

Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Learning

From: Committee of Management, Monash Community Family Cooperative, Melbourne

Monash Community Family Cooperative (MCFC) was founded in 1973. Its ethos has always been to provide high-quality care for infants and young children at a low cost, with particular attention to the best ways to service the needs of the Monash University Community.

MCFC is a not-for-profit organisation. Children's families join as shareholders/members and the Centre is run by a Committee of Management (CoM), comprised of volunteer parents/carers. Day-to-day operations are overseen by a Co-ordinator.

The Centre employs 41 staff and has 165 children, ranging from 12 weeks to five years. It has nine rooms, an extensive outdoor area and runs an indoor-outdoor, play-based program. There is a government-funded kindergarten program included in the care. For three years, the centre has been accredited as high quality.

The CoM has long had a principle of encouraging staff members to pursue higher qualifications and now has three educators with bachelor qualifications, and another two to complete their degree soon. An above-minimum number of staff are diploma-qualified. While this policy has implications for costs, it ensures that children are cared for – and educated by – people with the best possible qualifications and training, and with people who are deeply committed to the industry. (The Committee is presently in discussions about how to balance these rising costs and benefits.) As a result, in an industry with a notoriously high rate of staff turnover, the Centre has been remarkably stable in its staffing. This, of course, makes for a better work environment for all staff, and the flow-on effect is that children receive consistent care from the same people from week-to-week, month-to-month, and year-to-year.

Given the commitment of all people involved in, and employed by, MCFC, the Committee of Management is strongly opposed to any policies that would diminish the standards of education required to work with young children. In fact, we would recommend increasing still the requirements for qualifications. Of course this would mean rising costs, but better wages would only improve the quality of service provided. We therefore recommend the Productivity Commission consider reporting on ways to better subsidise childcare in order to offset the increasing costs.

In urging you all to consider this possibility the Committee relies on a wealth of research, both in Australia and overseas, regarding the importance of high quality pre-school education in achieving good long-term outcomes in education. In short, children who are taught by well-qualified educators in their early years, do better at school. They adjust to school more readily and show a higher standard of achievement throughout their schooling.

Of course the quality of care relies not solely on the level of education of the staff. In consultation with the educators, the Committee of Management also recommends that suggestions in the draft report *not* be implemented: namely, reduced numbers of staff to children; and ratios that are averaged out over a day or week. As the

educators at MCFC point out, infants and young children are not known for their patience, and they need care consistently, including during staff lunch hours, and at every moment of the day.

Finally, as a not-for-profit organisation, I would also ask the members of the Commission to reject the possibility of removing the exemption of Payroll Tax for not-for-profit centres. At MCFC, this change would result in cost of nearly \$100,000 per year, or \$4 per day per child, which is a significant increase.