



## City of Casey Response to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Early Childhood Development Workforce

### Introduction

The City of Casey is located in Melbourne's South-Eastern suburbs, between 28 and 60 kilometres south-east of the Melbourne CBD. The City of Casey is bounded by the City of Knox and the Shire of Yarra Ranges in the north, the Shire of Cardinia in the east, Western Port and Mornington Peninsula Shire in the south and Frankston City and the City of Greater Dandenong in the west. The City of Casey is a rapidly developing residential area with large areas of land still allocated for urban development and surrounding rural areas. The City of Casey encompasses a total land area of about 400 square kilometres (id Community Profile 2011).

Analysis of the age structure of the City of Casey in the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census compared to the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) shows that there was a larger proportion of people in the younger age groups (0 to 17) but a smaller proportion of people in the older age groups (60+). Overall, 29.3% of the population was aged between 0 and 17, and 11.1% were aged 60 years and over, compared with 22.9% and 17.0% respectively for the MSD (id Community Profile 2011). These statistics demonstrate the importance of early childhood services to the City of Casey.

### Questions and Responses

#### **What are some other examples of integrated and co-located services? What are the benefits and limitations of integrating and co-locating early childhood development services?**

Co-located services are preferable to stand alone services. However, the best outcomes for families are achieved when services are integrated. Organisations that offer early childhood services need to plan to have services integrated from the onset of service provision. Integration of services can be assisted with the inclusion of a position that undertakes coordination of the services offered at that centre. Infrastructure can enable cradle to grave services, however, to achieve integration service providers need to have a sound working relationship. It is imperative that the mix of services is complimentary.

Consideration needs to be given to governance arrangements of a facility to support integration. Public transport is an issue in the City of Casey. The provision of an integrated service facility assists families with accessibility. This also enables families to go to the one facility for a number of their children's needs. As a result, families and children get to know one another which provide positive outcomes because they become engaged with their local community.

There are often a number of early childhood services involved with families. However, they are often working with families in isolation. Better coordination of family information would maximise outcomes for families and provide efficiencies for service providers. Current funding guidelines and funding requirements does not support this.



**Does the list provided (p.7 of the Issues Paper) provide comprehensive coverage of formal childcare settings? Is this an adequate representation of the broad roles and responsibilities of childcare and preschool workers? What characteristics describe the childcare and preschool workforces – in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies, and job satisfaction?**

The list does not include Preschool Field Officers (funded kindergarten programs) and Inclusion Support Facilitators (provide assistance when applying for funding for additional staff support to assist inclusion of children with additional needs).

Despite increases in the wage levels of child care staff over the past five years, it is still not inline with the level of responsibility that they have to children in their care. Many child care staff undertake additional work in their own time to meet the requirements of regulation and accreditation. Anecdotally, some child care staff have become disgruntled and pursued other work with the same money, but less responsibility.

To fulfil workforce vacancies the City of Casey has implemented graduate programs to recruit Maternal and Child Health nurses and kindergarten teachers.

Family and children's services have an ageing workforce with one third of the current workforce over the age of 55.

**What characteristics describe the child health and family support workforces – in terms of demographics, wages and salaries, working conditions, employment status, staff turnover, unfilled vacancies, and job satisfaction?**

Maternal and Child Health nurse wages recognise their qualifications. There is flexibility offered around working hours and staff turnover is not high. However in areas of growth such as Casey growing the workforce is challenging.

**How do the differing roles and policies of government affect the planning and provision of the ECD workforce?**

Funding arrangements of different levels of government are challenging. Benefits would be achieved if funding from all levels of government were provided under the same guidelines and requirements.

**What are some of the child development reasons families choose to use, or not use, different early childhood education and care services? How is this changing?**

Reasons for families choosing to use different early childhood education and care services include socialisation, respite for families, and part-time, full-time working parents. Families are so busy that they are relying on external agencies to help them. The growth in Casey requires ever increasing services to meet the needs of the community.

**To what extent does the relative cost of early childhood education and care services determine the demand for those services?**

Cost is often the deciding factor when families are accessing services. The Victorian State Government supports low income families to access kindergarten through subsidies. Long Day Care and Family Day Care families have access to child care benefits but the cost of care can sometimes make it financially unviable for parents to work. Grandparents often look after their grandchildren to help their children out.

**What factors affect the demand for, and the skills required of, the child health workforce?**

Training institutes need to be in tune with current research findings, policy direction and practice of the sector. The workforce shortage is impacted by some people being trained by registered training organisations with inadequate experience and knowledge of the industry and therefore graduates are coming out with low level skills.

**How might the proposed qualification standards, staffing levels, and the implied mix of skills and knowledge assist the delivery of the desired outcomes for children?**

Fully supportive of having a multi-disciplinary team because it creates an environment where there is reciprocal respect and understanding of others' expertise and skill base.

**What effect will the new standards and targets have on demand for early childhood development workers?**

The new standards and targets will make services and staff more accountable. There will be greater equity. Change management needs to be supported with funding to assist staff in service to understand, implement and evaluate reforms.

**How will increased fertility rates, changing family structures, the introduction of paid parental leave and other demographic, social and policy factors affect the demand for early childhood development services and workers?**

A challenge for the City of Casey recruiting early year's professionals is its proximity from the Melbourne CBD. In response to this challenge, the City of Casey targets universities by going and talking to graduates and telling them about the employment opportunities available at Council.

**How much of the shortage is caused by low wages differentials? Are there other factors (such as working hours or conditions) that are important in attracting staff to the sector?**

Staff working in some private stand alone centres can find it quite isolating and are often not exposed to much in the way of professional development which can contribute to job dissatisfaction, hence high staff turnover.

In regards to the new reforms, the City of Casey is securing staff through a new graduate program.

**To what extent are early childhood education and care, child health and family support services experiencing staff retention issues? Are there examples of effective staff retention strategies in the early childhood development sector? How might such strategies be replicated throughout Australia?**

The wages of child care staff plays a significant role in attraction and retention of staff. However, in the case of the City of Casey Child Care Complex, it has not been difficult to recruit or retain qualified, quality staff. There is a perception among early childhood professionals that conditions are better in community based centres. As a result we tend to keep our staff at the City of Casey. The City of Casey also enjoys a good calibre of applicants when we advertise. The City of Casey offers flexible part-time arrangements, job rotation, and opportunities for multi-skilling, i.e. administration, Inclusion Support Facilitators, research, a graduate program for kindergarten teachers and a volunteer program to support staff.

**Why are early childhood development workers paid less than those working in related sectors? Are the wages and salaries for workers in different early childhood development occupations appropriate, given the skills and qualifications required? If not, how might this best be addressed?**

Services primarily try to meet the needs of the community with affordable services and this has an impact on operational fees such as wages. Children's services staff are paid less as a sacrifice to keep parent fees down in the public sector and the profit margins up in the private sector. This has always been a difficult thing to manage while services want to remain competitive and viable; they also want to reward their staff appropriately.

**Does the regulatory burden have a significant impact on attracting or retaining staff in the early childhood development sector? Do you expect recently announced reforms to make a material difference to the regulatory burden facing early childhood development workers? What more could be done to reduce the regulatory burden?**

It can be a regulatory burden, however we do not think it can be reduced because of the complexity of early childhood services. Some people do not want the responsibility associated with the regulations.

Cluster management assists in providing standards and regulations are taken over by a representative in the Cluster Management. Part of the role of the cluster manager is to look at regulations and legislation. The regulatory burden on kindergartens is negligible. The impact will be the 15 hours kindergarten on the hours of kindergarten teachers. It could also have an impact on retaining older staff and attracting newly qualified staff.

If Family Day Care regulations and demands are difficult for Educators they may struggle to meet them and therefore will need to leave by choice or as a result of non-compliance. Staff work closely with Educators to assist in the understanding and knowledge to assist with the transition and training/learning opportunities are provided.

Child care services have experienced constant increases in administrative duties that relate to government legislation, e.g. reporting data, such as hours used on a weekly basis, data that goes on a website. Child care staff have a heavy load of paperwork to do and the changing work patterns have impacted on this.

Long Day Care staff should have planning time allocated to them on the basis of time per child rather than the prescribed two hours. Occasional Care staff experience the same issues and it is magnified again as they care for many more children who attend for shorter periods of time. The only way services will allocate more time to staff for planning would be if it became an award entitlement as an increase will increase the centre's costs.

**Are in-service training and professional development programs meeting workforce development needs? Are there barriers to early childhood development staff accessing training and development programs? If so, how could such barriers be overcome?**

Child care staff's primary role is direct care and therefore they cannot leave children to participate in on-line training without a replacement staff member. The planning time of two hours per week is inadequate for planning and cannot cover professional development. Centres that budget for professional development can send staff to training during work hours as long as they have also budgeted to backfill with replacement staff. Training organisations offer reasonably priced training but generally not in easily accessible locations that is a reasonable distance to travel from the City of Casey. In large organisations like the

City of Casey we can plan for the needs of all service types and bring in our own speakers / trainers which seem to work best for us.

Some private providers are not providing training to their staff and staff have to do it in their own time. This has an impact on work/life balance.

**Will the supply of qualified early childhood development workers expand sufficiently to meet COAG's objectives? How might the training of additional workers be funded?**

There needs to be traineeships and scholarships which the government needs to commit funding to.

Courses need to be monitored by the government to ensure graduates have the necessary skills when they enter the workforce. Courses that fast track and offer unsupervised practical experience does not result in quality outcomes.

**Will the workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications do so, or will they leave the early childhood development sector?**

Those that want to remain in the workforce will be required to upgrade. However, some will choose to leave based on age and career aspirations.

**Do early childhood development workers have the skills to provide effective services to all the children who they regularly work with, including those with disabilities and other special needs and from CALD or low SES backgrounds? What additional skills or support might they require in order to do so?**

Communities are becoming more complex. Children's services are often the first service that families go to. Early childhood staff needs to be clear of their role and skill level. Knowing local services and referral processes is vital when dealing with complex family issues that fall outside their area of expertise. Early childhood courses cover CALD training. The Diploma of Children's Services offered at university teaches inclusive practice. The Early Years Learning Framework also embraces inclusive practice. There will be an increased need for bilingual staff. Child care centres have access to support and training through their local Inclusion Support Team to support the inclusion of children with a disability.

There needs to be commitment from employers to support staff if they want them to expand their skill base.

Family Day Care staff work closely with the Educators to ensure their skills are at a required level and where difficulties arise, referrals to agencies are made and strategies discussed and tried. Educators are provided with free training to specific topics that relate to the children they care for, i.e. Autism, behaviour management etc.