

Productivity Commission Submission for Isis Family Day Care

Our Family Day Care service is a small service in Childers, Queensland. We currently have 10 educators providing education and care for over one hundred local children. There is also a long day care centre and a kindergarten in our town, but many families choose Family Day Care for their children because of all of the topic headings below. I would like to highlight the ways in which Family Day Care already caters for the area's you are looking to improve or provide to the Australian community.

Flexibility

Isis Family Day Care is able to offer families flexible hours to suit their needs. There is no set opening and closing times, so educators can cater to the requirements of the clients. It is not unusual for educators to start work at 5am in the morning for farm workers, and/or finish at 7 or 8 pm for hospitality workers.

Some educators offer weekend, evening and public holiday care and can cater to shift workers rosters. (Although we do not have a great deal of shift working families at this time)

The lower ratio of adults to children also means that the routines, the experiences offered to children and the overall structure of the day is flexible depending on the children attending on the day.

Accessibility

In our town we usually have a pretty even number of educator vacancies to match education and care needs in our area. In other words we have a short waiting list, but most people are able to access the care they need. And the wait for availability is not usually too long.

I believe that money put into helping new family Day Care educators to get started, would be much more cost effective than building of new child care centers or Kindergartens. This would boost accessibility to quality care quickly and more affordably.

Affordability

Family Day Care educators charge by the hour, not by the whole or half day sessions. This can be a real help to a family financially, as they can tailor their booking to what they can comfortably afford. In other words they could just book a 5 hour day, instead of a 7 or 8 hour day if it is not needed for work purposes. By the hour bookings often allow working families to stay under the 50 hour Child Care Benefit threshold, which helps with affordability as they are not paying full fee for hours over 50.

Considering the amazing low educator to child ratio, Family Day Care is extremely affordable.

Quality

This is one point that is missing from the enquiry paper. Which is interesting as it is arguably the most important point. When we talk about education and care services, the quality of care is essential to the wellbeing of children, which in turn leads to well rounded, ready to learn, productive members of society.

We believe Family Day Care is overwhelmingly of a high quality and this has been shown in the Assessment and Ratings process results which have been carried out so far.

Isis Family Day Care received “Exceeding National Quality Standards” across all 7 areas of the National Quality Standards and compared to other education and care services, the percentage of Family Day Care Services who have received Meeting and Exceeding is high.

The collaborative and relationship based nature of Family Day Care lends itself to quality care, more than services with large numbers of children together in one room.

I have personally worked in child care centers for many years and after being involved in Family Day Care, I could not go back to that style of care. Family Day Care is the education and care choice for a huge amount of families and this is growing all the time.

Productivity Commission Issues Paper

What role, if any, should the different levels of government play in childcare and early childhood education?

I would like to see government (any level) contributing to the costs for Family Day Care educators to set up their homes for Family Day Care. There used to be a grant available for this and it was a great way for people to afford setting up quality environments at home.

Coordination Units, which provide ongoing support and supervision to educators in their homes, should also be funded at a higher level to maintain high quality care in these settings.

Would extending the length of the school day have a significant impact on children's learning and development outcomes or parents' workforce participation decisions? What other impacts would such changes have?

I have read and seen evidence of some Asian countries that have long school days for children, and have also seen reports about the impact this has had on children's stress levels, mental health issues and high suicide rates. Do we want that for our children?

I read and agree with the submission made by Maggie Dent when she says that we should be "pushing up" with our play based learning frameworks into schooling years. So many children suffer in classrooms as they are not catered to if they can't learn in the same way as others. Play based or children's interests learning curriculums allow children to explore things they are interested in which in turn means they are more likely to learn.

Instead of school work and "formal learning" being pushed down into early childhood, we should be pushing up!

The Commission is seeking information on:

- how well the needs of disadvantaged, vulnerable or other additional needs children are being met by the ECEC sector as a whole, by individual types of care, and in particular regions*

Family Day Care fulfills huge needs in rural areas where a large centre may not be viable, but education and care are still a need.

The ratio of one educator to only 4 children makes Family Day Care a fantastic choice for children with disabilities. And also for children who are vulnerable as often a large group situation is overwhelming and frightening to these children and the “home” atmosphere and close relationships offered by Family Day Care cater to these children’s needs beautifully.

the extent to which additional needs are being met by mainstream ECEC services or specialised services

Unfortunately despite the fantastic opportunities for children with disabilities within education and care services, particularly Family Day Care, their inclusion is interestingly, often hindered by Inclusion Support service processes, with excessive red tape, paperwork and inflexibility. This can become a barrier to educators taking on the care of these children. Many Family Day Care educators are enthusiastic to educate and care for these children, as they are for any other child, but the beaurocracy may change that if it is not reformed.

Family Day Care is already flexible, accessible and affordable. With some financial support, the industry could fulfill our country’s education and care needs and become the most common and best suited education and care setting in Australia.

I believe the quality of care in Family Day Care settings to be above that of large group settings as it has been proven that lower ratio’s contribute to better outcomes for children. And isn’t this this most important point here???

A focus on the Family Day Care model could solve lots of issues both for government and for families.