

**Public Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning**  
**Submission by Ms. Kelly Hutchison (nee Laing)**  
**30 January 2014**

The Commission has been asked to specifically report and make recommendations on:

- The contribution of childcare to workforce participation and child development;
- Current and future need for childcare in Australia, particularly given changes in work patterns, early learning needs, childcare affordability and government assistance;
- The capacity of the childcare system to ensure a satisfactory transition to schools, in particular for vulnerable or at risk children;
- Alternative models of care, including those overseas, which could be considered for trial in Australia;
- Options - within existing funding parameters - for improving the accessibility, flexibility and affordability of childcare for families with diverse circumstances; and
- The impacts of regulatory changes, including the implementation of the National Quality Framework, on the childcare sector over the past decade.

**The contribution of childcare to workforce participation and child development**

Unfortunately double income families and single parenting have becoming more common in today's society. Increasing costs of living and housing; with wages and income not meeting those costs impact on families. It forces both parents to participate in paid work outside the home. Sometimes as a result the flow on affect means a breakdown of the family unit resulting in single parent families.

The pressures of day to day living; including maintaining a mortgage and/or rental payments, a home and working full-time can impact on your relationships.

Both my children have been in full-time childcare since 5 months of age. A choice I would have much rather not make but found necessary to meet living costs and mortgage repayments.

It would seem more and more children and parents alike don't the opportunity to have one parent or the other care full-time for them until they reach school age. There seems to be an increase in the expectation of grandparents to care for children unpaid as working parents are stretched financially and unable to meet the rising costs of paid childcare.

The positive of childcare means that for many, many parents that want to return to work as soon as possible are able to. This in turn enables them to retain their skills and education in their chose field and position. The Paid Parental Leave Scheme has assisted this choice for working parents.

## **Current and future need for childcare in Australia, particularly given changes in work patterns, early learning needs, childcare affordability and government assistance**

I believe a single income family is few and far between today; unless you have families that have had a property 'gifted' to them, their deposit for their mortgage 'gifted' or they are living in subsidised housing of some sort {defence, social, community} to name some. Rental prices are just as high as mortgage repayments in many instances.

Our society is becoming more and more a 24 hour cycle; meaning childcare from 7:30am-6:00pm is for the most part insufficient in meeting the needs of working families that require assistance with care for their children.

Childcare needs to be provided on a 24 hour cycle to cater for shift workers and other families that work outside a '9-5' setting; particularly families that have no extended family or friends in their community that can assist them with the care of the child(ren) when they are working outside those hours offered by childcare.

The childcare industry has become highly regulated over time and in the first instance would be the preferred option over family day care, nanny or relatives as there is staff to cover for sick leave, annual leave and/or emergencies that can occur when staff need to take time off. In the family day care, nanny or relatives scenario there is no 'back up' or alternative than the parent(s) taking leave from work if they are unable to care for the child(ren) in times of sickness, holidays or other emergencies.

## **The capacity of the childcare system to ensure a satisfactory transition to schools, in particular for vulnerable or at risk children**

KU Children's Services has a philosophy that children learn through play. Both my children attended KU full-time and were 'ready' for kindergarten. My son attended 2 years at a private childcare after KU. My older child started school and it was no longer viable to have my son attend KU with my work start/finish times. The private childcare was opposite my daughter's primary school; enabling the double drop-off for a single full-time working parent. The private childcare provided a 'school readiness' program for the 3-5yo room.

I believe some 'readiness' prior to school; opening lunch boxes, drink bottles, taking jackets/jumpers on & off, using scissors, being able to blow your nose, toilet independently, wash hands, basic alphabet recital, basic number recognition and recital, being able to write your own name should be 'learned' prior to entering kindergarten.

I took great care to use all occasions for learning and teaching both my children, for example when dressing 'right arm first; in the hole', walking up the stairs; 1, 2, 3; down the stairs, shopping; '3 red apples' etc.

I also requested no more day sleeps as my children got closer to entering kindergarten.

St Margaret Mary's Primary School in Rydalmere I believe has THE best transition to primary school program. They have a half day where parents attend with the child(ren) the December before the child(ren) is to begin kindergarten. There they are observed and assessed by the teachers. In the new year of the year they are to start the child(ren) attend 3 mornings over 3 weeks; I think 9:00am-11:00am so they experience morning assembly and recess. The fourth week is a full day. I believe this gives the child time to adjust to their new educational setting and time to transition.

## **General comments/observations**

When my children first entered childcare it was a blanket 30% rebate regardless of income. It was not means tested. At that time I thought this was an unfair system; particularly for families that were on much higher incomes. I believe the changes that have been implemented over time have only assisted in the childcare industry to charge inflated daily rates for care. At one point it was almost \$90 per day per child before the rebate and that was back in early 2000's!

I believe the changes to the CCB & CCR in being paid directly to the service provider has enabled families to manage their budgets and cash inflow, however some families such as mine find the quarterly lump sum works for them as it coincides with quarterly bills, annual car registration and school uniform supplies and purchases in January and July of each. Having that flexibility with how your CCB & CCR are paid to you or to your provider is essential to the flexibility of families and their use of services.

I believe the National Quality Framework to be a good step in the right direction, much the same with when it was first introduced to the childcare sector some years ago. It gives parents, carers and other users of services some peace of mind that they are being monitored; there are standards and quality controls. I believe it gives service providers a benchmark to aim for to meet expectations and as well as measure themselves against others in the industry.

In an ideal world most parents would choose to stay at home with their child(ren) until they are ready to enter primary school. Unfortunately for so many varied reasons this is not always possible. Increasingly though it would seem financial reasons are a major factor.

Having more flexibility with a 24 hour cycle would enable more parents to negotiate flexible working arrangements and/or their working schedule if they are self-employed. It would also offer more flexibility to their staff who also have family and carer commitments outside their paid work in childcare.

Having after school care and organised holiday programs for up to 16 yo olds would give full-time working parents {like me} some peace of mind to their child(rens) safety and structure to their school and/or holiday time. Maybe providers such as local Councils could re-name them to 'home work hubs' or 'teens drop in'. Something along those lines where staff can encourage and assist students with homework and other related school curriculum in after care times. The organised pick-up van could still come to the school as they currently do with primary schools they service if the aftercare is off-site {not school site}.

During holidays organised day trips similar to that offered already; Ten Pin Bowling, cinemas etc. but in addition; Jambaroo, Wet 'n' Wild, Luna Park, Go Kart and other organised holiday activities such as Festival of Sydney could be incorporated into the programs. Obviously at cost to the parent(s).

Childcare and afterschool hour's carer's income and pay scales need to be aligned with the carers learning, experience and educational abilities. If carer's have teacher and/or several years of life and/or work experience; they should be remunerated as such. It does not seem right or just that a Carer with no tertiary qualifications and/or life and work experience can earn the same dollar amount per hour or more as someone with tertiary and/or higher educational qualifications to teach and care for our children.

I would be happy to supplement this submission with a verbal one should the Inquiry deem it necessary.

Kind regards, Kelly Hutchison