

To the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Productivity Commission,

I write to you to address my concerns of the future of Early Childhood Education in Australia. I am 23 years old and have been working in Early Childhood for the past 4 years. I am also the parent of a 3 year old boy. During that entire time, I have been studying. First, my Certificate III in Children's Services, then my Diploma, and currently I am halfway through the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education at Deakin University. These qualifications have benefitted my work greatly. It has changed the way I view children, their capabilities, how I can best care for them and teach them to be responsible, active citizens of the world. I believe I have instilled a love for learning in many children, preparing them for life-long learning.

As I describe the culture of my workplace I must make it clear that the people who I work with are *educators*. This is a title of respect as set forth in the *Early Years Learning Framework*, professionalising the field. I believe that the outside world does see us as 'glorified babysitters' when using the term childcare worker. It does not adequately describe the nature of the job, nor the qualifications we need to receive- asthma and anaphylactic training, first aid certifications, working with children's check, as well as the minimum qualification of Certificate III in Children's Services. All of this just to step foot in the workplace! And rightly so.

I am currently employed in a private 33 place Long Day Care connected to and managed by a university in metro Melbourne. The majority of the children that attend are children of students and lecturers- many who come from overseas to study and improve their families' circumstances. The future of these children's lives depends on their access to affordable, quality children's centres.

My workplace is open between 7.45am to 5.45pm. Being in close distance to the university, many parents find these hours suitable. The centre caters for children from birth to age 6. It runs a kindergarten program delivered by a degree qualified kindergarten teacher. I have witnessed many children commence care as an infant and transition through the rooms until they are all grown up and ready for school.

The educators become a part of their family. These educators come well-trained and experienced. All of the permanent room staff are Diploma qualified, this far exceeds the NQS requirements of half the educators 'on the floor' being Diploma qualified.

Being such a small centre, families have been able to connect with and form relationships with the people who care for and educate their children. Recently, the university had informed the centres that there will be a review of the services with the possibility of privatisation as they are not 'core

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businesses'. I attended at parent meeting on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> October and observed the anguish of the parents who were in attendance. There is a strong campaign against the privatisation of the centres, with 615 signatures currently urging the university to reconsider its options. The petition can be viewed at [www.ipetitions.com/saveourchiudrenscntres/#](http://www.ipetitions.com/saveourchiudrenscntres/#). In this petition it states 'we as parents put a huge amount of trust in our staff-trust they have earned-to help raise our children'. Clearly, these parents value the high quality of care and education their children receive.

My vision for the future of Early Childhood Education is that where all educators are highly qualified and encouraged to further their qualifications. I believe one of the best ways to do this is through educators receiving a fair wage- this will also make the field are more attractive option and will ensure the people best suited for the job are caring and educating our nation's most precious resource. I believe that in order to achieve this, governments must subsidise educators' wages, therefore parents will not be asked to pay for more than they already do. Early Childhood should be an extension of the school system and afforded the same respect and resources as schools do. Early Childhood settings should not be a profit-making business. I believe Australia needs to work toward these standards to ensure the thriving if our nation. We all know the importance of the early years, invest in them now and less money will be spent on prisons, health care services and welfare payments. The aim should be to begin from birth to assist children to reach their full potential in life- I know this is many educators' aspirations and I believe the government should meet us in our goal.

Research clearly tells us that high-quality programs make a world of difference. I will continue to pursue my goals in ensuring the best for the children in my settings, they deserve nothing less. In the meantime I will not stand down from advocating for higher wages for the people who work in the field, and higher standards to be met when providing the environment for these children. 'Do the right thing' and improve the quality of life for many young Australians.

Yours most sincerely,

Shannon McLeod

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