

THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO CHILD CARE

SUBMISSION FROM EMMA KALLARN 21ST OCTOBER 2009

REPRESENTING THE

KALAMUNDA OUT OF SCHOOL CENTRE Inc

The not for profit organisation, Kalamunda Out of School Centre Inc are extremely grateful for the opportunity to address the Senate on the subject of care for school aged children. Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) has been lacking in both recognition of importance and funding in Western Australia for too long. It is perceived that OSHC is not as necessary to the community as long day care of younger children.

Background to our Submission

The Kalamunda Out of School Centre (KOSC) was recently the 'unintended consequence' of the Federal Stimulus Package, Building Education Revolution, when it found itself evicted from buildings earmarked for demolition to make way for new buildings allocated to Kalamunda Primary School. This had been our home for the past 22 years. As the BER was implemented in such short time, KOSC had to garner local government support to relocate to appropriate premises, suitable for Child Care Licensing Regulations. A strong community voice made this possible in four months. We have however, sacrificed used, and licensed, OSHC places to take lease of smaller premises. Our waiting lists continue to grow, as do our operating costs and demand exceeds supply on a continuing basis.

ABC Learning Collapse

The ABC Learning collapse has had little effect on the service provided by KOSC. Despite there being an 'advertised' service of school age children, ABC Learning provides minimal service to our local primary schools for out of school hour's care. We suggest that the reduction of long day care places to fulfil this service was not financially viable and therefore not provided. ABC Learning did not alleviate the demand on OSHC in the Kalamunda region.

With any type of regulation lost on ABC Learning, community services disintegrated. The social impact was that a Corporation acted solely for commercial purposes and did nothing to address the needs of the community it purported to service. There was no compulsory obligation to distribute services to places of need.

KOSC is the only service providing care for school aged children in a district of over 3,500 primary school aged children. We have limited places of just 43. We drop off and pick up from 10 primary schools in our region and subsequently run contracted bus services at a cost of \$80k per annum. These costs are contribute significantly to the cost of OSHC and are likely to increase the risk of parents opting out of formal care arrangements and forcing children into 'home alone' situations. The return of the heavily criticised 'latch key kid' is at our doorstep.

The Latch Key Kid can anticipate 14 weeks of school vacation, a minimum of 1 hour before school and 3 hours after school home alone (using typical working hours for parents). This equates to 922 hours per year, approximately, that this child is left at risk, without adult supervision or proper developmental programmes.

More importantly, the service we offer can only be used up to 12 years of age. A child of 13 years + is not provided for by any government agency and can only be accommodated by private, commercial operators of vacation care programmes. Significantly, the availability and locality of any such service is poor. OSHC is a solid foundation for the early teenagers to integrate into society mainstream without influence or distraction of unsupervised time during critical parent working hours. Without provision of services to the 12 year plus age group parents are forced into this situation and bear the burden of worry and potential delinquency.

Alternative Options

There are varying options available in considering the future of OSHC, many of these relate to the use of public infrastructure to improve availability and distribution of service.

All things considered, it would seem relevant that OSHC is taken up by parents in some capacity from every primary school in the state (Western Australia) and that such care should be available from the school in situ. This has a number of benefits including reduction of infrastructure requirements, reduced necessity for use of community building/s and decreased costs incurred by not for profit organisations in delivering this service at an affordable price.

Operations outside of school premises are costly to the local government and therefore considered a burden to the community by those not requiring these services. OSHC is in direct competition with the Aged Care requirements and there is favour given to those within a community who have 'paid a life time of taxes' and need services. It is undisputed that both parties are deserving and should not have to compete for limited resources.

OSHC, in our experience, is not a choice but a necessity as a result of limited work choices for parents when facing greater financial and employment insecurity, rising costs to rear families and few options to choose the hours they work (WA, typically a 40+hr a week).

The role of Governments

Funding: Is non-existent (WACOSS 08/09 State Budget Information) and significantly under accommodated in any budgeting at Federal, State and Local levels for child care directed to children aged 5 through 16. Child care requirements do not suddenly cease to exist because a child goes to school between the hours of 9.00am and 3.00pm;

The Federal Government needs to ensure services are being 'rolled' out across the country ensuring equitable access in each state. The level of service that may be expected and received in the likes of A.C.T and N.S.W is far better than any being delivered in Western Australia.

There are few (if any) reliable resources available to Not for Profit organisations to apply for substantial grants to improve conditions for centres currently operating. Many centres have become (as did ours) dilapidated as OSHC providers strive to deliver an affordable service based solely on the direct costs of supervision alone. Community infrastructure is woefully inadequate to facilitate these services, short term and long term.

Service providers of this type of child care must not be beneficiaries of big profits in order to reduce the likelihood of costs exceeding affordability and therefore increasing the social and welfare implications to families.

The social implications of underperformance by Federal, State and Local Government are significant. It is likely that there will be an inverse correlation between the places funded for OSHC and the funding required for other government initiatives targeted toward children;

- Healthy Eating Campaign
- Getting Children Active / fighting Obesity
- Graffiti Clean Up
- Childhood Depression

The list goes on.

Until such time that the importance of OSHC is elevated in our society through recognition and availability we will continue to damage children and criticise parents that do not have choices. These services are undervalued and under delivered.

Funding for Not for Profit OSHC that should be considered necessary to new and existing providers includes:

- Building Funds
- Equipment Funds
- Maintenance Funds
- Educational Provision Funds
- Training Funds
- Transport Funds

Costs to parents utilising OSHC for one child, fulltime, will amount to approximately \$10,910.00 (before CCB). When a parent economises this and uses available annual leave (4 weeks per year) they can potentially reduce this cost to \$9,910.00, a dual income family (2 x 4 weeks per year) to \$8,910.00. Of course, the dual income family will undoubtedly suffer as they will not spend any quality time together but instead use their leave to manage the financial constraints of child care. Another social implication thrust into the nucleus of this matter.

Above all else, OSHC must be within affordable reach for all families.

Licensing Requirements

It seems that the Licensing Requirements within our state are becoming more onerous and that there is little room for proper consideration for the age appropriate requirements relative to OSHC.

We would encourage the Senate to consider that not all licensing regulations are 'fit for purpose' in delivering this specific service and that exemptions should be made where communities with reduced services might be adversely affected by compliance or where the regulation itself is not pertinent to the age of care to which OSHC caters. Exemptions should be considered only when quality care provision can be maintained.

Western Australia has a significant lack of representation through government agencies. There appears a general misunderstanding of OSHC and relevant jurisdictions.

Nationally consistent training and qualifications

Whilst we actively encourage nationally-consistent training and qualification requirements for child care workers, we are cognisant of the difficulty in employing such qualified staff (on minimal wages) for the purposes of before and after school care which does not secure enough employed hours to earn a decent income. We would benefit from any consideration introducing reasonable exemptions from such legislation, (again) being mindful of the importance of '*caring*' about children and appropriate working with children clearances.

Collection, evaluation and publishing of reliable, up to date data on casual and permanent child care services;

Whilst we do not deny this exists through government initiatives it fails to address locales where no service exists. There is no contingency to address complete lack of service or unavailable service within these areas. Collection of this data should be utilized in reporting and planning for future, urgent delivery.

Feasibility for establishing a national authority to oversee the child care industry.

There is little evidence to suggest that any national authority to oversee the child care industry will do anything to increase places for OSHC (or other child care requirement). Regulatory authorities are already in place and even though they could be better positioned, without sufficient child care places, their improvement capability is capped.

We highly recommend that Governments assist those organisations well established and struggling to be effective, in particular NOSHA, National Out of School Hours Services Association and PASACCS, Professional Association for School Aged Child Care Services. These associations are at the heart of the problems facing communities throughout Western Australia.

Other related matters

Without the recognition of the importance and value of children in our communities and provision of services to promote their wellbeing, we will produce a self centred generation, typical of the investment not made.

With many parents duly working to meet the high costs of living, Baby Boomer Grandparents unavailable for child care or still in the workforce due to retirement age increases, community denigration and neighbourhood shared care of children disappearing, as well as urban sprawl of families, children have become the 'unintended consequence' of the government's failure to protect them in their (still) formative years.

The Senate have a unique and timely opportunity to enhance the lives of children and their families in producing a proper report on the situation faced in many communities that do not have support. These communities are not restricted to regional areas but widespread throughout our metropolitan areas, no too distant from the CBD. Your report has the opportunity to address so many social and welfare issues that the consequences may be beneficial to our society for years to come.