

# Productivity Commission Inquiry – Early Childhood Education and Care



## **Submission from Clarendon Children's Centre Co-operative Ltd: The benefits of actively supporting the early childhood workforce.**

This submission is focused on the benefits that result when ECEC teachers and educators are actively supported by their employment conditions, using the example of a small, not-for-profit long day care service – Clarendon Children's Centre. These benefits and improved outcomes are experienced by children, families, early childhood teachers/educators, the Centre and the wider community.

### **HISTORY & CONTEXT**

Clarendon Children's Centre (CCC) is a small (40 place), not-for-profit, community-owned long day care service located in South Melbourne, Victoria. Since its opening in 1988, CCC has worked in a thoughtful, systematic and sustained way to maintain a positive workplace culture. CCC has employed deliberate strategies, over many years, to ensure that we are an "employer of choice", reflecting a high level of respect and regard for the skills and professionalism of early childhood teachers and educators and the value we place on creating a positive workplace culture for all employees. As a result, we are able to recruit, and retain, skilled educators (even at times when sector surveys report increasing difficulty in recruitment) and children and families benefit from a highly qualified and motivated team of educators.

In 2007, CCC became a signatory to the LHMU & VCSA Children's Centre (Victoria) Multiple Business Collective Agreement 2007 which provided some improvements on the pay and conditions included in the prevailing Children's Services (Victoria) Award.

In 2010, CCC registered its first enterprise agreement with the Fair Work Commission and this original Agreement was subsequently revised and renewed in 2014 and, again, in 2019. A variation to the [Clarendon Children's Centre Co-operative Enterprise Agreement 2019](#)

[CCCCEA 2022](#) was approved in 2022 and this current Agreement provides several significant benefits to all employees.

CCC operates with a team of ~20 permanently employed teachers (Degree-qualified) and educators (Cert III or Diploma-qualified) working in both full-time and part-time positions. Educator:child ratios are generally better than those required by regulations – for example 4 teachers/educators working with 11 children aged 0-2 years and 3 teachers/educators working with 18 children aged 3-5 years. Almost all our current team are qualified at Diploma level or higher and we have Degree-qualified early childhood teachers working with all age groups (including children aged 0-2 years). Teachers and educators work consistently in designated roles throughout the year and there are several staff who have been employed at CCC for 5+ years (including 2 who have completed 20+ years). CCC rarely uses casual or agency staff to fill short-term vacancies and always recruits directly for new teachers and educators (not through recruitment agencies).

CCC is supported by the City of Port Phillip which provides a Quality Subsidy calculated at 4% of total salaries (including on-costs) expenditure. CCC does not pay commercial rental but, instead, pays two different levies to the Council – in FY 2023 these will total ~\$104,000.

## **CCCCEA 2022**

The current [CCCCEA 2022](#) provides a range of “over award” benefits to employees:

- Pay rates that are:
  - 10-20% higher than those provided in the Children’s Services Award;
  - up to 10% higher than the Educational Services (Teachers) Award and the Professional Childcare Standard Agreement; and
  - comparable to, or higher than, the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers & Educators Agreement.
- Full-time employees receive 5 weeks paid annual leave p/a (pro rata for part-time employees).
- Full time employees receive 15 days paid personal leave p/a (pro rata for part time employees) and this leave is cumulative from year to year.
- Superannuation is paid at 13% and will increase to 15% by July 2025.
- After 12 months service, Paid Parental Leave (3 weeks) & Paid Return-to-Work Leave (3 weeks - following a period of parental leave)
- Distributed leadership model which offers the opportunity for educators to take on specific leadership responsibilities, supported by rostered non-contact time and increased hourly pay rate.
- Options for full-time (over a 9-day fortnight) or part-time employment.
- Generous non-contact time (for planning, evaluation & documentation of children’s learning) and professional learning opportunities.

## **OUTCOMES**

### **Teachers and educators:**

- Teachers and educators have secure employment in an environment that demonstrates high respect and regard for their skills.
- Non-contact time and professional learning opportunities support professionalism and best practice.
- There is a stable team of 3-4 educators in each room (the 'core' teams) with a separate 'support' team who work across the whole Centre to cover annual leave, personal leave, program planning and other non-contact time. We seldom (almost never) need to call upon agency staff to cover educator absences.
- All core team educators (who have primary responsibility for the planning, provision and documentation of children's learning and development) have regular rostered non-contact time (4-6 hours p/week) including one afternoon p/week for program planning together in their teams. This encourages a collaborative, professional approach to curriculum planning and evaluation, supports reflective practice and ensures that educators have the time and opportunity to meet the highest quality elements of the National Quality Standards.
- There is a career path available where higher qualifications and/or responsibilities are awarded higher rates of pay and supported with additional resources and non-contact time.
- Higher Superannuation rates, Paid Parental and Paid Return-to-Work Leave and opportunities for part-time employment are all especially relevant in a sector where the workforce is almost entirely female.
- CCC teachers/educators have received 3% annual pay increases every year for the past 12 years, plus pay increases for years of service, additional qualifications and/or additional responsibilities.
- CCC teachers/educators report high levels of work satisfaction and feeling recognized as professionals.
- Educator retention is high and absenteeism is low.

### **Children:**

- Continuity of care means that children can build secure relationships with their teachers/educators and these relationships provide a strong foundation for children's ongoing learning and development.
- The opportunity for educators that meet regularly and together as teams provide more opportunities to discuss consistent approaches and the needs of individual children. This results in children experiencing increased emotional security and support.
- Children benefit from the expertise of a highly educated, skilled and committed team of teachers/educators who can identify and meet children's individual needs.

### **Families:**

- Families form trusting partnerships with educators and have confidence that their children are receiving high quality education and care.
- Daily fees at CCC are currently \$145 p/day – this is in the low-moderate range of daily fees in our local community.
- Currently, families can access up to 4 weeks p/year of “holding” fee (50% of the daily fee) when children are absent. This supports families to take holidays with their children throughout the year.

### **Clarendon Children’s Centre:**

- While we have employed several new educators in the past 12 months, CCC maintains a strong, stable educator team with 8 educators (45%) who have been employed at CCC for more than 5 years, including 5 who have worked at the Centre for 10+ years.
- CCC is fully staffed with (almost entirely) Diploma- and Degree-qualified educators and teachers.
- Staff vacancies, when they do occur, are filled relatively quickly and without needing to pay high recruitment agency fees.
- High retention rates and low absenteeism provide cost savings in recruitment and relief staff expenditure.
- CCC has been awarded three consecutive “Excellent” ratings from the national regulator, ACECQA – one of only five services in Australia to have received the highest possible rating three times.
- Salaries, on-costs and other employee costs (eg. professional development, employee assistance program) represent ~86% of total expenditure.
- CCC successfully meets all regulatory requirements.

I am happy to discuss any aspects of this submission further, if required.

Linda Davison

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