

Submission in response to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report

By: The Children of Gowrie SA Child Centre

In addition to providing a submission on behalf of the Gowrie SA organisation and its stakeholders, educators have endeavoured to capture the views and responses of a number of children currently attending the centre. Children's right to active citizenship in their lives and society can be supported when adults engage in sensitive consultation with them (Harris & Manatakis 2013). The views expressed below are the words of children interviewed by their educators, between the ages of three and five years. Their names have been changed to protect their anonymity. Drawing on the work of (Clark 2011) child consultations were carried out within the frame of a tea party, using the process to engage the children. The draft recommendations, findings and information requests were used to develop simple questions related to the children's experiences and asked by educators in a semi-structured interview style (Clark 2011). Their responses are recorded below with educator interpretation to provide context.

INFORMATION REQUEST 12.1: The Commission seeks views on the effect on families of having a per child subsidy rate that is not adjusted for the number of children in a family accessing ECEC services.

Of children interviewed, two children have families where two siblings are accessing long day care, and one child has a family where two out of three siblings are accessing long day care. As Kai and Marcus commented, "sometimes I go to Gowrie with my sister"; "I see my brother". All families make use of some form of government subsidy to support long day care fees, and for these particular families, a per child subsidy rate without adjustment would have implications.

DRAFT FINDINGS 5.2: Participation in a preschool program in the year before starting formal schooling provides benefits in terms of child development and a successful transition to school. Any decision to extend the universal access arrangement to younger children should be based on an analysis of the effectiveness of the existing arrangements in improving development outcomes and from evidence drawn from relevant Australian and overseas research. This would assist in determining how preschool should ultimately be integrated into the school based education system.

Basically: "Yeah, it's important to go to kindy before school" (Blake), agreed with by an enthusiastic "yes!" from Connor.

When children were asked, "What do you like about going to Gowrie SA?" play was a key theme. Marcus highlighted "I just like to play with toys and if there's something trouble I just say stop...when I play with the tea party with someone I say that's ok." And Kai and Chris valued "playing

football with Lachlan”; “I love playing with Lachlan in the soccer”. The importance of play for children’s development in the preschool years is widely recognised, and participation in preschool programs is a major vehicle for children to engage in play that is scaffolded and intentionally planned for under the Early Years Learning Framework (Leggett & Ford 2013). For these children, attending an integrated preschool program in a community child centre also provides them opportunities to develop their social competence, a key indicator of school readiness (Ziv 2013), as Fang Hua and Connor said, “Um I playing um Frozen with Bella”; “I like playing ghosts with my friend Chris”. Taehan agreed that “yes”, learning happens at Gowrie, like “Mathematics”, and according to Connor, how to take care of your wellbeing: “It’s hot in here. Hey so I took my hat off, and my jumper”.

When asked, “and Mason, do you learn things at Gowrie SA?” he nodded immediately and enthusiastically, “Yup”. “I learn playing with people...like, uh, things that are hard” (Mason). As a recently transitioned child into an integrated 3-5 year old and preschool room, Mason demonstrates the opportunities he has to engage with challenges, and engage in scaffolded learning with older children.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 12.9: The Australian Government should negotiate with the state and territory governments to incorporate their funding for preschool into the funding for schools, and encourage extension of school services to include preschool.

Children spoke about the experiences of their siblings who have entered formal schooling “but my sister goes to school” (Chris); “my sister goes to school right behind these houses” (Melissa). This highlights the importance of strengthening connections between early education settings and schools, whether they are preschools, long day care, or others, to support children’s sense of community and effectiveness of school transitions (Lee & Goh 2012). This is especially true as “when I grow up I’m going to go to school” (Connor).

INFORMATION REQUEST 5.1: What are the optimal hours of attendance at preschool to ensure children’s development, and what is the basis for this?

Generally the children interviewed attended 2-3 days of care a week, with all interviewed children who access preschool accessing 15 hours a week. Children’s reflections on how much time they spend at Gowrie SA, and what those hours of attendance mean to them, are as follows: “I come two-thirty-one” (Taehan); “I come two-thirteen” (Mason); “I only go once a week” (Christina); “er, one day a week, kindy’s two days a week” (Blake); “I think three days is good” (Connor); “but sometimes I stay home. But sometimes I go to Gowrie with my sister” (Kai). “Sometimes I see Bella not come” (Kai) [because] “she stay home” (Fang Hua). Lachlan explained “I go here two days”, and when asked “is that a lot or is that ok?” he nodded saying “that’s ok”.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.9: Dedicated preschools should be removed from the scope of the National Quality Framework and regulated by state and territory governments under the relevant education legislation...Long day care services that deliver preschool programs should remain within the National Quality Framework.

The recommendation that quality regulation of dedicated preschools and long day care services should be separately governed, has implications for the experience of children in particular circumstances. In conversation with Lachlan about his four year old sister he said “Jenna goes to kindy, and to here.” Currently accessing preschool split between dedicated preschool and an integrated preschool program, were the quality frameworks different for each site, Jenna may potentially experience disconnection or contradiction between the pedagogies and practices on each day she attends. Even for Blake, who attends “er, one day a week, kindy’s two days a week”; may experience a change in the continuity.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 6.1: The Fair Work Ombudsman, and employer and employee associations should trial innovative approaches to increase awareness about the ‘right to request flexible work arrangements’, and individual flexibility arrangements under the Fair Work Act 2009 and National Employment Standards; promote positive attitudes among employers, employees and the wider community towards parents, particularly fathers, taking up flexible work and other family-friendly arrangements.

Marcus initiated a comment that “I don’t go when I’m sick, so I was sick last night with a cough and then I was feeling better. And then um I like had a sore and um um we had a play and I just saw my brother.” The implication of this is that his parents (one of whom works full time and one of whom is currently on parental leave from work), require flexibility in their working arrangements to be able to stay home with him and his brother when they are sick.

In regards to DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.2, and 7.5, children spoke about the relationships they and their parents had with their educators.

Connor talked about “Jess, Jamie, Sophie and Rose” who are full time permanent educators in his room. Blake responded with “my mum doesn’t know Sophie”, and Connor reassured him with “but my mum knows Sophie”. When asked if their parents had lots of conversations with their primary educators, Connor and Blake said “Yes”, “Jess and Jamie”. This highlights the importance of ensuring that decisions around staffing requirements include creating conditions to develop relationships between educators and parents, and their children.

When discussing learning they engage in at Gowrie SA, Christina and Connor spoke about “my learning story folder”, and “I made a book to put on the tree with no leaves. But everyone else made their own books. We read the monster books first”. The quality of early childhood curriculums is supported by the presence of degree qualified teacher educators, who can ‘guide and move the profession forward’ (Stamopoulos 2012, p. 42). Christina and Connor’s planned experiences and documented learning were implemented by a team of educators with diploma as well as degree qualifications. Kai also responded to the question “are there children who need lots of support?”, with “how bout [child with additional needs]? We call the teacher when they need help”. This also highlights the importance of professional knowledge of children’s development from birth, and knowledge of inclusive practices in early education settings.

Thanks go to the children who contributed their thoughts, reflections and experiences to provide a snapshot of how the recommendations of the Productivity Commission can influence the early education experiences of children like themselves.

References

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