

## Submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry

We have 136 years of experience amongst the staff at this centre. Seven of the eleven educators have only worked at this centre. Two educators have undertaken most of their experience at this centre. Collectively we have witnessed great change over the years.

Gone are the days when we were seen as “just babysitters”. Brain research has shown the huge amount of learning and development that occurs in the first 5 years of a child’s life. “Early experiences have decisive impact of the architecture of the brain, and on the nature and extent of adult capacities.” (Shore, R. 1997).

As early childhood practitioners we have a major influence in the lives of the children in our care. We see the importance of play in the teaching role that we play with children and take great pride in being part of those precious years. We also acknowledge that providing quality early childhood programs can be exhausting both mentally and physically for educators.

To enable young children to learn and develop it is critical that they connect and form secure relationship with the adults in their lives. This can be achieved by creating a safe space where all participants can engage with each other to create a sense of cohesion and shared understandings. Therefore the adult/child ratios are very important. This centre employs three educators to each of the three units over the busiest part of the day. The goal of educators is to have positive interactions with individual children throughout the day. The extra educator in each unit enables time for the children’s interests, skills and learning to be documented and shared with families.

We use these extra staff to cover educator absences, thus eliminated the need to employ relief staff who are unfamiliar to the children and their families. The centre does not find this higher than regulations staffing a cost burden. The centre’s fees are on a par with other centres and less than some locally. We have a variety of staff qualifications across the centre ranging from a 4 year trained early childhood teacher to a trainee studying for a certificate 111 in Children’s Services. We meet the 2014 staffing requirements.

Shore, R. 1997 Rethinking the Brain: New Insight into Early Development: Families and Work Institute, New York, pp18.

The centre is heavily utilised with an average of 98% occupancy annually. There are 22 families on our waitlist for the Baby Unit (6 weeks to 2 years), two for the 2-3 years and three for the 3-5 years groups. Families tell us that they found our centre from word of mouth. They say they are attracted by the central location, big shady playgrounds, provisions of lunch and the initial interaction they have with the centre staff.

We do have a turnover of staff from time to time as in the beginning of 2012 when we had staff leave for various reasons. The Director and at least two members of the volunteer management committee spent many hours recruiting new staff for the 2-3 years group only to have them leave after a short time and this went on for a few months. The children had to adjust to new adults regularly and parents let us know that they were not happy about so many staff changes and said their children were adversely affected by insecurity and showed a reluctance to attend. This in turn added negative pressure to the families.

When we advertise a vacant position in the local newspaper we have a very slow response and a very limited number of applicants with the needed qualifications. Employment agencies have a limited knowledge of the qualifications and skills required for early childhood professionals.

We feel that professional wages would be an incentive for educators to stay in the field, be more motivated to seek higher qualifications, which would in turn ensure quality and parent confidence.

As advocates for young children and their families the educators at this centre support the objectives of the National Quality Framework. Having one regulatory authority that is responsible for both the legislative regulations and quality standards reduces the administrative burden for services. The Early Years Learning Framework challenges educators to focus on outcomes for children and it helps them identify individual children's developmental needs, strengths and interests. It has made us aware of the need to question our daily practices and reflect on what we do in our work and why we do what we do. It is often a challenge to make the time to complete documentation daily.

Highly qualified educators with special skills and attributes are needed in the early childhood education and care sector to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of the children who attend. Child care has become an essential service in the community. We feel improved wages will attract the quality professionals needed.

This submission is submitted on behalf of all the employees at this service. We hope it gives some insight into the childcare sector and informs the inquiry about quality education and care for young children and their families.