

To Whom It May Concern:

I have been working in the childcare industry for over 20 years, for many years as a Professional Nanny, and after completing first the Certificate 3 in Children's Services and then the Diploma in Children Services, I am now working as a casual staff member in a number of different child care centres in Adelaide. I worked for a year in East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory in a private centre, before moving to Adelaide.

I am currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) externally through James Cook University, and am in my third year of this degree. As I am studying externally, and still have to work full time, I hope to finish the degree by the end of 2016, taking the total time for the degree to 5 years. This is as a result of receiving Recognition for Prior Learning for the Diploma in Children's Services, which took approximately 12 months off the length of the degree.

I believe there are many issues affecting the child care industry that the Productivity Commission has the opportunity to address in its report, resulting in better quality care and education for children, families and staff involved in the industry.

The first major issue is the current educator to child ratio that childcare centres currently operate with. Having worked in the Northern Territory when the ratios changed, I saw the benefits of lower ratios for children under 3. Ratios for children under 2 were reduced to one educator to four children, and ratios for children aged two to three years were reduced to one educator to five children. In a room that has up to 20 children aged two to three (known as Toddlers), there are at least four staff. In my personal opinion, this is still not low enough, as it does not allow for quality interactions, but it is considerably better than the ratios in South Australia that are currently one educator to eight children or two educators to twenty children.

I believe that the number of children within each room should be reduced, for example, limiting the number of Toddlers in a room to an absolute maximum of 15 children, with at least 3 staff. Some of the centres that I currently work in have 20 toddlers in a room with only two staff, and because of the 'under the roof' policy, one staff member can be left alone with 10 children in the toddlers room (and this happens on a regular basis), if there are 10 children in the three to five age group. This means that if an educator has to change a nappy, prepare a bottle, or retrieve something from a store room, they are unable to fully supervise all the children, which results in children potentially getting hurt.

Two year old children are becoming more independent, but do not have the cognitive skills to understand consequences, and as a result, the number of incident reports is considerably higher in this age group and constant supervision is essential, especially when dealing with up to 20 children at a time. I believe that the 'under the roof' policy is dangerous, does not allow for quality care, and should be abolished, ensuring that, along with reduced ratios, there are at least two staff members in the room at all times.

The other major issue affecting the industry is the low level of staff wages. As someone who has 20 years experience working with children, as well as the Diploma in Children's Services, I can make more money working at K-Mart as a night filler than I do working in an industry that I am experienced and qualified to work in. Completing the Bachelor of Education is a major goal of mine, and the main focus of my professional career at this time, but after spending 5 years, and over \$40,000 on study, it is simply not feasible for me to work in child care once I have my degree, because the wages are so low compared to working as a teacher in a school. In an industry that is demanding that their staff are more qualified and experienced, there is no incentive to stay in childcare, working for minimum wage. I love my job, and am passionate about what I do, but I also have to be realistic, and look for a job that will allow me to pay the bills. This saddens me no end, because, as I said, I do love my job, and I find working with

children both rewarding and challenging. Unless the industry starts to appreciate it's workers, the experienced, qualified and quality staff will continue to leave the industry. I believe that if the government is encouraging people to return to work, they need to subsidise childcare fees further to the same level of the public school system. Without this, it will be impossible to maintain quality care for our children, and without quality care, parents will not have incentives to return to work.

Providing quality Professional Development is also something that needs to be improved in the childcare industry. Although I am completing the Degree, I am not eligible for any assistance of any sort towards my University fees or study costs, and while I am eligible for Austudy, it is not a realistic option for me, as the fortnightly amount barely covers my rent. I believe this is an industry wide issue, and subsidies need to be continued for people studying their Certificate 3 or Diploma in order for them to be able to meet the requirements of qualified staff. I also believe the standard of training available needs to be increased dramatically, as there are many Registered Training Organisations that provide the courses required, but these courses do not provide realistic opportunities for staff to enhance their experience.

I really hope that the Productivity Commission produces a report that addresses these issues, otherwise, the children that are require childcare services will continue to suffer.

Yours Sincerely,

Jane Webb