

engagement with the local Filipino community. The small size of Darwin, which perhaps contributed to the sense of community, ranked as the second most important reason for staying (70%). Those who enjoyed the small city living also spoke of Darwin's multicultural character and friendly people. Family ties and stimulating work ranked *ex aequo* as second most important reasons for staying (70% each). Good relations at work ranked third gaining 56% each. Education for children was far more important as a reason for staying (44%) than as a reason for coming (7%). Pay conditions were acceptable only to 29% and these respondents were aware of different rates paid by different centres.

When asked about how long they intended to live in the NT, the majority intend to remain permanently or longer-term (85%). Reasons were primarily family-related. The remaining 15% intended to stay for a couple of years. Interviewees were also asked if they had plans or wanted to move in the next 12 months. Only 11% agreed and reasons included meeting visa/contract conditions and following family if they were moving. As 81% of the interviewees anticipated working in the ECEC sector in the NT in the next five to ten years, it can be surmised that nearly all of those who planned to stay would also remain employed in the industry for this period of time. The majority of the remaining 19% who were not planning to remain in the ECEC sector in the NT intended to work in another sector in the Territory.

Current Resident Status The majority of the interviewees (74%) were already Australian citizens. The remaining 15% were permanent residents and 11% were temporary residents. All interviewees who arrived as temporary residents (a) intended to apply, (b) had already received, or (c) had applications for permanent residency in Australia in progress. This illustrates their long-term civic commitment to Australia and corroborates the finding that the majority intended to reside and work in the NT long-term.

Discussion

This research has revealed that more than 80% of the interviewed overseas-born ECEC workers were committed to staying and working in the ECEC sector in the Territory long-term. This should be welcome news to NT policy makers, regulators and the community because the overseas-born make up nearly one-third of the workforce. If this was confirmed for the entire Territory, this would extend the good news. Their stability suggests that any further investment in these workers will be of benefit to both them and children in early education and care.

The reasons for their stability are complex. First, the majority of the respondents have come to the NT to maintain their immediate and extended family connections rather than use their ECEC-related overseas qualifications and experience. The majority of the respondents have become ECEC workers after arrival. This is likely because formalised childcare arrangements are either non-existent in many countries, or not as well developed as in Australia, and looking after children is part of the assumed duties of females in the family.

Second, the social environment and geography seemed to play a role. The integrity of familial and other social links in Darwin, the proximity to the Southeast Asian region of origin of many participants and similarities to its lifestyle and climate kept the respondents in Darwin. They seemed well settled there. Enjoying Darwin's cultural diversity and openness of people, and contributing to it as in the case of the Filipino-born, suggests that the respondents had a sense of belonging to the community. These results concur with other research on labour forces of migratory origin in regional and peripheral areas, including on nursing and dental professionals in the NT, which has demonstrated that being embedded in the local community

can greatly contribute to retention (Garnett *et al.* 2008:55,62,87,88,90,120; Hall *et al.* 2007:7,10,13,15,16; Wulff and Dharmalingam 2008:154–9).

Third, wages in the ECEC sector are universally low, giving no incentive to relocate interstate to advance one's career. Retention in low-paid sectors such as human services is sometimes explained by workers' intrinsic motivations that keep them there despite low wages (Manlove and Guzell 1997:147,148) and participants' love for their work with children in this study would confirm this proposition.

Fourth, the majority of the overseas-born ECEC workers held permanent positions, which may have also contributed to their retention. International research on the ECEC workforce has demonstrated that a supportive work environment including good managers and co-workers (Russell *et al.* 2010:204,205; Phillips, *et al.* 1991:57,64,67) and job satisfaction (Manlove and Guzell 1997:159,163) contribute to staff stability. This current study has confirmed the international findings by showing that a supportive and caring workplace and overall job satisfaction were among the top reasons for the participants to stay. They felt integrated into their workplace, demonstrated by appreciative comments on good team work, helping one another and looking after each other. Helping and approachable Centre Directors further contributed to positive perceptions of the workplace. The sharing of cultures as part of the job and the supportive learning environment for both staff and children has likely added to job satisfaction.

The Northern Territory Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011–2021 recognises that the NT faces a significant gap between qualified workforce supply and demand, with a high proportion of employees with no qualifications or qualifications below the level required by the ECEC reforms (Northern Territory Government (NTG) 2011:3). Findings from this current study can at least partially reassure policy makers, regulators and parents. It has been shown that more than half of the overseas-born ECEC workers in the NT already hold a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and 70% are either interested in furthering their qualifications or already studying, usually towards ECEC-related qualification. This suggests that this population is on track to meet the new minimum qualifications standards.

Recommendations

These relate largely to supporting overseas-born ECEC workers to achieve the minimum and higher level qualifications. One area where a scope for action has been identified is the capacity of these workers to read and write in English. Although the Census and interview data have shown reasonably high speaking abilities, the latter have revealed less confidence in reading and writing in English. These results attracted considerable interest from the project's Reference Group meeting, which comprised representatives of the sector, training providers and the NT Department of Education and Training. Anecdotal evidence shared at the meeting supports this finding. Reading and writing skills are indispensable to meeting employment and training needs, in particular the higher formal education standards now in place. Overseas-born ECEC workers elsewhere in Australia may have similar needs. The Government should consider funding to address such needs.

The evidence in this paper offers further recommendations on how some of these workers could be supported to achieve the required education standards.

1. Those who still need to obtain Certificate III may need encouragement to achieve it and Centre Directors need to continue supporting staff to upgrade their qualifications.

2. Overseas-born ECEC teachers are likely to be underrepresented in the NT, suggesting that greater efforts should be made to assist interested and able staff to attain these qualifications. This aligns with the Commission's observation in the *Issues Paper* (2013:26) that the sector will need more early childhood teachers in the future.
3. If a group prefers to complete all study for a particular qualification with the same provider, discussions between ECEC centres and training providers should ensure that multiple employees from the same centre are able to undertake formal training simultaneously in order for continuing mutual support in the workplace. As the Commission is interested in finding out how providers address their skill needs and how effective such initiatives are (2013:27), this could be a useful suggestion to put to childcare centres.
4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) needs to be considered as one of the avenues to help experienced workers achieve formal recognition of their skills.

In order to improve attraction to the sector in the NT, the following solutions could be considered:

1. Opportunities for securing permanent contracts could be promoted to both overseas and native-born potential staff as an attractive aspect of employment.
2. A possible better chance for the overseas-born of reaching a management level in the NT rather than elsewhere in Australia could be used as a motivator.
3. Attracting young native-born and overseas-born Territorians could also include additional scholarships to study for an ECEC qualification at CDU (the preferred provider of the majority of the respondents), work experience through the VET in Schools programs at NT senior schools (at Certificate II/III level), and career counsellors introducing graduates to careers in the ECEC sector.

REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. ABS. 2003. "Census of Population and Housing. Population Growth and Distribution Australia 2001." Cat. no. 2035.0. Dated 16 June 2003. Accessed 17 April 2013. [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/Lookup/D9379A6FFA24473CCA256D470005CC1C/\\$File/20350_2001.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/Lookup/D9379A6FFA24473CCA256D470005CC1C/$File/20350_2001.pdf).
- Carson, Dean, Prescott, C. Ensign, Rasmus, O. Rasmussen, and Andrew, Taylor. 2011. "Perspectives on 'Demography at the Edge'." In *Demography at the Edge: Remote Human Populations in Developed Nations*, edited by Dean Carson, Rasmus O. Rasmussen, Prescott C. Ensign, Lee Huskey and Andrew Taylor, 3–20. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Cross, Christopher T., Taniesha, A. Woods, and Heidi, Schweingruber. 2009. Editors. *Mathematics Learning in Early Childhood. Paths Towards Excellence and Equity*. Committee on Early Childhood Mathematics, National Research Council. Washington D.C: The National Academies Press. Accessed 12 May 2013. http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12519.
- Garnett, Stephen, Kristal, Coe, Kate, Golebiowska, Helen, Walsh, Kerstin, Zander, Steven, Guthridge, Shu Qin, Li and Rosalyn, Malyon. 2008. "Attracting and Keeping Nursing Professionals in an Environment of Chronic Labour Shortage". Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press.
- Golebiowska, Kate and Dean, Carson. 2009. "What Is the Role of Net Overseas Migration in Population Growth and Interstate Migration Patterns in the Northern Territory." *People and Place* 17:40–48.
- Golebiowska, Kate, Alicia, Boyle and Denise, Horvath. 2013. *Employment and Mobility Trajectories of Overseas-born Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workers in Darwin, NT*. The Northern Institute Research Brief no 201308. Accessed 12 December 2013. <http://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/the-northern-institute/Research-Brief-ECEC-Final.pdf>.
- Golebiowska, Kate, and Alicia, Boyle. In press. Professional Integration and Belonging of Immigrant-born Early Childhood Education and Care Workers (ECEC) in Darwin, Northern Territory (NT), Australia. *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*.
- Hall, Deborah, Stephen, Garnett, Tony, Barnes, and Matthew, Stevens. 2007. "Drivers of Professional Mobility in the Northern Territory: Dental Professionals." *Rural and Remote Health* 7:1–17. Accessed 19 May 2013. http://www.rrh.org.au/publishedarticles/article_print_655.pdf.
- Manlove, Elizabeth E. and Guzell, Jacqueline R. 1997. "Intention to Leave, Anticipated Reasons for Leaving, and 12-month Turnover of Child Care Center Staff." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 12:145–167. Accessed 26 May 2013. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885200697900107>.
- Moon, Jennifer and John, Burbank. 2004. *The Early Childhood Education and Wage Ladder: A Model for Improving Quality in Early Learning and Care Programs*. Policy Brief, Economic Opportunity Institute, Seattle WA. Accessed 14 May 2013. http://www.eoionline.org/early_learning/reports/ECELadderModelImprovingQuality-Jul04.pdf.
- Northern Territory Government (NTG) 2011. "Northern Territory Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011–2021". Accessed 27 November 2011. www.det.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/22146/NT_EarlyChildhoodWorkforcePlan.pdf.
- NT Treasury (NTT). 2012. *2012–13 Budget. Northern Territory Economy*. Accessed 18 September 2012. <http://www.treasury.nt.gov.au/PMS/Publications/BudgetFinance/BudgetPapers/I-BP06-1213.pdf>.
- Phillips, Deborah, Carollee, Howes, and Marcy, Whitebook. 1991. "Child Care as an Adult Work Environment". Accessed 16 June 2013. *Journal of Social Issues* 47:49–70. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.1991.tb00287.x.
- Productivity Commission. 2013. *Childcare and Early Childhood Learning. Productivity Commission Issues Paper*. December 2013. Accessed 12 December 2013. http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/130462/childcare-issues.pdf.
- Russell, Elizabeth M., Sue, W. Williams and Cheryl, Gleason-Gomez. 2010. "Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support and Antecedents of Turnover". *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 24:195–208. Accessed 27 June 2013. DOI: 10.1080/02568543.2010.487397.
- Taguma, Miho, Ineke, Litjens and Kelly, Makowiecki. 2012. *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Finland 2012. OECD Report*. Accessed 14 May 2013. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/49985030.pdf>.
- Wulff, Maryann and Arunachalam, Dharmalingam 2008. "Retaining Skilled Migrants in Regional Australia: The Role of Social Connectedness". Accessed 19 June 2013. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 9:147–160. DOI: 10.1007/s12134-008-0049-9.