

Carla Yeates
Director, Crows Nest Occasional Child Care Centre

17 August 2011

Dear Carla

I understand that you are going to join a round-table discussion on early childhood, and will be involved in presenting the Occasional Care ("OC") perspective. I have read the OC section of the draft document, and have some comments that you may like to include in your discussions.

As you know my son, Henry, attends the Crows Nest Occasional Child Care Centre; he recently turned 3 and has now been attending regularly for two years - generally twice each week. The reasons I selected the centre, and continue to use it, are:

- the flexibility of occasional care, which suited the casual work I was doing on returning to the workplace after maternity leave
- the small and friendly environment
- the mixed age group, allowing him to socialise with and learn from older children
- the diligent, caring and friendly staff (a young and dynamic team)
- the opportunities for him to learn and develop through structured play and craft activities

Sections of the discussion paper concern me. Its assessment of what OC offers does not tie in to my experiences, which is a relief as the environment described is not one in which I would wish my son to spend two days each week. Specifically, the report states that "the age profile of children in OC and the ad-hoc nature of demand for OC services suggest there is very limited scope for educational interactions" and "occasional care is primarily a care-only environment". While I understand that the framework is a minimum standard, and our centre would be able to continue to provide the excellent service it already does, by leaving OC behind in the NQF the sector is likely to be stigmatised by parents as providing an inferior service – which inevitably would lead to a decline in that service as it struggled for enrolments and funding.

I also find it frustrating (and inexplicable) that we are not able to access the 50% Child Care Rebate; it will inevitably put the service out of reach of some shift workers, which in turn could threaten the viability of the centre. For parents who are working the hours required to meet the work/study test it seems unfair that they do not get the rebate accessible to parents using other centres.

I strongly believe that OC is a childcare model that provides an essential service to some parents, like me, who do not work regular hours. I do not want my son to be treated as a second class citizen because he is not in a long daycare environment. I understand that it is more difficult to implement a structured learning path for children attending only for a few hours each week, but for the sake of those children attending more regularly I think something needs to be in place.

I am happy for you to pass a copy of this letter to others in your meeting if you feel that would be useful.

Yours sincerely

Antonia Connolly