

9 April 2014

Submission to Productivity Commission on the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Inquiry

I have followed the inquiry's progress with interest and wish to add my personal views in light of recent media coverage concerned the proposal to allow Asian nannies to work in Australia.

We are an expatriate family of two full time working parents. We currently reside in Hong Kong. We would dearly love to return to Australia, however we have been unable to find a child care solution that suits our needs as a family. We work in demanding professions and need the flexibility of a child care arrangement that extends beyond 8-6.

We currently employ a live in nanny from the Philippines under the Hong Kong domestic helper visa scheme. She cares for our daughter, does all of the grocery shopping, cleaning, cooking and ironing. This allows us to spend every minute of our free time with our daughter, a luxury that we could never afford if we were to return to Australia.

The benefits for us as a family have been enormous. Now aged 2, our daughter is cared for by someone who she has known from birth. She has a strong emotional bond with her caregiver. She is cared for in our home, which is something that is important to us. She also attends kindergarten and other social playgroups, so we do not use the Hong Kong system as a replacement for early childhood education, but as an adjunct to it.

As a family, we have benefited culturally from the experience. We now understand a lot more about living standards and the way of life in developing nations and we do our best to assist where we can. The salary that we pay our nanny allows her to support her family back home and far exceeds what she would be able to earn in the Philippines. She has formed enduring bonds of friendship with all of the families with whom she has worked in the past and keeps in regular contact with a number of Australian families whose children she cared for over a period of 20 years and who have now returned to Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne respectively. Their now university aged children often visit her when they travel through Hong Kong.

Whilst I appreciate that there is the potential for exploitation in a Hong Kong style system, a properly managed system with employer bonds and appropriate supervision has the potential to provide enormous benefits for Australian working families. Further, it is a system that is entirely employer funded (including medical insurance) and does not require any taxpayer funds. This would allow taxpayer resources to be redirected into other areas of early childhood education.