

**A Submission to:  
The Standing Committee on Education,  
Employment and Workplace Relations on Child Care in Australia**

Having read the terms of reference for the govt enquiry it is disturbing that the references speak of service providers models for the provision of child care frame works etc.but with no provision for examining the needs of "clients," i.e. the very small children for whom the service is designed.

The collapse of the A B C learning may provide an opportunity to look at the folly of large-scale for profit Child Care Centres and especially at the at the grand scale govt run Parent and Child Centres mooted, last year by the Prime Minister as the future of Child Care,

Barbara Romeril, Com. Child Care Assoc. Nat. Sec. enthuses,  
" We know this is what parents want and we know this is what is good for children. " Maxine Mc Kew, Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Child Care says,  
" All the experts tell us this is the way to go " # 1

It is hard to know which experts Mc Kew is referring to. Long hours childcare is definitely NOT in the best interests of small children especially babies from birth to 18 months.

Many researchers of long standing, Biddulph, Stern, Leach, Belsky, Mustard and Meluish to name a few, working in studies of children, their development and child care in the U. K., Sweden, U S A and Australia, over the last twenty years, point to the contrary.  
Your terms of reference list " financial social and industry impact of the A B C Learning collapse on the provision of child care in Aust. " It would be advantageous to add health to that list and examine the social and health implications for the children. For example a recent analysis of about 6000 Queensland mothers and their children, due to be published in the journal, 'Paediatrics' next month, found that, " the longer the mother breast fed the less likely she was to neglect or hurt her child " - due to the release of oxytocin, a calming hormone.

Research author, Dr Strathearn , concluded that the promotion of breast-feeding could be a relatively simple and a cost effective way to strengthen the relationship between mothers and their babies.  
"This over arching goal would be best accomplished by promoting parent education and long term marital stability," he said. # 2

As Mem Fox says, "Putting very young babies into child care is a form of child abuse. She says, "child care is all about adults' needs – No one mentions the babies – no one at all".

She states in conferences around the world that she has listened to paediatricians, social workers, educators, speech pathologists and child psychologists speaking on the detrimental effects of childcare on the very young, especially the first few months of life. They speak about worldwide research over the past 50 years on parent child bonding and worldwide research in the past 10 years on brain development. Some babies in full time care develop differently some of their neural [learning] pathways don't develop well due to insufficient touch in their few months.

" A baby who is touched, held and stroked, thrives. " # 3

Child Care centres are here to stay of course, but it is vital to examine their strengths and weaknesses and to highlight the desirability of mothers caring for their babies at least in their first year.

To make this feasibility would require a close examination of parental leave and or payment to mothers who stay at home to care for their children. It seems grossly biased for mothers in the workforce to have further financial assistance in the form of subsidised childcare while those who stay in the home are unpaid to care for their child.

#### **Alternative Options and Models**

Mothers who truly can afford options, do not choose child care centres, such as the government run parent and child centres proposed by the Rudd Government.

For example in Sweden, as Dr Steve Biddulph points out. It is unusual for a child younger than 18 months to be in care. Day care is used mainly for 3 to 7 year olds.

Biddulph declared, " Parents voted with their feet. Here the government is moving towards the 'Big Three,'

- \* Paid parental leave
- \* Return to work security
- \* Flexible working hours. " # 4

The adoption of these three guidelines would give mothers more confidence to defer career options whilst their children are babies and provide them with real options.

One option for the government would be to provide support for smaller community centred 'not for profit' child centres with strong input from Infant Health Nurses.

They could also look at a framework for family support eg. Parent sharing, grandparent participation, aunts and close friends who would have a close relationship with the child.

The government should be encouraging a culture of nurturing and caring for these very young who are the future of the nation.

Investing in our families, encouraging and assisting them to remain 'intact' should be seen as insurance for our future.

This goal cannot be met unless the best interests of the child are put first.

# 1 Report by Peter Saunders and Jessica Brown. 'The Australian'.  
18/4/08

# 2 Dr. Lane Strathearn 'The West Australian' 27/1/09  
'Mums who breast feed less likely to neglect.'

# 3 Mem Fox 'The Sunday Times' 7/9/08 'Babies need a voice, too.'

# 4 Dr Steve Biddulph "Raising Babies."