

Submission for the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning public inquiry

About us

Tabourie Child Care Centre is a privately owned 40 place LDC service providing high quality care and education to children aged 6 weeks to 6 years. The service is 23 years old and currently employs 14 staff – full time, part time and casual all of whom have families and financial responsibilities. The Centre is located in a small community on the south of NSW and is utilized by 78 families. We are a part of a community where the unemployment rate is quite high, job opportunities are difficult to find and families rely on early childhood services as many do not have extended family to assist with caring for children so parents are able to work. With the proposed changes to eligibility and the benefits accessible to families approximately 25% of my current families would not be able to access funding. It would be impossible to put a percentage on future families who would be excluded. As anyone who works in the industry is aware fewer enrollments require fewer staff. If my service was to lose 25% of current families due to the proposed reforms this would have a significant effect on the staff I employ and the business to operate at a high quality level. Our current philosophy states that: We believe that all children have a right to high quality Early Childhood learning that is inclusive of their individuality and family culture and lays a foundation for their future.

The emphasis is on all children. As Owner/Director I have a strong belief that no child should be denied the opportunity to access early childhood education and care simply because their family cannot afford it. There is no sub clause to my Centre's philosophy all means all- not all children with the exception of those who are from low income backgrounds.

I am responding to the Early Childhood Learning element of the Productivity Commission, with the aim of providing feedback regarding elements about which The Commission has made recommendations. If there was ever a time for anyone working with/caring for children, who has young children or even future parents to become politically aware now is that time. We must unite and advocate for children, their development and education and their rights on their behalf. Whilst there are numerous proposals made, some which are positive, I believe these are some of the most significant and those that will have negative outcomes for all stakeholders who use early child hood services:

1. The contribution that access to affordable, high quality child care can make to optimising children's learning and development (Scope of the Inquiry 1b)
2. Accessibility of affordable care (2c)
3. The capacity of the existing child care system to ensure children are transitioning from child care to school with a satisfactory level of school preparedness (2i)
4. The needs of vulnerable or at risk children (2k)

The research into the benefits of high quality child care is endless. However in a nutshell high quality affordable and accessible early education and care is important for children, academically, socially and developmentally. The common factor in all the research is that children who access quality early childhood services in the years before school are more likely to continue to value learning, continue to achieve, meet outcomes and become contributors to society. .”To quote the Council of Australian Governments” Research shows that quality maternal, child and family health, early childhood education and care and family support programs make a significant difference to improving outcomes for children. There are particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition The Rights of the child as set out by the United Nations is the most internationally recognised treaty on the planet. The Australian government has committed to make sure every child in Australia has every right met under each of 54 Articles in the Convention. Some of the proposed reforms would go against this commitment. The most relevant rights to my submission are:

Article 26 The Government should provide extra money for the children of families in need.

Article 27 Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. The government should help families who cannot afford to provide this.

Article 28 Children have the right to an education.

Again the Rights of the Child focusses on all children as having these rights. Quality early childhood education represents one of the best investments our country can make. This view is also supported by other countries for e.g. The National Education Association in America believes ‘it’s a common sense investment we can’t afford to pass up. High-quality early childhood education is fundamental to a student’s long term success and shouldn’t be determined by their parents’ income... It is the right thing to do. (NEA 2013)

The Early Years Learning Framework, which the previous government introduced and which all services nationally have been working tirelessly to implement is a valuable and meaningful curriculum. It aims to improve outcomes for all children in regards to all areas of development and provide foundations for future learning. The focus is on outcomes for children – all children. I am of the belief that because the National Quality Framework, including the EYLF, was devised by the opposition, because it is recognized by early childhood educators as being a valuable resource to support curriculum decision making to extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five years and beyond that the current government looks to change it as it wasn’t their concept. The NQF has raised the bar. It has brought about a recognition for early childhood that has never before existed. It has increased the value placed on what we do with young children. The level of professionalism has increased with the introduction of minimum qualifications. Supervision, care and education of children has improved with the change to ratios. Statistics

show that less qualified staff are more likely to stay in the industry for shorter periods than those who are more qualified. Changing minimum qualification requirements would impact greatly on quality, relationships and stability for children families and educators. Those working in the industry are proud of the work they do and the contributions they make to young children and their families. Why can it not be recognized for the value it has, the improvements it has made and the potential it has to take Australia into the future. Currently Australia is not rated highly on the world scale in regards to outcomes for learning however the NQF is going a long way to improving that. Why jeopardise that by changing it now?

As the Educators Guide states: The Early Years Learning Framework is an important and timely resource for early childhood.

It embraces a vision for a new Australia:

- a future that embraces all Australians
- a future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility
- a future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of Australia.

It again doesn't have a sub clause that states "only if you can afford it".

It is my belief that changing the affordability and accessibility of childcare will also place children at risk. Children from low income families are already vulnerable due to a lack of available resources and access to services. The proposed reforms to change access, eligibility and funding i.e. the new eligibility requirements stating that both parents must be in work or study or training for at least 24 hours a fortnight will be lock children out of funded care and remove these children from care services. We are, in many cases, the first point of call for behavior, language, developmental diagnosis, family and social issues and for children at risk. The purpose of The Keep Them Safe site centres on child protection as being a collective responsibility, along with the belief that primary responsibility for raising and supporting children and young people should rest with families and communities with government providing support. The proposed reforms regarding access would jeopardise these aims.

I have major concerns for those children who by victim of family circumstance will be unable to access an early childhood service who would be monitoring their development and learning. Changes will mean that low income families will have no access – no access means no support across many areas which in the long term means these children will go off to school without ever having had contact with trained, experienced professionals or a high quality early learning program. The flow on for the children and the school system would be enormous. No child should have to wait until 5/6 years to start their learning journey with support from a high quality program and trained educators. Learning begins at birth and successful learners need the support of others. All families need the support and assistance of other

services in the community regardless of their background or financial assistance. As the African proverb states: it takes a village to raise a child. Children grow up not just in a home but in a community, a village, with input, support and understanding from their village. Regardless of the child's upbringing, the child belongs to and is shaped by the community. Children are greatly influenced by their environment. The importance of the community has probably never been more relevant than it is today. We live in a face-paced technological world and children are faced with a multitude of challenges and opportunities. Negotiating parenthood can be daunting and difficult (especially when denied access to support services) – partnerships and supports are welcome and necessary to develop our children for the future.

Many of the proposed reforms would put this along with the primary aim of the EYLF in jeopardy: “to extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school.

The Council of Australian Governments has developed this Framework to assist educators to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning. In this way, the Early Years Learning Framework (the Framework) will contribute to realising the Council of Australian Governments’ vision that:

“All children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation.”

In our current world wanting all children to achieve to their full potential, to succeed to thrive should not be a privilege but a right and one advocated for at every level of society and government.

The Government needs to acknowledge that it is their role and responsibility to financially support families, services and communities to raise their children and offer them the best start in life.

I call upon the Abbott Government to reject the Productivity Commission’s recommendations on changes to access and affordability and changes to the NQF for the sake of all stakeholders in my service as well as those all around the country.

Kind regards

Sharon Clear

Owner/Director/Early Childhood Teacher

References made to:

- The COAG
- Early Years Learning Framework
- Keep Them Safe website
- United Nations Rights of the Child
- The NEA