

Response to Australian Government Productivity Commission Issues Paper

Brisbane South Family Day Care

January 2014

Brisbane South Family Day Care is situated on the Southside of Brisbane. We service a strong multicultural community of families who have particular needs in relation to family day care; ranging from cultural, language, to understanding of nurturing and extended family involvement in child care decision making.

As a service, we are in constant connection with families and therefore have many opportunities to obtain feedback from families in regards to their child care requirements. In response to the Commission's enquiry we have provided the information below to support you in your future directions of decision making for our sector.

Family requirements and expectations for families enquiring about care or enrolling in care with our service

- Having an educator available that speaks the child or families cultural language and shares an understanding of cultural practices in regards to child rearing so that their child feels a stronger sense of belonging and security
- Having an educator who has qualifications and experience working with children, preferably several years' experience
- Having an educator that is in reasonable travelling distance (10 minutes' drive or less en route to work)
- Having an educator who is warm and responsive to the child and the family's needs
- Having an educator that the family feel that they can trust
- Having an environment that is welcoming and well set up to support children's learning
- Having an environment where small groups of children are being cared for
- Have an environment where siblings can be together if required
- Affordable fees without sacrificing quality of care

Currently we are able to meet all of these requirements with the exception of having enough educators within reasonable travelling distance (closer to city suburbs). Families in these areas are quite committed to family day care as their preferred provider for care but due to high costs to prepare older homes for family daycare, many prospective educators in these areas do not commence. We are finding increased applications in newer, outer suburbs (where houses need less extensive changes) for which demand is lower. As a result educator allocation and care requirements are not always congruent. Funding to support educators who would like to conduct family day care in high demand (closer to inner city) areas would be advantageous to families.

As a family day care service, we believe that aside from being responsive to care requirements and expectations of families in regards to the aforementioned items above, we also believe that we have a responsibility to meet the cognitive, social and emotional and physical

requirements to support children to reach their full potential and be prepared in readiness for school. In this regards the benefits of family day care as a service option for families are:

A. Learning and development through formation of secure attachments

Learning and development outcomes are very much connected to attachments in the early years. If secure attachments occur then children are more receptive to learning. Children can have the most aesthetically pleasing setting available to them with all the latest resources but if the child does not feel safe to engage then they will struggle to reach their full potential. Research demonstrates that cognitive development of a child is highly relative to their ability to form secure attachments (Rolfe, 2004). Family Day Care educators focus strongly on developing strong relationships with children and have high success rates. Consistency of care is far more available to families in family daycare than any other service type. This is due to several factors:

- I. One educator caring for the child each day
- II. More consistency of care with same educator over consecutive years (as rarely seen in child care centres)
- III. Smaller group setting so that the educator has time to develop secure, closer relationships with children.
- IV. Stronger relationships with families to work together to understand the attachment needs of individual children.
- V. Ability to provide an educator that can more authentically support the child to retain language, cultural, family values due to matching families with most suitable options and a wide variety of options available.
- VI. Access to a co-ordination team who support with information and guidance in regards to attachment of young children

Families that attend our service are often willing (but not ideal) to travel further to find an educator that meets the needs of their individual circumstances (particularly in relation to culture). Whilst cost can be a mitigating factor in choosing child care, it does not usually deter families if an educator meets all their expectations.

B. Learning and development through a regulated framework (EYLF)

Whilst understanding and implementing the Early Years Learning Framework has created some challenges for our scheme, as does all new and unfamiliar practices, we believe that the framework has increased professionalism has increased child engagement and decreased child behavioural challenges. We believe this is because, through training, documentation and reflective practice educators are now developing a stronger understanding about what they are doing and why they are doing it. The Early Years Learning Framework has increased and

improved conversations, unplanned and planned experiences and intentional teaching based on knowledge.

The challenges with the framework are:

- Time management – educators often work hours in excess of 10 hours per day
- Increased cost of resources does not always meet the fee that can be charged and afforded by families
- Higher environmental/resource requirements and expectation often have educators feeling like their home space is being overtaken by their business

The positive outcomes of the Framework are:

- Increased professionalism and understanding about child development
- Increased pride in ability to share expert opinions based on theory with families and others working in the sector.
- Consistency of quality care and education
- Children are more engaged and prepared to enter school (feedback from families shows that children who attend school after attending family daycare are settled, engaged and ready to learn in their new environment)
- Adaptability to each families individual needs and circumstances
- Due to lower numbers of children, the increased risk of communicable diseases is decreased greatly in family day care therefore the high quality care can occur without the negative effects mentioned in the commission's paper.

What would we like to see retained in relation to child care provision?

- A regulated framework that recognizes children's individual strengths, family values and sector professionalism
- Current support and guidance from my OECEC/ information sessions
- Government support funding
- Retain qualification requirements

What areas do we think improvements could be made?

- Allow more flexibility in regards to educators being allowed to job share with other educators in one home (not increased children in the home). For example, if one educator is away, another can come in for more than four hours, one can work three days, one two etc. This may support extended hours being available to families as educators currently are withdrawing from flexible hours due to already working 10 hour days

- Regular training and support for educators on the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework and the expectations of such. So far government have mostly provided information sessions
- More flexibility to include environments reflective of modern day living
- Incentives to promote sustainability and recycling initiatives in early childhood. (Opening up of more community garden spaces).
- Support funding for educators to set up family daycare in close to city locations where housing and fencing requirements often do not meet the requirements of the regulations
- Reinstatement of startup funding for educators to commence a family daycare business with conditions attached to require educators to maintain practice for a period of twelve months or more or interest free loans available for startup of family daycare business
- Stronger information and support available for educators and families from different cultures and communities interconnecting their own views and values about early childhood practice with Australian pedagogies.

Service options, information about early childhood practice in Australia could be given to new families migrating. We often find that they stumble on options by chance or word of mouth