

Thursday, September 11, 2014

I would like to make comment on behalf of Byron Bay Preschool regarding the Productivity's Commission's Draft report.

Byron Bay Preschool is a not for profit preschool. It provides 120 families in a regional area with high quality Early Childhood Education for children between the ages of 3 and 6 years of age. The organization has been running for more than thirty years. BBPS values and supports the wellbeing and uniqueness of its community. High quality play based education, cultural competency, inclusion of children with additional needs and support for vulnerable families are at the core of our service provision. All children are taught directly by Early Childhood university trained teachers.

Whilst we agree with the continuation of the universal access funding to preschools and the move towards aligning preschools with EDUCATION rather than CARE we do not agree with removal of the NQF for preschools. Although it is evident that a high proportion of not for profit preschools are rated as higher than Long Day Care Centers, it has given preschools the framework and measurable incentive towards continual improvement in service delivery. After years of striving towards NQF standards it seems pointless except from a cost saving perspective to drop it. It has taken three years of inspired leadership, professional development and change in management to motivate educators and Approved Providers to embrace the NQF standards. BBPS supports keeping the NQF.

BBPS supports the notion of being associated with Education, however we employ early childhood teachers who have the same qualifications as those teaching in schools and as such if we moved to 'education legislation and funding 'would expect, and deserve, pay parity. As such the 'deemed cost' for running our service should include funding to support this.

Byron Bay Preschool believes that children and families should be at the heart of this inquiry, and not for the easy of profit based centers. Compromising quality such as the watering down of qualification requirements for children less than 36 months should not be compromised for the sake of profit making.

Quality, affordability and accessibility remain important to us at BBPS, and for this reason we DO support the streamlining of CCB and CCR to the Early Care and Learning Subsidy. However we are concerned that throughout the review there is no mention of support or recognition of the value of parents staying home to care for their own children. It seems remiss of the commission to have left out this component of quality care for babies, toddlers and young children. By not subsidizing mothers or fathers who stay at home to care for their children de values this most important element in early childhood education. This aspect of traditional child rearing has been left out over the years of debate and we feel strongly that parenting at home should be supported as a valued option to centre based childcare when the child is not from a vulnerable family, in their last year before school or from a disadvantaged background. A parent staying at home should be considered as an alternative model of care and education.

BBPS supports OHSC services being available to preschool aged children and agrees with integrated service delivery. In our service there are a number of parents who move their children to preschool from a long day care service due to the education they receive in the year/s before school at our service. Indeed many attend both services because of the perceived difference. However this can create

Thursday, September 11, 2014

hardship for these families. Funding OSHC programs for preschoolers will support these families with these values and needs.

The dilemma of the current funding formula not to fund three year old children unless on a health care card also causes us great concern. With a limit of available four year olds in our community having three year old children access our service is imperative for our viability. Two years of preschool also supports best outcomes for children with additional needs, as identification of needs and early intervention strategies to support optimum outcomes is severely compromised if attendance at preschool before school entry is for one year only. Whilst we support children in their last year of school being prioritized, we do need to fill available spaces with three year olds. Keeping the centre viable and fees low enough for families to access is a problem to our organization. We believe preschools are licensed for children three to six years and as such should be funded as such.

Accessibility, affordability, flexibility and high quality early childhood education for ALL children, remains our focus at Byron Bay preschool. We hope that our feedback contributes to the commission's final report.

Victoria Handley

Nominated Supervisor / Director

