



SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

April 2005

The National Family Day Care Council of Australia (NFDCCA) is pleased to provide this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into balancing work and family responsibilities.

NFDCCA was formed in 1988 to provide effective advocacy and promotion of the Family Day Care program on a national level, with financial support provided by the Commonwealth Government. Today NFDCCA is self-funded and recognised as one of the most respected child care peak bodies in Australia. NFDCCA also provides relevant services and products specific to the Family Day Care community for a growing customer base.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee shall inquire into and report on how the Australia Government can better help families balance their work and family responsibilities. The committee is particularly interested in:

- The financial, career and social disincentives to starting families
- Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce; and
- The impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life”.

NFDCCA POSITION

As the peak body for the Family Day Care program in Australia NFDCCA stakeholders include:

- Parents - of around 100,000 children
- Carers – 15,000
- Coordination Unit staff – 2,000
- Operators - 300
- Resource and other workers

Our organisation, along with its members, is committed to supporting families by providing responsive and flexible child care to meet their needs – with the most flexible range of accessible child care available.

NFDCCA VISION

Providing dynamic and responsive leadership, representing the interests of children and families, supporting excellence in Australian Family Day Care.

Regarding the Family Day Care program and its community in the context of the work family balance our first and prominent interest is that of the child. Of course the interest of the parents are intrinsically bound into that focus. NFDCCA sees Family Day Care as the preeminent child care service capable of moulding, blending and responding to meet the needs of children and their families. The very nature of the home environment and the philosophy of delivering the service within the family context reinforces this capacity.

With a record number of children now in child care in Australia – over 720,000 – and 59% of mothers with dependent children now working (mostly part-time), the importance of providing support to working families is more relevant than ever.¹

Family Day Care provides a support structure that enables parents to adequately manage the competing demands of work and family.

Because of the flexibility and individuality of Family Day Care, Carers generally become key support people in the lives of both the children and families they work with, providing an extension to the family unit that may not otherwise be available.

The following story illustrates the special relationship that can develop between a Carer and the families she works with, providing the type of support that no other child care service can offer.

This Carer did the most amazing things to support families She ... packed a picnic lunch for children and families on sports days and with the younger children would watch the school children compete in sporting activities. Parents would join the group for lunch, work permitting. She seemed quite creative in encouraging and finding ways to make it easier for parents to have contact with their children despite their work commitments.

She even held Family Day Care parties at her home every now and then so that parents could get to know each other because the children were so close. Her motive was to ensure the parents could see for themselves firsthand the strength of the children's relationships with each other. This resulted in parents making efforts to support these relationships in the same way they would support a relationship developed at school. This provider even took children to music lessons and made every effort to attend recitals, concerts, school plays when invited – and she was always invited.

*Preliminary findings of research project – The Contributions of Family Day Care to Family Child Rearing Roles and Resources
De Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies 2002*

It is important to note that Carers are also parents and that their special and unique work environment is their own family home. With the support of the coordination unit, efforts are made to recognise, acknowledge and address the need for balance for this special family and worker.

Structures, policy and practice should have a reference point which begins with the child.

OECD
(Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development)

¹ Hon. Larry Anthony, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs - NFDCCA National Forum 2003

ABOUT FAMILY DAY CARE

Family Day Care is a child care service that provides quality child care for children from birth to 12 years of age in a home environment through approved Family Day Care Carers.

Carers are experienced, skilled individuals who earn an income by providing care within their own homes for small groups of children. Staff from a local coordination unit work in partnership with Carers in supporting children's learning and development, while offering support to both Carers and families. Carers and staff are part of a 'scheme' that receives funding from the Australian Government to support its operations.

Operators are the management arm of the Family Day Care structure, responsible for ensuring that the schemes they establish and maintain are operating ethically and according to relevant standards and regulations. They also ensure financial stability and accountability while meeting the child care needs of the community.

Regarded as an international leader, the Australian Family Day Care model has been built on the commitment of the Commonwealth government for flexible and responsive child care including through its investment in the Child Care Benefit (CCB), National Standards, coordination unit support and the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) system.

Current issues confronting the Family Day Care program include:

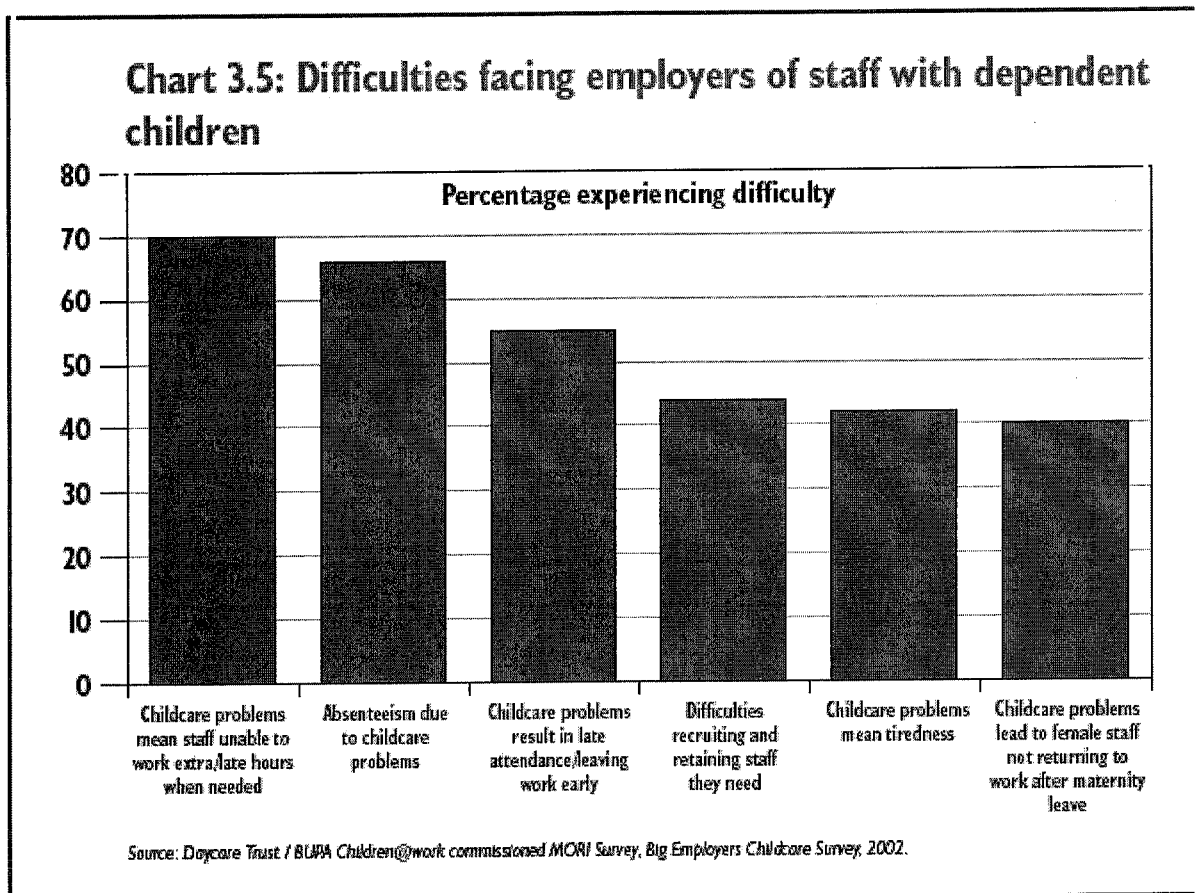
- Transition from Operational Funding to Network Support funding – associated administrative and policy issues particularly maintaining the current funding levels
- Recruitment and maintenance of a skilled workforce
- Income levels for Carers
- Lack of effective planning
- Need for promotion

THE ISSUES – WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE

There are many issues associated with the topics being covered within this inquiry - many of which will be discussed and debated during the inquiry. These include:

- The changes from one breadwinner supported by a homemaker in the 50s
- The immense increase in employment rates has occurred among women
- The social changes around women and their aspirations
- The need to look at trends of employees with caring responsibility – which will increasingly be for the aged
- The primary reasons for young couples choosing not to have children

In preparing this submission a number of interesting resources were consulted. The chart below from a British report² outlines the difficulties facing employers of staff with dependent children. It is interesting to note that in this case 80% of these difficulties were associated with child care.



NFDCCA CONTRIBUTION

NFDCCA has prepared its submission to provide background and information on the unique role that Family Day Care can and does play every day in supporting an effective work and family balance for those families using this special child care service.

The NFDCCA submission includes a number of anecdotes which illustrate the types ways in which Family Day Care operates within its community (365 communities nationally) delivering a range of social and support services and networks to families and children.

It is hoped that this outline of support mechanisms for families will be useful to the committee and be able to clearly demonstrate the benefits that responsive and flexible child care can deliver to Australian families.

² Department of Trade and Industry and HM Treasury Balancing work and family life: Enhancing choice and support for parents 2003

NFDCCA is pleased to provide further information should it be required and would be keen to provide a briefing on Australian Family Day Care to the committee.

FAMILY DAY CARE – A SNAPSHOT

Provides a current snapshot of the Family Day Care program including the role it plays in supporting families, including supporting work and family balance

The Child in Family Day Care

Any examination of Family Day Care must begin by focusing on the child and their experience within the program.

Children in Family Day Care could be described in many ways and fit many profiles.

They range in age from new-born babies through to 12 year olds (in special circumstances 12+ years). They are all kinds of children from all kinds of families, with all kinds of needs – simple through to complex.

Their parent/s could be in the workforce or at home. They could have a disability or come from a family where English is not their first language.

The experience of the child in Family Day Care may include care:

- for short or extended periods of time
- during the day, after school, in the evening or overnight
- on the weekends
- on a casual or on-call basis
- to support shiftwork arrangements
- that addresses their additional needs

The experience of the child in Family Day Care will be in the context of a family environment in the Carers' home and will involve interactions with other family members and other children in care, and their families.

In some cases, the care may commence when a child is a baby and the relationship with the Carer may continue for many years.

The care experience may introduce the child to another culture, learning the language of the family and the community as well as offering a unique opportunity for social interactions with other children, and for learning at the child's pace in response to their strengths and interests.

This diversity and flexibility in a small group setting and the ability to individually focus on each child is an important feature of Family Day Care - providing increased opportunities for development, play and social interactions under the watchful eye of a skilled Carer capable of identifying and building on the outcomes for each child.

Challenges for maintaining and improving the quality of the experiences of children in Family Day Care include:

- Promoting the changing face of Family Day Care to the community across all schemes, with all stakeholders – including staff, Carers and training organisations
- Identifying ways to promote the benefits of Family Day Care for children to families and the community
- Balancing the need to achieve consistency while maintaining responsiveness and individuality
- Developing stronger links with other services
- Maintaining a 'family' service while being accountable and standing up to scrutiny

The Family Day Care Carer

At the centre of quality Family Day Care are the direct providers of the care - Family Day Care Carers.

Carers ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children in their care while working with families to provide excellent care experiences for children. They often develop long term relationships with families and provide a link with community, care and education services.

Their role not only encompasses providing quality care to children but also support to families – effective modeling of child care skills; children's health and development information and advice; links to the community; a bridge between families.

There is great diversity in the experience and backgrounds of Carers yet they are expected to be consistently responsive to the changing workforce and changing care needs. They have increasingly high expectations of themselves and of the service they provide. They are continually improving and building on their quality practices by working with their coordination unit under the guidelines of the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) system.

Carers are also becoming more aware of their rights and responsibilities while further developing the business aspects of providing a home based child care service. In the majority of cases they are not only providers of quality child care but also small businesses, with responsibilities in the areas of taxation and proper business administration.

Carers also face the expectations of families for increased professionalism in child care. Yet access to formal qualifications relevant to their environment, and enabling their unique set of skills and experience to be taken into account, is limited.

Challenges to enabling Family Day Care to maintain and increase its Carer workforce include:

- increased recognition for Carers through improved conditions and remuneration
- better opportunities for professional development for Carers without loss of income

- development of an effective curriculum planning model for Carers which does not constrain them but enables them to articulate the quality of their unique learning environment and the outcomes for all children in their care

The Family Day Care Coordination Unit

Family Day Care Carers provide care for children in an individual setting but they do not work alone.

The Family Day Care model acknowledges the importance of collegiate networks, professional support and development for child care workers.

The coordination unit works in partnership with Carers in supporting children's learning and development while offering professional support to Carers, including:

- resources so they can remain up to date about new developments in child care
- feedback and advice about work related issues
- a sounding board for new ideas
- providing the hub of FDCQA
- a close network to celebrate individual and group successes

Coordination unit staff also have many other roles - they are change agents, resource gatherers, interagency networkers, policy implementers. They develop supportive relationships with families and are experts about home based child care standards, fostering the highest possible quality care environment for children. They respond to community care needs and the complexity of community expectations.

They are observers of good practice and have access to resources to develop the quality of care in individual Carers homes. They champion quality home based care and are accountable to the Carers, families and community.

Coordination units are experiencing increasing expectations of professionalism, better links with other early childhood services, effective implementation of systems and policies, increasing responsiveness to the complexity of families needs, increasing accountability and visibility, and increasing workload pressure with the support of limited resources.

Challenges to the continuance and improvement of the professionalism of coordination units include:

- responsiveness to complex and often competing demands
- keeping abreast of new developments in child care and other related research areas
- reconceptualising the relationship with Carers
- achieving consistent practice yet retaining the flexibility to respond to local issues
- supporting families when there are no places or Carers available
- increasing budget pressures, with expectations for schemes to do more with less

The Family Day Care Operator

Family Day Care operators are a diverse group that include:

- Community and religious organisations
- Local government bodies
- The private sector
- State government

As the management arm of the Family Day Care structure, operators are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the schemes they establish and maintain are operating ethically and within the stipulated standards and regulations. They must also ensure financial stability and accountability while meeting the needs of the community.

The relationship between the operator and the coordination unit is by necessity a close one, working together to meet the needs of the families who use Family Day Care and ensuring that the infrastructure of Family Day Care remains sound. This relationship is impacted upon by both internal and external factors, requiring operators to be manager, mentor, guidance counsellor and much more.

Operators also face increasing pressure to access more Family Day Care places, to keep abreast of the changing needs of the community, and regulating bodies, while delivering a service that is affordable and high quality.

Challenges for the operators of Family Day Care include:

- fostering respectful and supportive relationships between Carers and coordination unit staff
- supporting Carers and staff to implement and maintain the FDCQA system
- maintaining a high level of professionalism within Family Day Care while recognising the diversity of the skills and abilities of Carers and staff
- raising the profile of Family Day Care within the community
- developing and maintaining relevant policies and procedures in response to changing trends and legislation
- supporting staff in continuous education
- balancing the overall needs of the community against the financial viability of establishing and maintaining a Family Day Care scheme

THE ROLE OF FAMILY DAY CARE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Providing Economic Advantages

With over 13,500³ individual Carers operating small businesses throughout Australia, the economic impact of their service provision on the families of the 126,000⁴ children in care is substantial. This impact affects both the financial condition of each individual family and the broader commercial community in which the Carer, her family, and the families she services, participate.

SUPPORTING WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

The flexibility and responsiveness of Family Day Care allows for a broad range of workforce participation opportunities for families.

With its warm, home-like environment, individual attention to children in a small group setting and ability to provide care for children from a very young age, Family Day Care is often the choice of child care for many women returning to or entering the workforce after childbirth. This is particularly true if both parents work long hours and the family needs more flexible child care than other service types can reasonably provide.

Family Day Care also supports workforce participation by women in industries that require a high degree of flexibility, such as nursing or hospitality. The shiftwork or unpredictable hours that are a regular feature of jobs within these sectors make other forms of child care unsuitable or unavailable.

Becoming a Carer is also an employment opportunity for women, and for many enables them to remain at home during their children's early years while still contributing to the financial stability of the family.

INCREASING SKILLS and EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES – FOR PARENTS and CARERS

The retention of valuable skills is also a feature of supporting parents to return to/remain attached to the workforce. With the ability to provide quality care for children from such a young age, Family Day Care enables parents to return to or join the workforce as soon as desired, required and/or practicable after childbirth.

This equates to parents having less time away from their existing jobs and/or creates better opportunities for them to seek and gain employment or access training.

Family Day Care also provides employment and training opportunities for parents who may want to work as Carers. Carers acquire a wide variety of experience and knowledge during the course of running their Family Day Care business, in areas that range from children's development and learning, and nutrition, health and safety, through to conflict resolution, marketing and promotion, basic accounting and business administration. This on the job training provides invaluable skills in many areas and enables parents to build on their capabilities and/or retain their skills, supporting them to contribute to the financial stability of their family, their community and, in a broader sense, the economy.

³ Source : NFDCCA database – February 2003

⁴ Source : Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) – February 2003

SUPPORT TO BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY DEMANDS

With a record number of children now in child care in Australia – over 720,000 – and 59% of mothers with dependent children now working (mostly part-time), the importance of providing support to working families is more relevant than ever⁵.

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Because of the flexibility and individuality of Family Day Care, Carers generally become key support people in the lives of both the children and families they work with, providing an extension to the family unit that may not otherwise be available.

The following story illustrates the special relationship that can develop between a Carer and the families she works with, providing the type of support that no other child care service can offer.

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Preliminary findings of research project – *The Contributions of Family Day Care to Family Child Rearing Roles and Resources* – De Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies 2002

REDUCING RELIANCE ON GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

For many families, the ability to participate in the workforce afforded by access to flexible quality child care also means that they are no longer dependent, or have reduced dependency, on government benefits. This provides a positive impact on both the family, in terms of emotional and financial stability, and the government, in terms of reduced expenditure.

These advantages are particularly evident within rural and remote areas of Australia, where often Family Day Care is the only type of child care available. Without Family Day Care in these locations, there would be increased reliance on

⁵ * Statistics from speech given by Hon. Larry Anthony, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at NFDCCA National Forum 2003

government benefits and/or financial support, along with the social problems associated with unemployment.

GENERATING SHARED WEALTH

By creating support for workforce participation of Australian families, Family Day Care creates wealth – through the financial impact for Carers and their families, the parents for whom they provide care and the communities in which both groups participate.

Family Day Care also creates wealth for the local community by offering small business opportunities. This creates local employment, particularly for women, and generates expenditure and savings, supporting local commerce, including retailers and banking facilities. This in turn provides more employment opportunities for those living in the community, and increases the amount of commercial activity for the locality.

INCOME IMPACT

The majority of Carers are self-employed small business people that work from home caring for other people's children. With over 13,500⁶ Carers nationally, this equates to a sizeable number of small businesses providing revenue to the Commonwealth government in the form of income tax, contributing to growth and the economy.

The financial condition of those families accessing child care within Family Day Care is also positively affected, with their workforce participation, income and ensuing expenditure and taxation impacting on the broader economy.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building is the process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives.

United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

Capacity building is an important social process that improves the community's resources and increases opportunities for the individual/group by working collectively. This process focuses not only on technical skills, knowledge and human resource development within the community, but also on intangible capacities such as managing and resolving conflicts, or building networks and relationships.

The objective of capacity development is, among other things, to strengthen understandings and relationships and to enhance, or more effectively utilise, skills, abilities and resources in order to support sustainable development.

Family Day Care upholds and utilises capacity building in its everyday operation, working with the community to find ways in which to provide support to families, improve the welfare of children and parents and strengthen community ties.

The following story illustrates capacity building at work in Family Day Care and how it provides important social as well as economic benefits for families and the communities in which they live.

⁶ Source : NFDCCA database – February 2003

CAPACITY BUILDING – A FAMILY DAY CARE STORY

The mother of a young family needed to find work to support her husband while he studied. The Carer they were utilising to care for their young daughter... organised some work for the mother at a mushroom farm. As it was 50km away and the mother had no transport, a friend of the Carer, who also worked at the mushroom farm, was able to pick the mother up. This allowed the father to continue with his studies, starting early and arriving home late.

The Carer's husband also applied to become a Carer as he saw the potential in both of them caring for children from their community. He had a lot of encouragement to do this from the ... Family Day Care scheme. As he was working full time, the training was delivered in his home face to face over 3 months.

HELPING FAMILIES HELP THEMSELVES

The government's development of a national early childhood agenda that will focus on a coordinated government effort in early childhood, emphasising the importance of early intervention and prevention, is a timely and warranted move.

Early intervention is critical in today's social climate, with Australian families increasingly experiencing difficulties in reaching out to the traditional extended family for support when needed. The important role played by the extended family in assisting families in crisis, or those simply needing support in the demanding role of parenting, has diminished and family ties have become more difficult to maintain. Relocation due to lifestyle or work choices and the changing role of grandparents have contributed to the erosion of strong extended family structures and to the isolation now experienced by many families across the country.

Family Day Care recognises that effective parenting and family support, modelling and information, through accessible, quality child care networks are all factors capable of strengthening families, including those 'at risk'.

This builds their capacity for future growth and learning and empowers families to identify problems themselves and seek help from appropriate community contacts before intervention is required.

Family Day Care has traditionally provided child care for families that is both work and non-work related, including care for those families in need of extra support or guidance. By modeling good practice in working with children, providing information about child development and learning and identifying families requiring further community support, Family Day Care promotes early intervention and prevention and assists families who may be bordering on crisis.

LINKING FAMILIES TO OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES

Family Day Care establishes links with other support agencies; early childhood centres; financial counselling; and health, nutrition, and education services. These close community service links provide a real benefit for families and children, giving access to help and advice from a local and trusted point of reference.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Carers and families often establish a close bond, and both Carers and scheme staff are in tune with the services available within the local area.

This enables Family Day Care to provide information that could make all the difference to a family that is inexperienced in locating community help or is new to the area.

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN FAMILIES

Family Day Care is well known for its capacity to successfully operate in both suburban and isolated locations across Australia and is often the only service type available to families living in rural and remote areas. Without Family Day Care, many of these families would be unable to continue to work, to receive the respite they require and/or to support their children's developmental needs.

Family Day Care affords opportunities for children to learn through stimulating play and exploration and experience social interactions with other children while also fostering the establishment of valuable connections between parents.

In a community where there are long distances between homes, helping to build bridges between families in this way is an important step in addressing isolation and its associated problems.

In my view, Family Day Care services do not always get the credit they deserve - not just for the care they offer, but because of the difference you make in your own communities, by linking local families, Carers and children together. This is especially true of Family Day Care services outside the main cities, where services 'build bridges' between isolated families.

From a speech by Hon. Larry Anthony, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, at NFDCCA's National Forum 2002

Focus on the experience for each child.....

The focus of Family Day Care is, and must remain, on the individual experience for each child in care. Experiential learning and authentic experiences for children are fundamental components of Family Day Care, components that make Family Day Care the very rich and vibrant service it is.

The role of the Carer in providing these developmentally sound experiences for children is critical, with their ability to interact and successfully attune themselves to each individual child's needs forming the basis for the quality of the care provided in the Family Day Care environment.

Support to families provided by this quality care environment is manifold providing for healthy and happy children, workforce participation or studying opportunities for parents and the support of the family environment which is responsive and flexible.

QUALITY SERVICE PROVISION

Continued implementation of the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) system is vital to enable Family Day Care to be recognised as a quality, professional service, capable of meeting the needs of families. However, proper implementation and maintenance of any child care accreditation system must be based on the ability of the service to continue to be able to support the provision of quality care for children.

Quality care for children comes at a cost. Without the continued provision of both operational funding and funding of quality supports (D-SUPS, training, etc.) for Family Day Care, the ability of schemes to continue to provide quality care is seriously jeopardised.

Consideration of the additional workload on Carers and coordination staff to support implementation of the FDCQA system must also be given. While enthusiasm and support for FDCQA is high, the practicalities of implementing a process of continuous improvement are time consuming and costly and burnout among Family Day Care workers is a very real concern unless adequate financial support continues.

RECOGNITION FOR FAMILY DAY CARE AS A QUALITY CHOICE.....

Family Day Care needs to continue to raise its profile if it is to continue to survive, and thrive, in today's competitive child care market. While there is an increasing awareness of Family Day Care in the general community, the profile of the program is still relatively low in comparison to other child care services.

The introduction of FDCQA has been a positive step in addressing this issue. However, recognition of the skills and experience of the Carer would complement the work already achieved under FDCQA and ensure that the professionalism of the service is acknowledged. It would also provide for increased work opportunities for families with the bonus of working from home.

STRONG PARTNERSHIPS.....

Establishing and maintaining strong partnerships between all major stakeholders in Family Day Care – Carers, coordination unit staff, parents, operators, governments and other child care and professional organisations – is critical to its ability to continue to play an important role in capacity building within the community.

The following story about a young Chinese family's experience with Family Day Care illustrates the way in which the coordination unit works with Carers to develop a competent local child care service that is of lasting benefit to the community.

STRONG PARTNERSHIPS – A FAMILY DAY CARE STORY

A young Chinese family – father, mother and their 2 year old daughter – made the decision to leave their homeland, family and friends as an opportunity arose for the father to study in Australia to undertake a Masters degree.

When the family approached the Chinese Association for support (in finding appropriate child care), they were referred to Family Day Care, who organised a Chinese Carer.

The local Family Day Care scheme fieldworker promoted Family Day Care to the Chinese Association - speaking to many parent groups to encourage this community to utilise Family Day Care. There were 5 Chinese applicants who were invited to become Carers and were supported throughout training by the establishment of study circles at the Chinese Association and access to interpreting.

Once the Carer started in Family Day Care, the scheme fieldworker continued to support her by visiting her on a regular basis to build up a relationship. The Carer was very happy about this as she was able to practice her English language skills. The fieldworker also attended the Carer's first interviews with 2 of her families to support her with paperwork and provide advice on how to interview families.

The scheme (reports) they are very conscientious workers, providing excellent care and meeting the needs of their community.

A STABLE WORKFORCE.....

Retention of existing, experienced Carers and coordination staff and recruitment of new Family Day Care workers is a critical issue for the continued growth of Family Day Care. Demand is increasing but the ability of the service to attract and retain skilled Carers and staff must be improved if the service is to remain viable.

A stable workforce for Family Day Care can only be developed on the basis of proper remuneration and adequate conditions for its workers, this without negatively impacting on the ability of the service to remain affordable for families. Access to appropriate and relevant formal training is also an increasing area for attention in the consideration of Family Day Care workforce issues.

AFFORDABILITY FOR FAMILIES....

Affordability of care for families has traditionally been a priority for Family Day Care, with fees remaining lower than those charged by other services, such as long day care centres.

Ensuring that the current format of the Family Day Care model remains intact supports affordability and access to quality child care for families from all socio-economic backgrounds.