

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Education and Care Sector.

My name is Maria D'Onofrio and I have been an Educator in the Education and Care sector for the last 16 years. I'm currently the Assistant Manager for the City of Bayswater Child Care Centre Association Inc. and the director at the Noranda Child Care Centre.

Noranda Childcare Centre is a not-for-profit, long-day childcare centre operating in the North Metro area, Western Australia. Noranda Child Care Centre was established in 1992 and is licensed to care for 47 children aged between 0 and 5 years.

Noranda Child Care Centre is a part of an incorporated Association which has two other Long -day child care centres, Silverwood and Salisbury Child Care Centre. Within the Association we also have one Occasional Care service the Derrick Ernst Neighbourhood Centre and three before and after school services.

There are some aspects in the draft report that I support which is the single based subsidy payment direct to the service. The current system is confusing for families and for providers who try to explain these entitlements, having the one payment will take away the frustration. The Childcare Benefit and Childcare Rebate are important to ensuring that families experience a financial benefit from engaging in the workforce.

However applying for a means-test to the Childcare Rebate would likely result in families being restricted to reducing their work days as the financial benefits of working would not be justified. Some families have chosen not to return to work due to this and have left the service. The activity test should ensure that families can afford to go back to work by lowering the threshold. Families who currently are not working shouldn't have their subsidies reduced or stopped either depending on the circumstances. We have had some parents that have been made redundant, parents actively looking for employment – which can take a period of time, families who have “children at risk” that may not be in the system yet and some parents who medically cannot return to the work force. I support additional funding for families with children who have additional needs or a in the prognosis stages.

It is important for children with an additional need to access an education and care program that support the child's early intervention and future development. Improved funding must focus on the real costs of providing an additional support Educator as this currently does not happen. I do believe it is important for all children to be able to access Quality Education and Care programs.

I support the National Working with Children Check, it means that educators who do move states wouldn't require to go through another application process and waiting time to obtain a position in the sector until the card has come through.

The implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards has been a positive step forward in improving the Education and Care Sector.

Our Assessment and Rating visit was in August 2013. This was a very positive experience for myself, educators and the Manager for Children Services. We as a service and organisation were very excited and proud to be able to show the assessors what the framework looks like in our service. We had ample amount of opportunity to talk to the assessors and the educators

were all able to show any evidence of the Standards and elements that they felt they wanted the assessors to see so they could write this down.

We believe that it was beneficial having two assessors on the day as being a busy service there are always many adventures happening throughout the day. The assessors would have more than a snap shot to see everything that happens in the centre. It was a fantastic experience and we enjoyed the assessment process.

As an organisation we have been working and tailoring our service to the Early Years Learning Framework since its draft form in 2010. This has been a learning journey for us as educators as well as the children. This was not an overnight change. It has taken many professionals development trainings, Staff meetings and many different types of consultation work to achieve this result. We have budgeted extra each year for training, extra studies for educators as now majority hold their diploma for Children services and budgeting for extra support educators to boost ratios in each room. This has been a success in having the extra support in each room and allows more time to have creative freedom in implementing experiences for the children every day. Passing the fee increase to parents has always been minimal as we have carefully budgeted for all these extra educators which is done by the Manager for Children Services and Secretary treasurer.

Our families of the service are always actively involved and contribute in many ways to support the service, whether this be new ideas for the rooms, equipment, experiments to conduct with the children, cooking with the children, bringing items from home that represent different cultures within the service and offering business services to help with maintenance of the building (i.e. plumbers, architects, gardeners, builders etc) that make the service have a home away from home environment. As a result of this our rating we obtained is Exceeding the National Quality Standards in all seven Quality Areas an achievement we are very proud of.

In our Education and Care service and in our Organisation quality is a very important factor as it sets the foundation of the children's learning journey from an early age.

There are some points in the draft report that I do have concerns with. The reduction of Educator to child ratios or "averaging" the ratios over the week could have serious implications over the health and safety of the children and educators that are in our service. Currently at Noranda we have an extra educator in each room as mentioned before. We believe that this helps us provide an environment that fosters the growth and development of children in our service. If there is to be a decrease in the ratios I believe this would lead to more stress within the service. Educators would "burn out" at a faster rate and children would become more unsettled as there would be constant change to their environment. This is in Outcome 1 children are to feel safe, secure and supported.

I also do not agree with changing the qualifications for birth to 36 months which only a certificate 111 is required. There have been many studies to prove that experiences in the first 3 years of a child's life lay the foundations of lifelong learning. Diploma trained educators have the extra units that give them the skills to understand the higher level of child development, holistic approach when developing and implementing curriculums for children's evolving learning, managing behaviour plans, observe document and analyse learning of each child, liaise with professionals with the inclusion of children with additional needs and their support plans and connect children's learning with theorists.

Many of the educators at Noranda have their diploma not because it is a requirement but chose to because they wanted to increase their knowledge and be the best advocates for children and their learning. They are highly passionate about their profession and wanted this to be reflected in their work. Families have also mentioned that they feel more secure knowing that their children are being educated and cared for by experienced diploma trained educators. The issue of professional wages needs to be addressed in some form within this inquiry. Early childhood educators have a huge responsibility and play a critical role in the learning and development of children birth to 5 years in the support they provide to families. Hence, they should receive fair pay for this very important work that they do.

This leads to the concern of the tick and flick box approach that some training organisations have adopted. I believe that this impacts on the quality of service that is provided to children, which results in educators needing retraining to improve skills.

It is our role as advocates for children to see the current system stay in place. We need to ensure that children's learning, development and creative experiences are not hindered in anyway. As it states in Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the child – All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

Thank you.