

Public Inquiry
Productivity Commission
Early Childhood Education and Care

To Whom It May Concern;

Re : Personal view and experience into Childcare education and care - SA

I write to the Early Childhood Education and Care Inquiry from a concern grandfather that has two grandsons who were recently both attending the Fleurieu Occasional Care childcare facility in Noarlunga, South Australia. I have previously mentioned my concerns regarding the closure of the Fleurieu Occasional Care – Childcare centre in Noarlunga , South Australia, to the Federal Minister for early childhood education, Minister Aly. The Early Childhood Education and Care Inquiry were one of the recipients of my email to the Federal Minister, Aly's department. That correspondence has been reordered by the Inquiry as a submission document.

The Fleurieu Occasional Care facility has a long-standing history as an occasional childcare service that has been operational for 33 years in Southern Adelaide. The centre provides an essential service for childcare, as well as catering for disability children. The centre supports and caters for the essential needs of families who are employed on shift work and those families who only require occasional care. One major benefit is the reduce fee arrangements in provides that supports the low the socioeconomic area of Noarlunga.

I would like the opportunity to elaborate on this and add further information from a recent correspondence from a representative of Minister Boyers office in SA. The correspondence to the Minister outlined my concerns as a grandfather, who's grand children attend the childhood centre. This centres facility and infrastructure has been designed and staffed to cater for the needs of a disability child as well as have the flexibility to cater for shift work parents at an affordable cost.

I have had recent discussions from a staff member from the office of the SA Minister for Education, Training and Skills, Minister Boyer. The staff member was replying on behalf of Minister Boyer to my correspondence in relation to the Childcare centre closure, (correspondence attached). The staff member was emphatic to my concerns and fully understood my family's situation and inherent dilemma of looking for alternative childcare service. but admitted that his level of expertise in this particular issue was limited. This did not give me great comfort or confidence from a political department that is tasked to oversee childcare services in SA. I was informed that such matters regarding funding support is determined and assessed by the Federal Minister for early childhood education, Minister Aly's . However, I would have assumed that such urgent matters would be forwarded by State Ministers to the Federal Minister for viewing and consideration. This however does not seem to apply as a political practice.

The following points was raised in a discussion to the staff member of Minister Boyers office;

1. The management of Fleurieu Occasional Care childcare facility in Noarlunga, South Australia have endeavored to seek financial support from Federal and State Ministers for the last three years.
2. SA Labour ministers, who have state and federal seats when in opposition were prominent advocates to promote the Fleurieu Occasional Care proposed submissions to the Government of the day to seek sustainable funding to maintain service delivery. From the centres management conversation, since Labour has inherited power, no correspondence or discussions have been forthcoming after several request from the centres management to those political members.
3. The centre has been operational for thirty-three (33) years in Noarlunga and provides a unique service that places priorities to the needs of low socioeconomic community members. The centre places the needs of its community members by charging affordable fees.
4. The centre caters for shift working parents, who need to both work in the current economic conditions of the economy to sustain a living. The childcare 'Occasional' Care approach allows parents to have that flexibility that is essential for them to be able to work.
5. The last 3 years, there has been considerable growth in childcare facility being built around the Southern area and this reflects a Supply and Demand need by parents to put their children into childcare so as to work. Conversely, we now see an established Childcare centre being closed down after a such a long and established period of operations.
6. It has been commented that an audit was conducted and it was not economically viable to sustain operations. However, the cost associated with maintaining a service with a collaborative working arrangements with relevant government departments to maintain a existing 33 service that offers a tailored service that support vulnerable families and disability children, pales insignificantly to the cost of families needing to find new services that may exist outside their zone The scenario of parents paying higher childcare services or a parent needing to leave work, only adds to the strains of the growing welfare workforce.

7. Disability children require a sustainable and constant environment and routine and constant changing childcare facilities will create behavioural issues that ultimately impacts on families.
8. Waiting list for parents may require traveling across many suburbs for vacancy and this adds to time management schedule to ensure children can attend the childcare facility and parents attending work.
9. I can understand it the centre had asbestos or there was any significant environmental concern or if a major road was being build, however, this is not the case and the short notice just before Christmas in 2023 of closure was to ensure all available attempt by the centres management was exhausted before passing on the sad news to parents.
10. Through my support documents, I made reference to an example of SA government financial support for a private business. The SA government handing over one million dollars to a private hospital in Henley Beach to maintain its operation. This is a profit business that is given priority to maintain an essential health service but a non-for-profit childcare centre does not even get the decency or courtesy to receive any consideration to maintain their essential service.

I have attached my email correspondence and the dates and time will reflect the processes of my attempt to seek and receive any form of constructive and valid response. My major point of concern is that I feel it is just brushed under the carpet or those Ministers do not fully understand the impact this has on vulnerable community members.

As of the 25th January 2024, the Fleurieu Occasional Care childcare facility has closed it doors. A sad indictment of how an important facility that serves the vulnerable and needy succumbs to such a tragic end.