

Our service is situated in a regional city and extends to a remote area in the west, and rural residential areas in the north and south. We utilize between 115 - 125EFT. Our furthestmost educators live 140kms away from the coordination unit office. Coordinators conduct support visits on average once a month and promote the service at community events whenever possible. We also work in partnership with employment agencies in the remote area to recruit more educators as demand for quality child care there outstrips supply. At present we are maintaining a status quo of educators in that area. The service has to meet the cost of travel to this remote area as it cannot meet the high minimum mileage requirement to qualify for RTAG (fuel subsidy).

Our service bought into sponsorship several years ago to secure an injection of much needed business acumen at the top level. Our sponsor understands the mechanics of FDC and provides expert advice and professional support/development to help us make sound decisions to sustain our service and continue to provide quality care to families within our community. In return for this progressive governance we pay management fees that must necessarily (despite a reduction in staff hours and some successful grant applications) be passed on in part to families by way of increased levies. Levy increases resulting in widening "gap" fees are undoubtedly contributing to fees becoming unaffordable for families.

Our service predominantly provides both full time and part time care to working and studying families between the hours of 8.00am and 6.00pm. We have 6 educators willing to work flexible hours but demand for this sort of care in recent years has fallen away. We believe that cost is a prohibitive factor because the last 3 requests the service received for weekend/overnight /Public Holiday care did not proceed. The feedback from each family was that the care was going to cost too much. Out of core hours care in our service has always been charged at a higher rate thereby attracting a higher "gap" fee.

The amount of time spent in child care can have a detrimental impact on children's learning and development if a child is left there for too long. All the research into this subject points to children (especially babies) benefitting more from shorter rather than longer hours so I don't think it's a good idea to increase preschool programs or school hours.

We have embraced the minimum qualification requirement for educators in FDC. The entry level for an educator wanting to join our service is a Cert 111 in Children's Services (or equivalent) and anyone without a qualification can only start an orientation program after they have achieved competency in 3 modules of the Cert 111 and undertaken 30 hours of work experience in FDC. This "raising of the bar" is attracting applicants who genuinely want to achieve best outcomes for children. The drawback is that these recruits have to outlay quite a lot of money before they can earn any money and this is proving a barrier too far for applicants who would dearly like to make a career out of FDC and stay in the sector for a number of years.