



## Supporting Unique Needs in ECEC Services

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Inclusion & Professional  
Support Program  
AN AUSTRALIAN  
GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

### Submission to the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Productivity Commission

By CAERSU (Childcare Access & Equity Resource Unit) Inclusion Support Agency Ipswich 42  
Sponsor by Inala Community House

29 January 2014

This submission has been developed in collaboration by all CAERSU Inclusion Support Agency (ISA) staff members, focusing on Inclusion, Equal access and quality care for all children, including children from the priority groups.

#### Background Information

CAERSU Inclusion Support Agency's Philosophy values equity, social justice and human rights perspectives.

We have a universal focus through developing capacity building practices that promotes innovation and change and embraces diversity and inclusion.

We believe we are all diverse and all our differences are to be included in everyday practice. We advocate for the rights of all children to have universal access to quality inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care services.

We provide support to all eligible Childcare Services in region 42, Ipswich, Queensland.

#### Submission

As an Inclusion Support Agency we believe that the Inclusion Professional Support Program (IPSP) should have a stronger focus on Capacity Building, Mentoring and facilitation of Reflective Conversations. It should strive to continue supporting the scaffolding of strong partnerships with all Childcare and Early Childhood Learning services within each region, as well as promoting and facilitating Network meetings with services and communities agencies to share information, to reflect on current trends and issues affecting Inclusion.

It should also have a stronger, ongoing role in supporting Childcare and Early Childhood services to become highly cultural competent.

Consistency across regions needs to be ensured, for ISAs, in regards to their roles and responsibilities, therefore similar interpretation of guidelines.

We advocate for the rights of all children and families, children should not be exempted from inclusion support due to a fixed eligibility criteria in the current Inclusion Support Subsidy guidelines, under the IPSP Guidelines for 2013 - 2016. The program needs to acknowledge the bigger picture of diversity, barriers and complexities of our communities and to take into consideration the multi factorial disadvantage that some children and families may face in society. Children who are considered vulnerable, including children at risk of neglect or abuse, children showing challenging behaviours,



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children who are exposed to mental illness issues within their families, children with low self-esteem and lacking a sense of own identity or self-identity, children who due to the constant changes in their lives are unable to develop healthy attachments and a sense of security and confidence, could be at risk of social exclusion from mainstream services.

Some sort of funding, not necessarily Inclusion Support Subsidy funding would support Childcare and Early Childhood Learning services, in this task; as a result these children would be supported in an efficient and successful way. This will ensure Inclusion, Accessibility, and Equality and optimal insertion into society breaking down the vicious circle of vulnerability.

Educators often struggle when trying to support children from vulnerable or disadvantage backgrounds as they may not have the knowledge, the experience, and resources, to support their needs to ensure inclusion. Educators need capacity building and support, mentoring and access to resources and time to access training, resources information from diverse professionals and community agencies.

Resources should be regularly available and financially feasible to support Childcare and Early Childhood Learning services intrinsic capacity to provide highly inclusive quality programs for all, ensuring segregation and stigmatization of individual children and families does not occur.

Services need to have extra time and human resources to ensure the curriculum meet all needs and is inclusive at all time. Some strategies that could help to achieve this are: to lighten the red tape, to make processes simpler, relevant, and realistic allowing services to have the availability of extra time and human resources to ensure inclusion and equal access.

Health services to be funded to visit child care services to complete developmental milestones or other concerns, particularly for children transitioning to school, with speech and language impairments, etc. would provide onsite support to children, families and services.

The Inclusion Support Agencies' role should be extended to include the possibility of working in partnerships not only with Childcare Services but also with families and with professionals related to Health, Mental Health, Education, and Settlements Services, to be able to provide a holistic support, maximising the outcomes for children, families and services.

On the other hand, there are significant barriers that affect the enrolment of children from the priority groups in Childcare and Early Childhood Learning services, including:

- Orientation and Induction Policies and procedures for families and children that are not always relevant, culturally respectful, friendly, extensive and comprehensive.
- Staff knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes particularly in terms of Cultural Competence.
- High turnover in some areas and low percentage of qualified, experienced educators in the region.



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- Stressed, overwhelmed staff that is not coping with the amount of documentation required.
- Financial constraints of services.
- Low percentage of educators from diverse cultural and linguistically backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in all child care services and lack of recruitment policies supporting diversity.
- Pressuring families to get diagnosis to meeting eligibility criteria for funding may discourage families from enrolling children.
- Previous experiences with paperwork and funding processes could impact on future enrolments for children identified with additional needs and access could be declined.
- Services difficulties in connecting and working with their communities and visa-versa.

We need to point out that, good staff/child ratios ensure quality care, inclusion, and support rich interactions, learning and safety. However we would like to see a review of the Under the roof staff to child/ratio legislated requirements.

In regard to qualifications, the content of courses available may not always be relevant and tertiary institutions need to ensure that the content of the courses is not only relevant but is also preparing students for the job they need to do. Supporting all children and ensuring inclusion requires an ongoing learning journey and commitment. Theory connected to practices, particularly inclusion practices, should be compulsory in cert III and diploma, not only in text book studies, but during practical placements.

In regard to the qualifications required for an Inclusion Support Facilitator (ISF), higher qualifications and nationally consistent professional development in relation to the complex role of ISF should be required and supported.

Yours sincerely

Haydee Cummins  
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