

## Friends of Sole Parents Inc



ABN 31617276600

**05/09/14**

### Submission to Productivity Commission re: Childcare and Early Learning

Friends of Sole Parents Inc is a registered charity and specialist service in NSW which supports sole parents and their children. A major preoccupation of sole parents is the family's financial survival, so affordability and flexibility of child care is key to this group being able to undertake study and training in addition to finding and remaining in paid work.

As a vulnerable group in the workplace, sole parents are more likely to be experiencing job insecurity, contract work, shift work, casual status and changeable work conditions. In many cases, due to prioritising their children's welfare and balancing paid work, they have limited workplace choices. It is critical to address the gaps in child care provision in order to support them to reduce the likelihood of further marginalisation and improve their capacity to make a rich contribution to society.

Having read the draft report, we would make the following recommendations:

- That the Commission should examine the child care needs of sole parents in more depth, particularly in light of the changes to income support and the transfer of sole parents to Newstart when their youngest child turns eight.
- That increased access to flexible child care hours should be prioritised and accorded appropriate funding.
- That the practice of collection of bonds equivalent to several weeks' child care fees by some child care centres be looked into, as it represents a discriminatory barrier for workforce participation and an ongoing financial strain to low income families.

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- That the Commission consider extension of the existing JET Child care subsidy to cover a longer period during job seeking, say 3 months when sole parents are seeking work, instead of the current 20 days. Also extend JET to cover when any sole parent does paid or unpaid work for a period of one year after entering or re-entering the workforce, as is currently the case within certain designated LGAs.

We remain at your disposal for consultation with regard to any matters relating to child care and sole parents in our community. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute on behalf of sole parents.

Julie Forster

President

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