

30 January, 2014

Education and Care Submission from South Burnett Family Day Care

Our family day care service is situated in rural south east Queensland, servicing a district with a population of approximately twelve thousand people. We are a regional service of Family Day Care Association Queensland, which is our licensee. We currently have eleven (11) educators registered with us, providing child care and outside school hours care to one hundred and ten (110) families.

Educators in our service identify the following primary reasons for choosing to work in family day care: earning an income whilst caring for their own children, being able to negotiate the service around the educator's lifestyle and family needs, and being able to provide quality care for the children of families with whom they establish (and generally maintain) a close personal bond often for years after the care has ceased. Our educators provide flexible and affordable access to families in our community by: providing care outside normal working hours, providing before and after school hours care, and negotiating with families to meet their particular needs.

Families in our service identify the following primary reasons for choosing our family day care service: children are educated and cared for in a small group and in a homely setting, their children receive the personal touch from their educator, meaningful relationships are built between families, their children do not get as sick as when they attended long day care centres, families get to negotiate the hours of care, and emergency care is more readily available.

Question 1. Workforce participation and

Question 2. Current and future need for childcare in Australia – work patterns

Educators and families in our service report that, due to the number of parents engaged in shift work, it is easier to negotiate care for their children with a family day care setting than with a long day care centre. This applies to short term emergency care and non-standard hours requirements as well. This has assisted numerous parents, including many mothers, (in particular nurses, teachers and legal personnel) the opportunity to return to the workforce sooner. This is good for our rural region because local business owners report from time to time that available qualified people can prove to be hard to find, and difficult to attract to the country from the city areas.

Point of discussion arising from this – Because of shift working parents, and also because many families live in one town but work in another, before and after school age care is a critical factor in the needs of our region. However the availability of educators to travel to pick up and drop off children to school or other venues is limited. This is partly due to the requirements of annual certified vehicle checks and child restraint legislation. The argument that these costs are a tax deduction has not encouraged more educators to provide travel. Our suggested solution might be that perhaps government could be brought into discussion about providing funding in regional areas, for all services within a certain allocated region, to purchase and share the use of a certified bus to transport children to and from school from whichever ECEC service they are using, thus providing better likelihood and accessibility for children to access each family's service of choice.

Question 3. Our capacity to ensure a satisfactory transition to school

Our family day care educators have an intimate knowledge of their communities and the schools within our region. This knowledge includes the ethos of different school, as well as the special support that families may need to access during the early years of the children's development e.g. speech pathologist, occupational therapist, behaviour management therapist. Because of this intimate knowledge, we believe that our service enhances the early assessment of learning difficulties and smooth transition of children to school. Furthermore, our educators support transition to school through individual planning for children's interests and strengths, learning portfolios and evidence of close connection with families.

Question 4. Alternative models of care

Australia already offers a number of different models of care.

Point of discussion arising from this – Our educators frequently comment that many families do not recognise family day care as equivalent to other models of care and education (e.g. long day care), even though criteria for qualifications are the same for personnel who work in a day care centre, and we all operate under the NQF. We believe that the term “family day care educator” still bears the weight of the previous term “day care mum” and that term's association with babysitting.

With this in mind, the proposal for CCB being made available to au pairs, babysitters and nannies causes us concern. The term “babysitter” or “nanny” is both casual and flimsy by definition and therefore by standards. It raises the question of how such casual and flimsy services could be assessed for quality outcomes and how they could be assessed for attention to the national quality standards.

Question 5. Our service has no stand-out point to make in this area.

Question 6. Impact of regulatory change.

The care and education industry has seen a great deal of change during the past decade. Included in these changes is the magnified number of service providers entering the field.

Point of discussion arising from this - During the past five years, our area has absorbed a further three long day centres (in addition to the original two centres) and a further two family day care service providers. This has made it much harder to recruit educators, which in turn has made the marketing dollar harder to find. Even if we put this information aside, it is our observation that, with the benefit of local knowledge, despite the NQF's claim to create quality outcomes for children, it does seem that the process required to become a service provider may be less than the stringent assessment of quality that we believe that it should be to match the standards of the NQF.