

Submission to the Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

I have been the teacher at a small rural Victorian preschool for the past eighteen years. Three of my four children attended this preschool before I began working there. During these years I was the Honorary Treasurer of the preschool. A parent committee has successfully managed the preschool since its inception. The service delivers a three year old program, three hours per week and a four year old program, fifteen hours per week. For many, many years the local government Maternal and Child Health Service operated from the preschool premises as does a current, parent lead playgroup. Our small preschool has a critical role in “connecting and supporting” the families of young children in the local community.

I have seen many changes to the early childhood education system during my time at the centre. Achieving the very best outcomes for young children has always been the catalyst for such change. With the introduction of the National Quality Framework and National Quality Standards; parents and staff have, for the first time, evidence based documents to guide and support our pursuit of “excellence” in early childhood programming. Our centre has embraced the framework and has recently been assessed as “exceeding” the standards. The children at my centre are fortunate to have highly qualified and dedicated staff; caring, supportive parents; small group size and great facilities (provided by enthusiastic, fundraising parents).

Of course, every child in Australia should have access to such a high quality early childhood education service. The National Quality Framework identifies two critical determinants of quality: caregiver qualifications and lower staff to child ratios. It is imperative that the Australian Government requires (and supports) all care and education services to “up skill” their staff and lower staff to child ratios.

The provision of facilities and infrastructure should never be dependent on a parent group’s capacity to fundraise. An engaging, learning environment should be fully funded by government.

Educator wages and conditions should be such that the attraction and retention of “quality” staff is possible. These wages should also be fully funded by the government.

EVERY AUSTRALIAN CHILD MUST RECEIVE A “FREE” EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Gayle Davis