



Magill Campus
**Community
Children's Centre**
LEARNING TOGETHER, EVERY DAY.
14 – 16 Bunday Street, MAGILL S.A. 5072

4th September 2014

The Magill Campus & Community Children's Centre established in 1976, is a not-for-profit, community based service located in the eastern suburbs of Adelaide, which meets the licensing and funding requirements of the Children's Services office and other relevant State & Federal Government Departments. Support is also maintained by the University of South Australia through building and maintenance upkeep. The Centre currently provides long day care (Monday to Friday) to over 130 families, either attached to the University or the wider community.

The Centre enables parents with children aged between birth to school age who are studying, members of staff of the University or families who live and work in the general community to leave their children in a happy, warm and secure environment. We are licensed to educate and care for up to 63 children at any one time and cater to a diverse group of families including families from culturally diverse backgrounds to supporting families with children with additional needs.

As a long standing community service, we have first-hand experience of the issues that have surrounded the early childhood education and care sector for many years and appreciate the opportunity to express some of our interest, concerns and disagreements relating to the *Productivity Commission Draft Report on Childcare and Early Childhood Learning*.

We support:

- the streamlining of payments, with payment of CCB and CCR going directly to Centres as this offers parents and services security that the funding is going directly to assist to cover families' child care costs.
- Increased investment in subsidies for at risk and low income families, who will benefit most from ECEC.
- Linking of subsidies to the NQF and extending the scope of the NQF to include all centre and home based services that receive Australian Government assistance.
- Ongoing funding by the Federal Government for Universal Access to 15 hours of preschool and the recognition of the importance of

quality education and care for children's development and their transition to school.

- The minimum staff:child ratios be maintained at all times to ensure individualised attention and safety requirements are met in order to support quality education and care requirements. This would also provide some incentive for educators to possibly remain in the job rather than adding additional pressures.
- Diverting of the funding from the proposed new Paid Parental Leave scheme to the Early Education and Care sector.
- The need to maintain the current qualification requirements as lowering the level of qualification requirements decreases the professionalism of early childhood education and care. The need to maintain if not increase the qualification requirements of educators working with children under 3 years of age which would support studies indicating the 1st three years of life as the most vulnerable of children's development & learning. *Phillips (2000): Shonkoff (2000) and Blakemore (2005)*
- Assistance to providers in rural, regional and remote areas as these communities often struggle due to the lack of and availability of qualified staff and employment opportunities. This includes the need to provide access to additional training and adult education opportunities in order to support their community needs.

Our concerns:

- The removal of preschools from the scope of the NQF does not acknowledge that ECEC should be reflective from birth to school age and beyond. Quality care is needed and should be supported through NQS that encompass child care services including preschools.
- Requiring educators working with children under 3 years of age to only hold the minimum Cert III level qualification. We believe all children have the right to access quality education and care with qualified educators working at all age levels but particularly with our very young children. Our best educators should be supporting our youngest and most vulnerable children as the early years are their foundation years. *'Nurturing and responsive relationships build healthy brain architecture, providing a strong foundation for children's learning, behaviour and health. The relationship a child has with their caregivers literally sculpts their brain and determines the development of brain circuits. Therefore it is essential that child care settings promote consistent, nurturing*

relationships between childcare professionals and children in which children's needs are recognised and responded to sensitively. (NCAC Putting Children First, Issue 24 Dec 2007, pg. 8-9)

- Any agency or educator, including nannies, if eligible, and in receipt of Federal Government funding **should** be required to provide education and care within an approved quality framework such as the NQF. This would mean registered nannies should hold a minimum Cert III training or above, again supporting the notion that children under 3 years of age should have our best educators supporting their development in the first 3 years. How would the Government monitor nannies for regulatory requirements if this was the case?
- Educators working in child care services currently being undervalued within this profession. There is an urgent need to acknowledge the professionalism and knowledge of educators through appropriate and adequate remuneration (wages). Improvements in this area would help retain educators who are currently leaving the sector due to low wages and high demands. Families, and more importantly - children, need continuity of care in order to maintain quality, consistency and confidence. This also comes back to the provision of adequate staff:child ratios and quality. Example: If a room has 2 educators and 20 children (toddlers 2 to 5 years of age) all of whom are in nappies and educators want to provide quality 1:1 interactions during a nappy change, this might take 5 minutes per child. Therefore 1 staff member is being left with 19 children. To change all children would amount to an educator looking after the majority of children for a whole hour. Nappy changing occurs more than once in a day. Quality care and education cannot exist in such situations. The NQS states, *'Responsive learning relationships are strengthened as educators and children learn together. Educators are more likely to be responsive, purposeful and thoughtful when staffing arrangements at the service allow them to direct their full attention to their work with children, and when they do not have to attend simultaneously to other tasks.'* (EYLF, pages 14 – 15 NQS pg 112)

A solution to supporting professional wages would be for State and Territory Governments to pay all preschool required teachers working within child care services under their separate Education Department funding. This would enable services to allocate current funds to improve wages for other educators.

In conclusion, high quality education and care contributes to our society through promoting children's growth and development. These children are our future. Child care services make a substantial contribution to our National economy. In short, it enables parents to work which in turn places it amongst the essential infrastructure of our society. Workers pay taxes, part of these taxes support ECEC therefore **increased funding is a prudent investment in creating economic growth.** Quality education and care will not occur across the nation unless the professionalism of employees is acknowledged and better supported through the provision of adequate professional wages.

The NQF was a significant and positive milestone that involved the collaboration of all State and Territories and the Federal Government, along with expert advice from academics and the sector. It should not be downgraded or lowered in any form. There are currently other review processes in place with many services still waiting for their assessments, once completed, in full, these review processes will provide informed recommendations regarding the National Quality Framework.