



Baya Gawiy Buga yani Jandu yani u Centre

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4 September 2014

Submission to the Productivity Commission Draft Report Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

Background

As one of the 38 Children and Family Centres (CFCs) Baya Gawiy Buga yani Jandu yani u Centre (Baya Gawiy) was funded under COAG's *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development* (the Agreement). This funding included the construction of our Centre (approximately \$6.4 million) and operational funding of \$950,000 per annum.

The Agreement ceased on 30 June 2014. In Western Australia, the state government has rolled over unspent funds to enable the five CFCs in this state to continue to operate until 31 December 2014.

Baya Gawiy is a key component of a long-term strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the Fitzroy Valley. It comprises an Early Childhood Learning Unit (ECLU) and a Family Centre which together provide integrated early childhood education, health and wellbeing services to children and their families. While we focus on providing services for Aboriginal children and their families, we also provide services to non-Aboriginal children and families.

The ECLU is the only early licensed long day care centre in Fitzroy Crossing serving communities up to 25km in each direction and a population base of approximately 1,500 people. The next closest services are Derby (257kms), the Halls Creek CFC (290kms) and Broome (397kms).

The ECLU provides a therapeutic learning environment for 38 children from 30 families. Twenty of these families work and eleven of these working families are Aboriginal. The parents and/or primary caregivers of these children provide essential services to the Fitzroy Valley communities including:

- Police
- Teachers at two schools
- The only permanent GP
- Half the staff at the Department of Child Protection and Family Support
- Centrelink
- Local pool and
- Local businesses.

The Family Centre provides a culturally secure, one-stop shop for health and well-being services for children and their families. Services provided include:

- An Op Shop which provides the only affordable clothing in town and whose proceeds help to resource the Centre
- Early literacy support for families through the Parents and Learning program
- An after school drop in club
- Four playgroups
- Vocational training in early childhood, nutrition and literacy support and
- Paediatric, infant, maternal and allied health services.

General Comments

Overall the Draft Report provides a thorough and balanced documentation of the issues across mainstream Australia. In particular we are pleased to see:

- the need for all primary schools to provide Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) where such a demand exists in recognition of the difficulties that the universal access to 15 hours of preschool per week imposes on working parents
- the recommendation to reduce the regulatory obligations of OSCH under the National Quality Framework (NQF)
- the difficulties being experienced by families in Canberra acknowledged.

We are, however, disappointed by the scant and under-informed attention paid to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. Further, the information on such services is distributed throughout the report without a consolidated examination of the issues. This approach compounds the invisibility of these services to policy makers. Of particular concern are the following:

- The little attention paid to Children and Family Centres, of which we are one of the 38 across Australia
- The assumption that for remote and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services mainstream funding should be the norm or that Centres could be made financially viable by means of short-term viability assistance. Mainstream funding is completely unsuitable for these services for both financial and practical reasons. Where CCB has been implemented it has proved extremely problematic. For our service, even if we were to pursue mainstream funding, it would only account for approximately 25% of our operating costs and would introduce institutional racism into our culturally secure facility, sabotaging the strengths and success of the Centre. These Centres are in localities where the market cannot, and is highly unlikely to ever, operate.
- While there is no funding cap placed upon mainstream services, those services with the highest operational costs and the most challenging social conditions are inexplicably subjected to a cap.

- The name Disadvantaged Communities Program uses deficit based language and also happens to have the same acronym as the Department for Child Protection in WA. This should be avoided.

Specific comments are listed against the applicable Information Requests and Recommendations.

Information Requests

8.2

Baya Gawiy is a key component of a long-term strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the Fitzroy Valley. Through it we have seen steady improvement in health and wellbeing of children through integrated service provision with clinicians. The Centre is a hub for integrated health services for infant, maternal and child health in the Fitzroy Valley.

Services Provided

Baya Gawiy provides the following services in an integrated service model.

The Early Childhood Learning Unit (ECLU) provides a therapeutic learning environment delivered by qualified teachers.

- The ECLU is the sole provider of child care in Fitzroy Crossing.
- It focuses on school readiness through a formalised program of school transition and developing the children's pre-literacy, pre-numeracy and social skills which are all essential foundations for a lifetime of successful learning.
- The ECLU is licensed for 50 children aged 0 – 5. The current staffing levels only enable it to care for a maximum of 25 children at any one time.
- There are 38 children currently enrolled (33 families) with 10 children on the waiting list.

The Family Centre provides a culturally secure, one-stop shop for health and well-being services for children and their families. Services provided include:

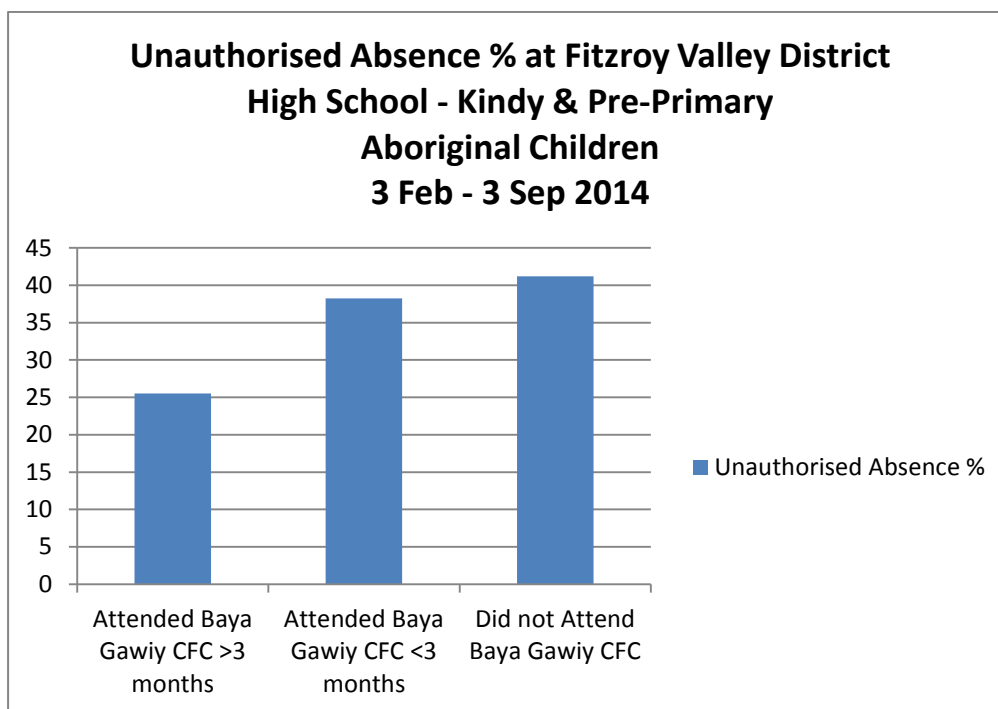
- An Op Shop which provides the only affordable clothing in town and whose proceeds help to resource the Centre.
- Early literacy support for families through the Parents and Learning program.
- An after school drop in club.
- Four playgroups.
- Vocational training in early childhood, nutrition and literacy support.
- Paediatric, infant, maternal and allied health services.

We have service delivery partnerships with:

- WA Country Health Services

- Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services
- Patches Paediatrics
- Telethon Kids Institute
- Fitzroy Valley District High School

The NAPLAN results and Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results for Fitzroy Crossing paint a bleak picture of the educational attainment of our children and their prospects. However, it is clear that Baya Gawiy is having a positive impact. Aboriginal children who have attended Baya Gawiy have better attendance at school than those who not. The longer they have been enrolled, the better their attendance. What is particularly interesting is that the Department of Education recognises that as children grow up their attendance rates tend to deteriorate. For those children who have not attended Baya Gawiy already having absences over 40%, their prospects are very limited.



Baya Gawiy’s model is a leading example of what is needed in Indigenous communities. The following testimonial has been provided by one of the visiting paediatricians whose team has been responsible for the establishment of a team care approach to infant and child health in Fitzroy Valley.

“Baya Gawiy is an incredible example of a community-led service that combines evidence-based early learning practice with Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing. The unique architecture of the building, combined with the natural materials used throughout and high proportion of local Aboriginal staff, make the facility inviting to local families and the broader community. The efficiency and professionalism with which Baya Gawiy is managed gives health and other service providers a reliable hub through which to deliver programs that are accessible and acceptable to community members. I cannot speak highly enough of Baya Gawiy, and believe it represents a model for early childhood service delivery and coordination that should be replicated in other sites.” Dr James Fitzpatrick, Consultant Paediatrician

12.4

As a service in a remote, Aboriginal locality we are faced with significant cost premiums over urban and regional centres. These are outlined below.

The cost of running the ECLU in Fitzroy Crossing is approximately \$1M per annum, or 91% of the total operational costs of the Centre. Of this amount, \$757,000 is for wages and on-costs and the remainder is operating costs including the provision of food, vehicle operating costs, repairs and maintenance and accounting and audit.

Staffing costs

We employ qualified teachers as room leaders and local Aboriginal staff as room assistants reinforced by a pool of casual staff. It is imperative to employ qualified early childhood teachers, not just those with a Diploma or Certificate III in Children's Services, to address the high levels of early life trauma, disabilities including Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and the almost universal global developmental delay of the children attending the ECLU.

Although we pay above award wages to attract and retain these staff, the packages we are able to offer are far below those available to similarly qualified staff at the Fitzroy Valley District High School located next door to our Centre. The qualified early childhood teachers at Baya Gawiy are paid a base salary of \$65,000 per year and are required to share the poor quality housing that is allocated to MWRC through the NGO pool (which could be taken off MWRC at any time). Teachers employed by the school with the same qualifications as the ECLU staff have access to highly attractive employment packages including salaries almost double that of the staff at Baya Gawiy, free, high quality housing and substantial leave entitlements.

We expend just over \$100,000 per annum on allowances (which includes housing) which are payable due to our remote locality and which do not need to be factored into the budget of urban centres.

Although we are licensed for 50 places, due to a lack of funding for staff we are operating at 50% of our capacity ie 25 children at any one time. To meet the licensed number of 50 children at any one time the Centre would need to employ a further 3 full time early childhood teachers and provide them with housing. Neither the funding nor housing is available to enable the Centre to operate at capacity.

If we were to proceed with self-funding these positions, the additional staffing alone (excluding housing) would cost \$197,862. Last FY we received approximately \$150,000 per annum in fees with a maximum of 25 children at any one time. The amounts per child vary from \$85 per week (for children whose household income is under \$35,000 per annum) to \$300 per week (\$176,000+). If we assume that by doubling the number of children from 25 to 50 we would also double our fees, we would attract a further \$150,000 per annum. This is \$47,862 less than the cost of the additional staffing (\$197,862 less \$150,000).

In addition, we would need to provide housing for each additional staff member. This housing is not currently available. Indeed, we are already in need of a further 3 houses to safely and appropriately accommodate our current staff. Three of the four houses currently occupied by Baya Gawiy staff could be taken off us at any time.

Operating Costs

The Regional Price Index (RPI) for Western Australia provides a comparison of location-based prices for a common basket of goods, with Perth as the basis for comparison with each regional location. The costs for Fitzroy Crossing are not included. However, overall the Kimberley region is 14.7% more expensive than Perth. Items that are especially relevant for Baya Gawiy are as follow:

Item	% Increase in Kimberley Region over Perth	Comment																						
Food	14.5%	<p>We consider this to be a <i>significant under estimation</i>. Due to poor quality of foodstuffs available in town, we procure as much produce as possible directly from Perth through the Bayulu Supermarket. The prices vary considerably from week to week. The following provides indicative prices:</p> <table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Item</i></th> <th><i>Price per Kg/Each</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Beef mince</td> <td>\$10/kg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Chicken mince</td> <td>\$20/kg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Chicken loaf</td> <td>\$30/kg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Potatoes</td> <td>\$3.80/kg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pink Lady Apples</td> <td>\$5.60</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Lemons</td> <td>\$10/kg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oranges</td> <td>\$6.67/kg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Green Capsicum</td> <td>\$10/kg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kiwi Fruit</td> <td>\$1.20 ea</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Zucchini</td> <td>\$2 ea</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Delivey from Bayulu Supermarket to Baya Gawiy is a further \$10 per order. Freight from Perth to Bayulu is included in the cost per kg.</p>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Price per Kg/Each</i>	Beef mince	\$10/kg	Chicken mince	\$20/kg	Chicken loaf	\$30/kg	Potatoes	\$3.80/kg	Pink Lady Apples	\$5.60	Lemons	\$10/kg	Oranges	\$6.67/kg	Green Capsicum	\$10/kg	Kiwi Fruit	\$1.20 ea	Zucchini	\$2 ea
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Housing	25.6%	Due to lack of housing, this cost is borne by Baya Gawiy. This also includes utilities which are payable by Baya Gawiy for our own operations.																						
Household Equipment & Operations	9.7%	Includes appliances, utensils, tools, cleaning supplies, services and communications which are all payable by Baya Gawiy for our own operations.																						
Transport	8.8%	We consider this to be a <i>significant under estimation</i> . The cost of fuel is approximately \$0.50 per litre																						

		(36%) higher than in Perth. We average 3,500km per month on our vehicle
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Our remote locality imposes significant transport and accommodation costs. In order to attend meetings and professional development (other than those held in Fitzroy Crossing), our staff need to travel 800kms return to Broome or 18 hours return to Perth. Costs include fuel, wear and tear on vehicles, flights and accommodation as well as time out of the Centre and backfill (if available). The average cost for an overnight trip to Broome is \$350 per person (dependent on accommodation available at the time). A three day trip to Perth would cost around \$1,400. Again, these costs do not need to be factored into the budgets for urban centres.

Draft Recommendations

5.2

We agree that integrated services are the most effective means of addressing the complex needs of Aboriginal communities. Baya Gawiy combines a high quality early childhood learning unit with a culturally secure, one-stop shop for health and well-being services for children and their families, the Family Centre. Services provided through the Family Centre include:

- An Op Shop which provides the only affordable clothing in town and whose proceeds help to resource the Centre.
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“Baya Gawiy is an incredible example of a community-led service that combines evidence-based early learning practice with Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing. The unique architecture of the building, combined with the natural materials used throughout and high proportion of local Aboriginal staff, make the facility inviting to

local families and the broader community. The efficiency and professionalism with which Baya Gawiy is managed gives health and other service providers a reliable hub through which to deliver programs that are accessible and acceptable to community members. I cannot speak highly enough of Baya Gawiy, and believe it represents a model for early childhood service delivery and coordination that should be replicated in other sites.” Dr James Fitzpatrick, Consultant Paediatrician

5.4

Agreed. Robust evaluations are required that address both quantitative and qualitative outcomes over the long term.

7.2

We wish to express considerable concern that the Commission has not taken into account the abundant evidence that demonstrates that the first three years are critical for the development of sound foundations for life. We do not support lowering educational standards required for this age group either in mainstream or Indigenous services.

7.3

Agreed.

7.5

Agreed.

7.7

Agreed.

7.8

It should be noted that the assumption that all Indigenous services are not covered by the National Quality Framework is incorrect. Baya Gawiy has recently undergone its rating and assessment and has been rated as meeting each of the seven quality

areas. Our service is delivering early childhood education and care services on par with any mainstream service.

7.10

Agreed. A single, national working with children check is preferred to ensure that relevant convictions in all jurisdictions are flagged as part of the process.

10.1

Disagreed. FBT exemptions and rebates provide the not for profit sector some ability to provide more attractive salary packages than would otherwise be possible. Such organisations are often financially challenged meaning that this is one practical way to attract and retain staff in a competitive environment.

12.5

The logic underlying this recommendation is fundamentally flawed. The assumption that for remote and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services mainstream funding should be the norm ignores both the financial realities of these communities and the ongoing nature of the high needs for which these Centres cater. The idea that Centres could be made financially viable by means of short-term viability assistance is for most Centres, unrealistic.

Mainstream funding is completely unsuitable for these services. For our service, even if we were to pursue mainstream funding, it would only account for approximately 25% of our operating costs. These Centres are in localities where the market cannot, and is highly unlikely to ever, operate.

In addition to the inability of mainstream funding to meet the financial needs of these Centres, the policy framework upon which CCB/CCR is based cannot be applied to these Centres without major impacts. Where CCB has been implemented it has proved extremely problematic.

The 42 Day Rule

Under CCB, each child is permitted 42 days absence from the child care centre they attend. At this point, CCB ceases and parents are required to pay the full cost of care. While there are circumstances under which additional days can be covered, it then requires supporting evidence which may not be realistic to obtain and/or which would place an additional burden on the already overworked doctors each time a child had a cold and required a medical certificate to explain their absence.

Insisting that Baya Gawiy introduce CCB would leave us and our families in an untenable position for the following reasons:

- Annual leave: in recognition of our remote locality, employees are provided with additional annual leave. This equates to 7 weeks or more per annum. This instantly brings families to 35 days of leave (7 weeks x 5 days). Under the 42 day rule, this only allows each child 7 days of sick leave which is completely unrealistic.
- Cultural obligations: for local Aboriginal families, the requirement to attend funerals (we are currently averaging 2 – 3 deaths per week in Fitzroy Valley) and to visit relatives in other localities mean that families would meet their 42 days extremely rapidly. At that point they would have to withdraw their children due to the cost impost, resign from work and return to Centrelink benefits.

Enforcing CCB/CCR would introduce institutional racism into culturally secure centres, sabotaging their strengths, local appeal and successes.

The combination of the above factors would mean that Baya Gawiy would be financially crippled. We would have to close our doors which would have a profound negative impact on the children we serve. Each day we witness the impact Baya Gawiy has on the cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of the children who utilise our service. Our ability to improve Indigenous childhood development would be completely undermined if Baya Gawiy and other Indigenous services have to close due to the ill-considered application of inappropriate funding models.

12.6

Block funding, where services are able to determine the allocation of the funding provided to line items without this being dictated by the funding body, provides necessary flexibility. This approach was used to fund the Children and Family Centres including Baya Gawiy and has worked well.

While there is no funding cap placed upon mainstream services, those services with the highest operational costs and the most challenging social conditions are inexplicably subjected to a cap. It is manifestly unfair that the services most in need of assistance are the only ones singled out for such treatment.

12.7

This recommendation appears to apply to children already within the child protection system. Taking an early intervention approach seriously, requires that services should be assisted to provide additional support to children at risk and to work with other service providers to support families and reduce the number of children entering the child protection system.

12.8

Fitzroy Crossing has been the focal community for research into Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). However, while prevalence rates are in the vicinity of one in four children in Fitzroy Valley, FASD is not recognised as a disability at this point in time. Hence, this recommendation will not provide any assistance to those communities blighted by this condition.

13.1

Block funding, where services are able to determine the allocation of the funding provided to line items without this being dictated by the funding body provides necessary flexibility. This approach was used to fund the Children and Family Centres including Baya Gawiy and has worked well.

The logic underlying the part of the recommendation relating to transition of block funded services to mainstream funding is fundamentally flawed. The assumption that for remote and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services mainstream funding should be the norm ignores both the financial realities of these communities and the ongoing nature of the high needs for which these centres cater. The idea that centres could be made financially viable by means of short-term viability assistance is for most centres, unrealistic.

It should be noted that the assumption that all Indigenous services are not covered by the National Quality Framework is incorrect. Baya Gawiy has recently undergone its rating and assessment and has been rated as meeting each of the seven quality areas. Our service is delivering early childhood education and care services on par with any mainstream service.

13.2

Agreed.