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Childcare Inquiry Productivity Commission
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I am writing to you in response to the Productivity Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.

Firstly Background on myself:

I am an Early Childhood Educator (Teacher)/ manager of 13 years and I am a strong advocate for childcare services for all children and families e.g. cost/ Flexible hours for families/ education and I am a Australian defence wife/ mother (of a 2 month old).

When it comes to defence child care issues I have been involved with a number of defence families via friendships and within my role as director of Kidsnest -Crows Nest occasional child care where defence families on the north shore of Sydney used care when required or just moved to the area with no other care arrangements available.

Government involvement in childcare and early learning:

As Occasional Child care Australia (OCCA) I believe that all levels of Government have a role to play in early childhood education and care. The National Quality Framework (NQF) has provided a consistent system for all early childhood education and care (ECEC) services which are in scope and all levels of government.

Availability of childcare and early learning service:

To me the availability of childcare and early learning services is a major issue for defence families for a number of reasons.

One of the major reason is when a family is posted (moved) to a new location/ state this could be a short notice or longer notice, this already has pressure on families when moving states/suburbs then throw childcare in to the mix that adds a whole lot more pressure.

I am aware of families that have not moved with there dad or mum due to there not being any available childcare for the children in that location so then the family becomes separated which then adds a whole different level of stress/ pressure on families and most of all the children (Why should defence members miss out on their children due to lack of care within locations, they already give up so much).

Lack of care for Australia Defence force:

Across Australia there are a number of 43 major bases* and within there is only 21 Childcare and Early Childhood Learning service (this includes OHSC) with some areas having two locations of care available to be this is disheartening to see that some major base areas have no care available to them.

I am currently located in Sydney CBD/ North Shore and as you can see below, the inner Sydney location houses 6 major defence bases;

Randwick barracks

Victoria barracks

HMAS Watson - Watsons Bay

HMAS Kuttabul - Potts Point

Fleet Base East - Woolloomooloo

HMAS Waterhen - Waverton

HMAS Penguin - Mossman

I also believe there are a number of other locations across Australia that also would be in the same situation as Sydney based families.

Children's development needs;

Development needs of children is always the for front when I think about my child and I am sure other parents. As a Defence family when we are being relocated my child's development needs are also a topic of conversation for my partner and I, for early childhood education this is no longer a concern for us thanks to the National Quality Framework (NQF) our biggest concern is once our child turns school age as throughout Australia each state has different starting ages and if we need to move from state to state I feel our child would be a development disadvantage which the different starting ages and different curriculum.

Availability and cost of childcare and early learning services:

Within my location and the location of my partners bases there is 28 services with only 1% offering care for under 2 year olds. Yes there is service located where we live but to ensure that my partner can be involved in our child's education we would like her to be close to him. (Which we should be able to have that opinion) even if that the services located within our houses there is waiting list longer then my child will need early childcare.

Along with this the cost of childcare is up there with the cost of living in Sydney, because of our bases location fees are starting at \$160 a day for under 2's.

Flexibility of childcare and early learning services:

The flexibility of hours is important to defence families as most defence members start at 0740 but with commuting within Sydney and in some locations the lack of public transport, which means that open hours do not fit in with members. I know of a number of families where both parents are in the ADF and both work in different locations have the same start time which means one member has to be late for work or I have a single ADF member with a child who needs to rely on friends to support with drop off and pick up

* <http://www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/adf-posture-review/docs/bases.pdf>

and work with senior divisional officers to gain flexible hours which isn't always possible.

This where extended hours/ flexible care need to be looked at for defence families, to support during deployments and extended working hours.

Recommendations:

1. Childcare allowance for families not able to utilise defence childcare services.
2. Location of childcare services to ensure it means the needs of defence families.
3. Extend hours in care, e.g. 24 hour care in some locations.