

Thursday 4th September 2014. This submission is made on behalf of the Committee at Wongan Cubbyhouse Inc.

Wongan Cubbyhouse is a not-for-profit, community run childcare service based in the town of Wongan Hills within the Shire of Wongan Ballidu and the Wheatbelt of WA with a population of approximately 1,127 (2011 census). Cubbyhouse was established in 1993 as an occasional childcare centre and has been growing from strength to strength. In 2007 we moved into a custom built childcare facility thanks to a great community effort and changed from occasional care to a long day care centre in August 2008. Cubbyhouse provides high quality care and education for children aged 0 to 5 years in a warm, safe and nurturing environment. The centre is run by a voluntary committee made up of parents and community members and runs at a maximum capacity of 19 children on any session (all age groups in the same room). We have a team of 7 staff and our opening hours are Monday to Friday, 8.15am to 5.15pm.

Cubbyhouse would like to comment on a few of the issues affecting the service within our area in relation to some of the Draft Report's draft recommendations and information requests.

In relation to Draft Recommendations 12.4 and 12.5 and Information Requests 12.4 and 12.6 of the Draft Report –

Government assistance focussing on a single child-based subsidy (ECLS) based on a reasonable cost of delivering ECEC for each age of child (deemed cost of service) is of some concern to us due to the complexities of calculating a suitable deemed cost especially if a single national estimate is adopted. Cubbyhouse currently charges \$70 per day or \$40 per half a day (8.15am to 5.15pm) or \$7.78/hr for a full day or \$8.89/hr per half day, however, due to a 20% drop in utilisation rates this year compared to 2013 we expect to make a loss of \$30,000 this year. Luckily, we have reserve funds saved from previous years in order to bear this loss in the short term. In order to break even at the current shift in our local child population ages and demand (17 children in the 3-5 age group moved on to Kindy preschool at the start of 2014) we need to charge \$80 per day or \$8.89/hr. This is already above the median deemed cost of \$7.53 per hour (based on 13/14 data) as mentioned in the draft report.

Also, we currently receive approximately \$50,000 per year from DEEWR Sustainability Funding in order to make our service viable and so the proposed viability assistance available in 3 out of 7 years would mean that our fees would need to be higher again in order to break even in years that viability assistance was not gained, possibly to a point that demand was reduced due to parents not willing to pay a higher fee/higher difference between the deemed cost of service and the fee we would have to charge.

In relation to the Commission being asked to

“... examine ways to enable ECEC to be more flexible to suit the needs of families including those with non-standard work hours, or with disadvantaged children, and those who live in regional areas.”

Recruitment and Retention has been and still remains very challenging in our area with little or no response to advertisements for Educators, uncompetitive wages and more recently the NQF regulations mean that 2 out of 3 of our Educators on shift at any one time have to be Diploma qualified or actively working towards. Encouraging study has been difficult but is imperative at our centre as we operate with 3 out of a total of 5 educators to

make up our staff ratios on any day. Thus, on top of all staff having a minimum of Cert 3, two out of the three educators on shift have to be Diploma qualified (or actively working towards) in order to meet the NQF reg that at least 50% of staff ratios have to be Diploma qualified. Currently, we have a qualified educator (centre co-ordinator) studying for Advanced Diploma and a Bachelor of Education - Early Childhood, two educators studying Diploma on- the-job traineeships, one educator studying Cert 3 and our relief educator joined us studying Cert 3 in Education Support. From January 2014, our service has had to work under a waiver in order to allow any combination of our 5 available educators (4 part time, 1 full time) to work together, essential for covering for sickness, training and holidays. Due to our repeated failed attempt to get relief educators our administrator has agreed to complete a Cert 3 on- the- job traineeship for emergency cover but this will only help us if the remaining two educators are Diploma qualified once our waiver expires. The situation will be made far harder next year when the NQF regulations will require full staff ratios during lunch breaks too (Reg already postponed once).

Volunteer Dependency Cubbyhouse is governed by a voluntary committee comprised of parents utilising the service. Getting volunteers to join the committee has been an ongoing issue at every AGM for many years but has definitely worsened in the last several years especially for the office bearer roles. This is because the workload has increased in recent years and legal compliance and HR issues are overwhelming to volunteers. Since our centre's licensee is the committee our centre cannot open without one, this has become such a concern to Cubbyhouse we have actually considered alternate management options. In fact we were due to be taken over by a private not-for-profit organisation from January 2014 but they withdrew after an 8 month consultation process stating that we were too much of a risk. In order to reduce the workload of the volunteer committee, members of Cubbyhouse voted at a Special Meeting to employ a part-time Manager as of April this year. Hopefully, this will encourage more parents to volunteer to join the committee each year as the committee's workload has reduced dramatically.

'One Stop Shop' Some sort of online site with all relevant information required by ECEC providers would help regional, community run centres (information such as health – immunisations and infectious diseases, OSH, employee relations guidance, food safety, NQF guidance, policy development guidance etc). However, this site must be kept up to date and be reliable as lots of online sites relevant to ECEC are out dated and contain old versions of documents. Currently, a lot of sites have to be navigated in order to obtain the information required such as ACECQA, Department of Local Government and Communities, Department of Commerce, Department of Health, Early Childhood Australia, Regional Development Australia (RDA) etc....

Facilitate Regional Areas to Set up Networks - Regional community run child care centres can sometimes lack certain necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to deal with ECEC and HR issues and find it difficult to get relevant professional development without travelling to Perth or to the nearest larger regional centre. Facilitating regional groups such as RDA Wheatbelt to set up regional early childhood networks could enhance leadership and development opportunities in collaboration with other early childhood services.

In summary, Cubbyhouse welcome the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning, look forward to your final report and hope that issues being faced by ECEC providers in regional areas are fully taken into consideration to ensure that services can continue to provide sustainable, high quality childcare services to their surrounding communities.