

Country Childrens Early Learning



To whom it may concern,

Country Childrens Early Learning Pty Ltd is a private Family Day Care and In Home Care service operating in inner regional NSW. The service commenced operation in November 2010 when the local council Family Day Care service in Yass NSW closed due to lack of viability.

The commencement of our service ensured the continuation of the operation of 6 Family Day Care Educators in the Yass, Murrumbateman, Gundaroo and Boorowa townships, these 6 Educators were all operating at the enrolment capacity at the time. We have increased the services viability through growing into other areas and incorporating In Home Care as one of the services that we offer.

As part of our growth plan we have been marketing for Educators in inner regional, outer regional, rural and remote locations in the south western area of NSW. This marketing has been successful with the service branching into areas such as Bungendore, Braidwood, Captains Flat, Young and Harden, we now have Educators working in towns and on properties. Our marketing has included the benefits of becoming an Educator including being at home for your own family, having a rewarding career, operating your own business and being involved in the local community.

Since the commencement of our service we have been working through the challenges of change with our Educators as a result of the introduction of the National Quality Framework, most of these challenges expected with any change in legislation and some more challenging and frustrating for our service, Educators, families and the small communities in which we service.

National Quality Framework Changes

Qualifications and Training

We have had Educators working through the Certificate III since we started operating in 2010. The consistent issues we have had with this training include:

- Availability of Certificate III training in regional areas, TAFE is the best option, however students can only commence the training at the beginning of each year. Other RTO's we have used have provided little or no relevant support to our Educators. This is very difficult for the older Educators that we have who have not studied for up to 30 years and have low confidence. Some of our Educators left school at 15, 20 to 30 years ago and do have low literacy skills despite being wonderful Family Day care Educators
- All Educators studying the Certificate III have needed a high level of support from our service, as they struggle through questions and assignments with little explanation and support from training organisations.

- The Certificate III course questions and assignments are predominantly based on Long Day Child Care Centre environments, so difficult and irrelevant for FDC Educators to answer. This focus not only makes the course difficult but does not provide the Educator with the relevant tools for the job they are training for.
- There is no funding to assist self employed Family Day Care Educators to complete the Certificate III.

Ratios

Despite preparing for the reduction in the under school age ratio for the last few years the impact of its introduction on top of the other changes over the last 12 months has been devastating to many of the communities that we service.

- The Qualification requirement has caused us to lose 5 Educators over the last 12 months
- The Qualification requirement does inhibit new Educators commencing, most new Educators are keen to study however the cost of setting up their Family Day Care business and then having to have sufficient money to pay fees upon commencement for the Certificate III course is too much.
- The reduction in ratios this year has caused a large amount of stress in most of the communities in which we operate. We have been fielding calls from very angry frustrated families who need child care and cannot understand why we do not have vacancies. We have parents who are turning down job offers for new work who are unable to access care. We also have increasing reports of 'informal' care increasingly being provided in the communities where we operate. We are currently seeking details into one report where a child was reportedly nearly hit by a car when found standing in the middle of the road where the home where the care he was receiving is not fenced. We will be reporting this incident to the Department Of Education of Communities when the details are received.
- Last year our services EFT averaged at 58 it is now 37, as a result of the loss of Educators and now reduction in children we can care for . This figure shows what childcare has been lost in these communities, it does not show what child care is not available to new families in the growing towns.

Funding

Inclusion Support Funding

Since the commencement of operating the service access to Inclusion Support is so difficult it is not possible in most cases. On average it has taken 6 months to get an application submitted and approved by the ICS Coordinator in our area. This makes it impossible to access it for the many children we care for with additional needs in our In Venue Holiday Programs as the funds are not paid back paid.

We have managed to access the funding twice for under school aged children in ongoing care in Family Day Care homes. However saw no benefit for the child in each of these homes from the funds. Our service purchased resources and equipment and provided additional visits and support to assist the Educators and support the children.

The funding available is too low to provide Educators incentive to reduce their numbers anymore to take on any children with additional needs, placing families with children with additional needs in a harder position to seek care in regional areas.

Why can this funding not be paid to service? Paying the ICS to the service would mean that service could purchase resources and equipment that could be used for more than one child through the service library. The funds would also assist in covering costs of service staff providing additional support to Educators with children with additional needs. This providing incentive for Educators to take on children with these needs.

Regional Travel Assistance Funding

The number of changes in the requirements of Family Day Care Services and Educators, has increased the need for regular ongoing visits to all Educators for the provision of support and supervision. The nature of homes and properties in regional and rural homes present a higher precedence of risk factors than homes in suburban city areas. In regional areas most homes have pets, pools, dams, farm equipment and partners who work at home which means a higher incidence of change to the environment. These factors require regular risk assessment from the service to ensure that the home remains safe for Family Day Care children and families.

The discreet removal of Regional Travel Assistance to services who service majority of inner regional communities from 1 January 2014 is another factor that will affect the implementation and quality of services provided in these areas.

In Summary

We have less Educators because:

- Lower ratio reduces their income (2 of our Educators have finished due to having 2 children of their own and the work no longer being viable for them)
- Lower ratio does not mean higher fees in lower income towns as families cannot afford them
- Lack of support with Certificate III Training
- Cost of setting up as a Family Day care Educator with cost of Certificate III
- Requirements of role not worth it for the income with reduced ratio

We are losing Families because:

- Less places available due to lowered ratio
- Fees unaffordable due to lowered ratio and Educator overheads
- Educators are less able to provide flexible hours due to increased costs of operation
- Childcare is getting the reputation of unavailable or unaffordable so many families in regional areas seek alternate 'informal' options.

Suggestion for improvements:

1. Allow approved providers to determine ratios within each home or venue based upon a formulae of need, space, experience and ability.

2. Introduce a set up fund for new educators to assist with the cost of establishing a family day care service in their home or venue
3. Pay ICS funds to the service to be allocated to the cost of support and resources for children with additional needs and acquitted by the service.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards

Julia Morphett

Owner Operator

Country Childrens Early Learning

Supporting quality care in regional communities