

# JENSEN EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

The Jensen Early Learning Centre (J.E.L.C) is a private and locally owned centre in the Northern suburb of Jensen in Townsville. The centre itself has been in the area and operating since the early 1970's and such has seen a number of owners and operators go through its doors. It is currently a 75 place centre and also part of the National Kindergarten Program with a fully qualified early education teacher.

The current owners and staff have all worked extremely hard in developing this facility. We have a number of returning families and occupancy has been built up to just under 90% at the start of this year as a proven result of their efforts. The centre prides itself on quality personalised care, with experienced caring staff to provide a secure and nurturing learning environment. A number of the staff are long term employees and of the 15 members, 6 are working parents within the centre.

Hi my name is Bettina and I have been in child care since 1993 when our centre first opened. Officially I was unqualified as I only had qualifications from Germany. Then in 2000 everybody in child care needed to be qualified – which is a good thing- but the pay didn't seem to keep up with the qualification as it does in other trades. We are called 'educators' now but we are still waiting on equal pay. Our paper work is more involved and complicated as it always changes of how we are supposed to do things. Children are earlier and earlier expected to not just play but to learn and perform to a set of curriculum. I am the only staff left from the beginning. Most people leave eventually to do bigger and better {paid} things. To keep good qualified people in the childcare they need to be paid as professionals as we can't all do it for the love of it.

I am the Director of a Long Day Care Centre. When I heard about the Productivity Commission Inquiry my first thoughts went to 'what if'. A few of them were 'if they drop the need for qualified staff and increase the child staff ratios then think of all of the accidents that will happen, think of all the

children who will fall through the cracks and fall further behind because the staff are not aware of the developmental milestones that each child should be reaching. Parents expect for their children to not just play but to learn while they are here at Day Care. They feel that they pay enough money that their children should be coming home with better developed emotional, social, intellectual and physical skills. As a working parent myself I like to know that my child can build a loving and trusting relationship with their educators as they are with them more than with me at home. The thought of inconsistency and disturbed care from staff leaving and away due to stress and being run down scares me because I wonder how this will affect her being able to build relationships in the future. I try to make our working environment as pleasant as possible and help girls where I can to encourage them to stay longer. However, some of the reasons that they leave are out of my hands and one major issue is the low rate of pay for the hard work and effort that they put into the children and centre.

Keira - Director

Working as an educator in a long day care centre can be an extremely challenging profession. Each day we draw upon an array of skills to ensure children receive high quality care and education from our centre. The lowest paid worker here earns \$8.62 an hour as an assistant educator and is required to:- be highly organised – Teach Manners – Toilet Train Children – Introduce early literacy & numeracy skills – Plan and prepare nutritious meals and snacks – Handle chemicals safely – Study and complete assignments – Observe and assist children's development – Manage & educate groups of children with acceptable social behaviours – Teach and help children care for animals and gardens – embrace sustainability and above all else treat children with love, patience and kindness.

Hana - Teacher

I have been working in the childcare sector for 8 years. It is my passion and I love developing and nurturing the future leaders of our country. During my time I have been continually astounded by the high turnover of staff in the various centres I have worked in. Why is childcare such a transient industry? It is not retail, hospitality or fruit picking, it shouldn't be transient. But I guess if you are paying people \$18 an hour and expecting them to study and then live, work and invest in their future, what incentive do they have to stay within the industry?

Continual changes in staffing can be very stressful for children and also the continuity of quality care they receive. This then destroys parent confidence in not only the staff but also the centre to which they are sending their children.

Kylie – Group Leader

As a worker in the childcare industry for 22 years I have seen a lot of changes in the industry, some good, such as the introduction of national quality standards and the quality of education programs such as ELYF, some not so great, such as long waiting lists and rising cost of care to families. However, one thing that has remained a constant is the shockingly low wages, especially at entry point for school leavers {who would earn more in fast food outlets.} This has led to centres being unable to retain staff, and having a high staff turnover. High staff turnover is extremely disturbing for both children who need to form secure, reciprocal relationships and parents who need the peace of mind a trusted reliable carer brings. A close look at other industries with similar levels of qualifications reveals a significant difference in remuneration. The government needs to address ways of bringing childcare wages into line, we are educating and nurturing the future of our country, and studies have shown clearly the vital importance of quality care during the first 5 years of life.

Angela – Group Leader

I started working in Childcare Industry two and half years ago, I love working with children. I have studied my Certificate III and am now studying my Diploma to further help in the care of children. I started out earning around \$8 an hour and now I'm earning \$19. Compared to other industries this is not a great amount for a qualified educator. I love my job so I am always willing to further my education by taking extra courses when they come available. Even though I do this I do not get extra in my pay packet, it is purely to better myself for the children.

Tayla – Group Leader

I have 3 boys who have all attended day care for two days a week after they turned 3. Thru out this time I have noticed a lot of staff coming and going in the different centres they have attended. Having just come into the childcare industry I now realise why! I am 29 years old and am studying to get my Certificate III, I earn \$15.02 an hour. I thought I was the lowest paid in my centre until one of the young ladies who is also studying her Certificate III told me she earns as little as \$8 an hour. To say I was shocked was an understatement! I was earning more money when I was in retail unqualified and under 18 then what I am earning now and double what she earns! One bonus when I started working was my Director telling me that I would soon be in for a pay rise which wouldn't affect me to much while on my traineeship but would be great for when I finished it. Then not even a few short weeks later I was told that the government has taken it off us. Right before Christmas too I might add, I felt ripped off for not only myself but my fellow workers. I am finding that I love working in childcare but if my circumstances where different that I couldn't afford to. I can't see how the government can expect us to earn so little when everything around us keeps rising, Electricity, Rent, Interest rates, Fuel, Food, just to name a few. Something needs to change to keep this needed industry to thrive. For a better future for our children we need to keep our qualified staff and better wages is a good incentive. Pay our educators the wage they deserve for the work they do.

Renee – Parent and Trainee

23/1/14

I am Nelisa and a parent of four children who attend Jensen ELC. I have over 5 years' experience within five different childcare centres utilising child care for my children while attending employment and feel very passionately in writing this submission.

In my experiences I have found that the most successful childcare centre's were driven by senior, experienced and devoted centre STAFF. Jensen ELC is very successful in the minimal staff turnover, high staff morale which reflects in the development of my children. We need to keep these outstanding experienced and senior staff on board to provide successful outcomes. In talking to staff in each of the previous and current centre Jensen ELC the same issue is all very present the pay factor some earning as little as \$21 an hour for their ever DEMANDING job. The educators at Jensen ELC go above and beyond the call of duty and should be recognised for their hard work and efforts with a pay increase.

**Quality** to me is providing ongoing individualised learning and developmental activities and ongoing support to my children and our family which has been achieved through long term senior/qualified and experienced staff members. Ensuring when I drop my children off each morning they are with qualified devoted educators who know my children, their needs and daily routines. The change that needs to happen is to INCREASE their wages and keep them on! In conversations with educators I have been notified due to low wages such as \$21 per hour that they may need to look elsewhere for work, this compromises my children's learning& development due to possible staff turnover this needs to change.

**Professional wages** are wide spread across many industries why not childcare? Professional wages at Jensen ELC will mean that we get to keep these awesome senior educators who are devoted, experienced and knowledgeable. This will encourage centre staff morale and provide new innovative and challenging work ethics, strengthen personal KPI's and minimise staff turn over. Professional wages for educators gives me the re-assurance that there is a high quality of staff and when dropping my children off at the centre I can feel my children are safe and secure which enables me to effectively perform in my employment daily.

The **impact** of staff turnover is devastating to the centre and has been to my children. There has been such a negative impact on my children in the past which I had to relocate my children to another centre. I have learnt from these centres with a high "staff turnover" that the centre morale is low, as is the values and work ethics which were enormously affecting my vulnerable children; socially, emotionally and their ability to communicate and form relationships with the ever so changing of faces and new routines.

**Improvements** to be made are simple Stop the staff turnover, listen to the Superstar educators, grant them their pay increase and provide ongoing staff learning & development for new and existing staff. Help keep these superstars!!

Regards,

Nelisa Taufalele

My experiences of using childcare services began when my twin boys turned 4 and a half. Prior to this, returning to the workforce was out of the question as the high cost of care outweighed any wages I earned. {I wonder how many other parents withdrew from the work force for this reason!} Since then I have used long day care and after school / vacation care. I also rely on relatives to care for my children on some days as full time care, especially during holidays is simply unaffordable. {\$128.00 per day for two children is more than I earn.} The second most concerning issue is that of having a high turnover of staff. Who will be my children's carer today? Just recently my children's much loved educator decided to leave the sector, an unsettling experience in itself. The centre has worked hard to find a qualified replacement, but as recruiting qualified staff is difficult the children were grouped with kindergarten children and were unable to attend excursions and the usual school holiday activities. Recruiting qualified staff in childcare is an ongoing issue, mainly due to the poor wages paid. Staff have little financial incentive to stay. Many centres employ school leaver age staff, who may earn as little as \$8.00 per hour and are unable to accompany vacation care students on excursions. The government needs to work to address how staff wages can be brought into line with other industries, and also how centres can access funding to provide affordable care and quality care and quality training for staff.

Angela- Parent

When my daughter was 7 months old I was forced to return to the workplace. This thought distressed me as I had planned to take at least 12 months off. My relief at finding a wonderful centre full of caring staff eased my anxiety. This however was short lived as within three months staff in her room had sought other employment as they were done with childcare. When I approached them in regards to this the answer 'Too much stress, too much paper work and not enough money.' They then clearly explained their day, their qualifications and what is expected of them. I had become accustomed to the quality care my child leader was giving her. Who now would support my child's social emotional and physical needs every minute of the day? The incoming staff member did very little to ease my concerns, as she was barely an adult herself. How could she possibly know what to do? I soon discovered that having

younger staff of trainees lowers centre overheads. I ask you “what sort of incentive is this for building and developing early childhood education and keeping quality staff retained in the industry?”

Kylie – Parent

Never has there been a greater need to support child care workers and their endeavour to access and attain quality training and earn a fairer income. Likewise, retainment of well trained childcare workers in the industry is paramount.

Children and their families who attend childcare centres give and expect staff to act “in loco parentis” caring and loving our children, educating them with quality learning programs and looking after their social, emotional and physical needs every minute of every day. The childcare industry is a difficult and demanding career choice – this should be respected by providing child care workers with fairer incomes which reflect the time, effort and demands of the job. A fairer income would also attract and retain well trained quality staff in the industry.

Celia O’Keeffe

Full time working mother of three.

As you have just read our main concern within the Childcare Industry is that we need to continue to have the qualified staff but also to give incentives like the fairer wage for the staff to stay within the industry. This is to give the children the continuity of staff to help them to feel safe and secure in their surroundings and give them more quality of learning through familiarity.