



Baw Baw Shire Council
PO Box 304
Warragul Victoria 3820
DX 82014 Warragul
t: 03 5624 2411
f: 03 5622 3654

e: bawbaw@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au
w: www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au

Friday 28 March 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Inquiry into the immediate future of the childcare sector in Australia and the delivery of quality and affordable early childhood education and care services

I am writing to provide a submission regarding the immediate future of the childcare sector in Australia and the delivery of quality and affordable early childhood education and care services on behalf of the Council. Firstly thank you for the email confirmation received 20 March 2014 providing an extension for our submission until Friday 28 March 2014.

Baw Baw Shire is located in West Gippsland, about 100km east of Melbourne. Population growth over the last 10 years has been slightly above average and strong growth is forecast to 2021, particularly within our early years and aged populations. Thus early childhood education and care (ECEC) is both an immediate and future concern for our municipality.

Council would like to take this opportunity to make the following comments that we believe should be taken into consideration when reviewing ECEC services.

National Quality Framework (NQF)

As a Service Provider of family and children services including Family Day Care, Council strive to provide the highest possible quality of education and care to our families, fully supporting the NQF and the Education and Care Services National Regulations.

Council believes the focus needs to be on the outcomes for children rather than the administration of services and support the need for suitable qualifications and the staff-to-child ratios as per the regulations.

Whilst a lengthy process and not without a few hiccups our family day care experience with the “National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating” was positive.

In relation to the administrative “burden” and impact of the introduction of the NQF, Council services have accepted the additional demands placed upon management and staff, fully endorsing the process and the professional status it carries with it. Council supports the expansion of home-based models of care to provide increased, flexible options for families but firmly believe that any other ECEC options being explored such as nannies should be held to the same level of regulation and quality expectations.

In short, Council supports measures designed to streamline administrative processes and remain committed to the NQF but recommend that future changes to the NQF be accompanied with additional funding to enable changes to be successfully implemented.

Council agrees with Family Day Care Australia’s submission that all policy decisions should be driven by the rationale of establishing high quality ECEC services, due to the direct correlation between ECEC quality and learning and developmental outcomes for children. Therefore, the fundamental elements of the NQF should be retained as they provide a sound platform for the integration of care and education with a defined focus on quality outcomes for children.

The current regulatory environment and the impact on children, educators and service operators

Each care environment needs to be an effective “environment for learning” so in order to achieve this Council’s family day care program sources ongoing, relevant and high quality professional development for our Educators and provide regular support visits from qualified field staff. This can only be achieved with ongoing Government operational funding at the current level as a minimum. Our concerns are that if the current operational funding is slashed or rolled back, our ability to resource, support and provide quality training is what will be first affected.

Council has recently increased the Educator base within the family day care program although the National trend is that services are losing Educators, this shows that our family day care service is needed and seen favourably within our community.

How the childcare sector can be strengthened in the short term to boost Australia’s productivity and workplace participation for parents

Council strives to maintain low service user costs and in most cases our family day care program costs less than using a Child Care Centre. Government rebates, namely Child Care Benefit “CCB” and Child Care Rebate “CCR” assist families to afford the costs of childcare and our services continue to be popular demonstrated by our wait list for family day care services.

Despite maintaining low cost services and even with Government subsidies such as CCB and CCR it is our most vulnerable children and families that often miss out on the benefits of ECEC services and programs. Thus Council believes funding for ECEC needs to be reviewed and improved to make ECEC accessible to all children including children whose parents have an inability to pay. Ideally this would include weighted subsidies for rural services such as ours through simplified Commonwealth/State funding arrangements.

Any related matters

Within Baw Baw Shire there are insufficient kindergarten places for children. Baw Baw Shire introduced a central enrolment system in 2012 to simplify the process for families and to capture the number of kindergarten placements accommodated or not. Council does not run kindergarten services but currently provide the infrastructure for seven kindergartens within the municipality. Within the Baw Baw shire municipality there are currently fifteen kindergartens, ten kindergartens are managed by the YMCA, one managed by Kinders Together, one managed by Uniting Care, a government school licensee and two operate from private schools. Twelve of these fifteen kindergartens participate in the central enrolment scheme and the enrolment data is drawn from these twelve kindergartens.

Council's data suggests that between 40 and 70 additional kindergarten places will be required from 2015, assuming the population will grow at a similar rate. The 'pinch points' will be within our main townships - Warragul, Drouin and Trafalgar.

Whilst Council continues to support and advocate children having access to 15 hours of universal kindergarten we consider the State Government as being in the best position to provide the infrastructure to deliver kindergarten programs. The Council supports the State Government's position and recognises the benefits of co-locating kindergartens, primary schools and other children's services on the same site to better assist families and support young children to make the transition into the school system.

Council raises the issue of insufficient places for kindergarten as apart from negatively impacting the children who miss out on placement, it impacts Baw Baw's productivity and workplace participation for parents. As the reality is that many parents are forced to delay their return to work or work reduced hours because the places and times (if available) do not match with their working hours.

The use of the childcare benefit could also be extended to all ECEC centre-based services to allow for before and after kindergarten care, which would increase the flexibility of ECEC services for families. Additionally funding is required to plan for and coordinate access for children and their families especially our vulnerable and remote children to ECEC services. If this type of funding was received Council could further expand our locally centralised approach to include all local ECEC services.

Lastly I would like to leave you with a quote from Marian Wright Edelman “The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to.” Thanks for considering our submission.

Kind Regards

Belinda Forester

Human Services Manager