



Response to the Productivity Commission Draft Report into Early Childhood Development Workforce

About NTOSHC Association

NTOSHC Association currently represents 30% of the NT School Age Care Centre's and is rapidly growing. Established in 1989 and run by a volunteer group of dedicated OSHC Directors. We support Educators around the Northern Territory through training, networking and advocacy through NOSHSA.

Introduction

NTOSHC response supports the submission of NOSHSA. We would like to specifically highlight issues concerning NT OSHC Centres and Educators in regards to the Workforce development report (Chapter 7 "The Outside School Hours Care and Occasional Care Workforce")

NT Response to Report

In our opinion the report does not reflect a true image of school age care. This is evident in the comments made about OSHC being "non-cognitive" which are not only offensive but also demeaning of the hard work done by educators in our industry. We believe that this comment needs to be removed from the report and that there needs to be an investment in research based on school age care to acknowledge and educate others about our claim, that OSHC is a cognitive environment where children not only learn through play but most importantly through social interactions. Considering that the Early Years Learning Frameworks focus is on Play Based Learning it would be unacceptable to consider play as "non cognitive".

We also agree with NOSHSA that the term OSHC Workers needs to be replaced with OSHC Educators, also that the term Directors should be Directors/Coordinators.

The report has not highlighted the shortage of educators, let alone qualified educators needed in the Northern Territory. Pay and working conditions do not reflect the responsibility required when working with children. There is an inability to provide security

or full time positions, other than the Director/coordinators role. Most positions are casual or part time with little time for planning or documentation. There is an added pressure on Centre's in the Northern Territory because of its remoteness and cost of living. Our population is small and opportunity to further your career in OSHC limited.

We believe that to ensure the future of OSHC we will need to work as a training ground through some form of partnership with the NT University/Training Organisations, where they recommend current students/apprentice's looking for part time or casual work that fits around studying. Not only will students gain practical experience, children will be exposed to variety of skilled people that have an invested interest in children and their development.

We are currently required to have 50% of staff with qualifications in the Northern Territory but believe that it would be impossible to sustain the expectation of all staff being qualified. Educators commonly work in the OSHC sector until they gain qualifications, then move on to find secure full time positions in teaching or early childhood. We would also like to see there being a skill set required of Educators that do not yet have qualifications or are working towards qualifications. Including First Aid, Mandatory Reporting, Food Handling and an understanding of our framework My Time Our place.

The challenges for the OSHC Workforce have not been covered in this report and we believe that it needs to be acknowledged that many OSHC Centre's run out of non-purpose rooms or shared rooms and can often be moved with little notice, putting extra pressure on staff and children to adapt to new spaces. It has also been noted that in some schools there is little support, understanding or appreciation for the role OSHC play in the school system.

We have worked very hard regardless of all the issues described above to improve our sector but without the support of government developing a workforce strategy for OSHC it will be difficult to continue improving as we move into the new National Quality Framework.

NTOSHC comments on draft recommendations

Draft Recommendation 3.6

- Regulators need to have mandatory qualifications reference to "adequate resourcing" this does not address the necessary skill set to understand and assess our sector.
- We agree that there needs to be qualified staff working in OSHC but not that all staff should be qualified. NT is currently required to have 50% and we don't want this to change.

Draft recommendation 7.1

- We disagree with the term that “OSHC is non-cognitive” and want this term to be removed from the report.
- There needs to be further research to support the development of appropriate qualifications. We would like to see a broad range of qualifications that would be acceptable. Eg. Children Services, Diploma in Outside School Hours Care, Sports and recreation and Arts just to name a few.

Draft Recommendation 7.3

- The statement that “OSHC is responding well to the strong increases” may partially be true but for those Director/Coordinators that are coping will eventually burn out, trying to learn and implement the New Framework with very little help.
- Some Director/Coordinators only work part time hours and are also expected to complete all the new documentation requirements and be a part of ratios once children arrive.

Draft Recommendation 8.1/8.2/8.3

- We believe that there needs to be a higher level of support for children with disabilities and resources for Centre to provided quality care for these children and families. Funding provided does not cover the full cost of a wages or the cost of Professional Development to improve educators understanding and give them strategies to best support children with additional needs.
- We agree that it is not appropriate for children/teenagers between 13-18 years old to be cared for in centres, when we care for children as young as four.

Conclusion

We look forward to reading a revised report that captures a true picture of the challenges facing the OSHC Workforce in the Northern Territory. That it will highlight the need to further research what strategies are required for our sector to successfully transition into the new National Quality Framework.

For Further Information

Amanda Stevenson

Please contact the NTOSHC Association

PO Box 43083

Casuarina NT 0811

ntoshc.assoc@gmail.com

08 89450193