of a "care and education" service any childminding carried out in the service provider's residence "other than as part of a service that is delivered through the use of 2 or more educators": see Reg 5(2) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012.

However, the WA Education and Care Services National Regulations are slightly different in that the exclusion to the National Law in WA applies only to childminding which is provided on an ad hoc, casual basis.

We submit that this arrangement should be made possible in all jurisdictions. Unless the arrangement is regular, it cannot be relied on by a parent to re-enter the workforce.

Benefits of Connect4Care:

Connect4Care will enable families to access local quality childcare and to reduce the cost of childcare and will also assist in dealing with some of the issues which the Draft Report of the Productivity Commission indicated were the more difficult issues to overcome, namely:

- parents will have access to care without the need to satisfy an Activity Test;
- days and times are flexible, based on individual arrangements between the families, which is a great benefit to shift workers;
- this is an ideal solution for after school care and holiday care which is traditionally the 'poor cousin' in the world of childcare policy yet is critical for working parents; and
- most significantly, it helps overcome the 'wall' that mothers hit applying a cost benefit analysis to the prospect of working more than 2 days per week. It was reported in the Workshop on Childcare held at Sydney University on 15 August that there is strong evidence that mothers would prefer to work 3 or 4 days but it becomes financially unviable to do so given the loss of childcare benefits for higher income earners. If a parent can rely on formal childcare two days a week and use informal arrangements such as those envisaged by Connect4Care an additional one or two days a week, this overcomes this hurdle.

Community and Government support

Connect4Care requires public support to be successful. One way to generate that support is to promote the website through relevant government agencies. However, as a private business venture, we have found some difficulty in gaining government support on the basis that the government does not “endorse or support commercial products for use in the childcare and early learning sector”.

Whilst Connect4Care will charge families to become members, and hence is considered a commercial venture, it has at its heart a community spirit and a desire to find a solution to the ever-increasing problem of affordability of, and accessibility to, flexible childcare. If successful, it can be self-sustaining, without any funding from government, and it aims to achieve many of the objectives which the Government has set for itself.

We would like to work with Government to make the website accessible in all States and Territories. We look to the Productivity Commission to set the direction to Government to facilitate this.

Yours faithfully,

Katrina Clark
Director
Connect4Care Pty Limited