

## PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION SUBMISSION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES.

### TROPICAL NORTH FAMILY DAY CARE

Tropical North Family Day Care has been established since 1988 in the Douglas Shire and currently has 8 educators, two part time coordination unit staff and is providing Education and care for over 100 families in our local community. Our unique community is made up of a diverse range of peoples including a large Aboriginal population of Kuku Yalanji, third generation cane farmers, mill workers, tourism, hospitality, nursing staff and tradespeople.

The need for quality child care in our local area has grown throughout the years, predominantly due to more families moving to our area for employment and lifestyle. As many families living in our area are without the support of their extended families, the need for a choice in approved child care that suits family's individual needs is so very important.

Family Day Care provides the perfect balance of educational experiences for children based on their individual interests, skills and home life in the comforting environment of the Educators own homes. With a variety of educators offering flexible times and varying types of care, families are more likely to find care that meets their individual needs. As legislation allows only four children under school age in care at any one time and up to seven including school age, Family Day Care is very personal with the Educator truly being able to bond and develop rich relationships in a home environment while providing learning experiences planned for the best outcomes for each individual child. Educators are able to build meaningful partnerships with families thus providing a strong sense of personal worth and wellbeing in children.

As family day care offers flexible hours, it is able to help meet the needs of families of both pre-school and school aged children who can continue to have the comfort and security of a home routine while in care when parents work in industries that perform shift work that requires care for varying hours and lengths during the day, night or on weekends.

Family Day Care can be a real choice for parents with children with special needs due to the low ratios and if the Inclusion Support process were streamlined providing hands on help and support to parents and Educators in assessing and meeting the needs of these children it would be beneficial for all stake holders.

Approved family day care, after school care and long day care services operate under the stringent guidelines of the National Quality Framework (NQF) with National Regulations, National Quality Standards and The Early Years Learning Framework. While it is important to note there already were Regulations and an Accreditation system in place in each state and territory of Australia, the NQF was designed to support services in further improving the overall quality of education and care in all registered Early Childhood services on a National basis when it was implemented in January 2012.

While it is understood that many parents would appreciate more individual services such as nannies or private carers who are not required to work under the NQF receive full child care benefits and child care rebates, it needs to be questioned how these very different services could or should fall under the same government assistance if indeed non approved services should receive any assistance at all.

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Approved services work under the NQF, fulfilling government requirements of qualifications, staffing, regulations, National Quality Standards and quality programming to meet the best interests for each child and family, and it needs to be acknowledged this is done so with some very real challenges involved.

Attracting, recruiting and retaining quality Early Childhood staff with the required formal qualifications has become increasingly difficult as Early Childhood standards and requirements have rightfully increased considerably, while unfortunately working conditions for Educators have deteriorated and wages barely improved from years ago.

Universal Access models need to be reconsidered for funding to be available to Family Day Care services. Many Family Day Care services have approved, registered Educators working in their service who are qualified kindergarten teachers that provide the required 15 hour a week kindergarten program in their home whilst also offering the added benefit of small groups, a rich learning environment and flexibility in care, yet are unable to access the universal access funding available to kindergartens and long day care.

As the waiting list for childcare grows in our own local area, we face a shortage of new Family Day Care Educators who are willing to commit to the training, study, work load and adhere to strict regulations in their own homes. Set up costs are considerable with the need to purchase equipment, furniture, insurances and make appropriate safety adjustments to meet standards and regulations. The Educator start up grant that was available previously was of true support to Educators and helped to meet the needs for care in our area. Further impediment to attract Family Day Care Educators is the problem of not being able to claim government assistance for their own children in care with them, yet need to count them in their overall ratio thus losing that income. The ruling of this is based on not profiting for money on your own children, however this seems to be contradicted in long day care and schools where they are in fact being paid a wage when their own child is in their age grouping or class.

While supporting the National Quality Framework to enhance learning and developmental outcomes for children, the increased demands on the coordination units in informing and supporting Educators and families in creating a holistic approach to the care and education of each child, connecting with culture and community needs to be considered logistically and financially. Government funding needs to be reviewed and improved upon in consideration of time and workload of the coordination units.

The extra workload on Nominated Supervisors, Educational Leaders and Educators, costs involved by individual staff for continual upgrade of qualifications and training and wage increases to reflect the responsibility, qualifications and work requirements need to also be considered. Furthermore while funding needs to be addressed for these costs to be met, it needs to be done so without impacting families or at the detriment or closure of services meeting the requirements of the NQF.