

As an Educator working within the Family Day Care sector I would like to report on the problems that I see in the system with regards to parents trying to access care for children with additional needs.

Children with additional needs can be eligible for an Inclusive Support Subsidy ISS which recognises the additional care and attention that these children require to enable them to have a high quality of care. This subsidy has two tiers, and once you qualify for the subsidy you have access to an excursion worker to assist with the children on excursions away from the home.

The problems that I perceive are as follows:

The length of time for the application to be processed

There have been cases where taking 6 months to be processed, and I know of a current case (which should be straight forward as the child has Downs Syndrome) which is still in the system at 4 months. This means that either the care doesn't commence until the subsidy is in place or the Educator isn't receiving support and recognition that they deserve. They're outside the system.

The subsidy is with the educator and not with the child

ISS is approved for the carer and not the child. This means that if a child goes to another Educator while the primary Educator is on holidays an entire new application has to be filled out. The whole process starts again Even though the condition has not changed.

ISS for only one child

You can only get the subsidy for one child in care. You may actually have two or more children who qualify for ISS in care at the same time, but you will only be paid for one child. This makes it difficult to find someone willing to do the care if you have two children with additional needs within the same family.

Inconsistencies within Government Agencies

KU, Inclusive Directions, Family Day Care and Federal Government Departments all seem to have different information.

Recently, after several years, an Educator had a renewal for ISS not allowed. This was even though the circumstances of the family and the children (yes two children in the same family with additional needs) had not changed. The guidelines hadn't changed just someone's interpretation of them. During this case we were told by:

Inclusive Directions - ISS will not be approved for non-working parents using ISS using family day care.

KU - ISS is not going to be approved for both Long Day Care **and** Family Day Care for non working parents

Federal Government - Early Childhood Initiatives (Susan Leys Office) -that it has nothing to do with whether a parent is working or not, it's to do with respite care. In relation to the Federal Government Office the letter referred to policy which wasn't relevant to our case, told us to inform the parent to get in contact with our Business Centre, which when I did on their behalf had no idea while they would be referred to, and also gave out a number for the Business Centre which hadn't been used in two years since the office had moved. It took 3 months to get a reply to the initial query without any acknowledgment of having ever received the initial contact.

Discouragement of application

Family Day Care co-ordinators tell Educators that there is no point in putting in applications as there is no funding.

Inconsistencies in applications

I know of cases where some applications for ISS have been approved and identical circumstances the care has been knocked back.

Conclusion

Since KU took over the administration of ISS applications the number of educators receiving this subsidy has more than halved. This means that either the educators are not receiving the support that they desperately need, or alternatively the children are not receiving the care.

It is hard enough to find Educators qualified and willing to look after children with Additional Needs, without the Educators being treated by all that we are ignorant incompetents. Instead of being offered the subsidy we are informed that we can have training and brochures, even though many educators have years of experience working in this field.

Please feel free to get in contact with me about any of the above.

Karen Hack
Family Day Care Educator
Central Metro Scheme