

Child Care Inquiry Submission

To: Mr John Carter,
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Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee,
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The Committee states that its terms of reference will inquire into:

- a. the financial, social and industry impact of the ABC Learning collapse on the provision of child care in Australia;
- b. alternative options and models for the provision of child care;
- c. the role of governments at all levels in:
 1. funding for community, not-for-profit and independent service providers,
 2. consistent regulatory frameworks for child care across the country,
 3. licensing requirements to operate child care centres,
 4. nationally-consistent training and qualification requirements for child care workers, and
 5. the collection, evaluation and publishing of reliable, up-to-date data on casual and permanent child care vacancies;
- d. the feasibility of establishing a national authority to oversee the child care industry in Australia; and
- e. other related matters.

I wish to address the issue the second term of reference of the committee, that is, alternative options and models for the provision of child care. My belief is that although institutionalized care is an option for the provision of child care it is not the first option which should be the care of the child in the home by the mother.

Also more subsidized, universally available, affordable, high quality, professional childcare is often advocated as a way of advancing the interests of women. Yet early long day care is not in the best interests of very young children and their families. Evidence increasingly suggests that this childcare agenda is misconceived, because it:

- Is unrealistic, as it is often unaffordable and unachievable.
- Overlooks accumulating evidence of risks of undesirable outcomes.
- Is contrary to much expert opinion about what is likely to be best for very young children and is contrary to the desire of many working mothers to care for their own young children if they could afford to.
- Relies partly on the now-discredited ideology of cultural determinism, which denied the relevance of biology to human behavior, arguing that mothers can be largely replaced by trained carers.

- Makes adequate breastfeeding difficult or impossible (Cook 1999)

Our society has created the spiral in which women are forced into the workforce to the detriment of the children and ultimately society. Our society through other social policies now has many single mothers who must work and this thus fuels the need for institutionalized care. Also mothers who work bring in more income into the family which means they can afford to pay more for a house, and causes housing prices to go up which means to afford a house more mothers in families are forced into the workforce and the spiral continues (Cook 2004).

The role of mother and housewife has been denigrated by our society. It is time it was once again given the praise and support it deserves. This role is of major importance in that it is a major factor in producing healthy and well adjusted adults for our society. A case in point is breastfeeding. Cook explains

“That breastfeeding is of far-reaching health significance, and involves a foundational love relationship, not just a tank-filling exercise, is largely disregarded. The American Academy of Pediatrics now recommends breastfeeding for a year or more, and WHO/UNICEF urge at least two years. Danish adults who had been breastfed for nine months averaged six points higher IQ than those breastfed for less than a month, as reported in a rigorous study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2002. Research consistently shows the greatest positive effects are on the competence of the immune system and on health, in ways that have major long-term cost implications for any modern society.”

The care provided by a mother is very different from what a child care worker can provide. It is only the mother who can say I love you, without getting into trouble, and prove it by her actions. An important part of the relationship between a mother and a child is the infant-mother attachment. Research shows that the security or insecurity of this attachment provides the foundation upon which subsequent relations with adults and peers are built and that moderate but significant associations have been found between insecure attachment and various forms of psychopathology both in childhood and adult life (Cook 1999). A mother provides a safe environment of unconditional love that enables a child to experiment, fail, succeed and grow. A mother is more likely to sacrifice for her child and thus teach the child what real love is all about.

National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD) studies also found that when children spent more time in childcare, their mothers displayed less sensitivity when interacting with them at six, 15, 24, and 36 months of age. Sensitive, responsive mothering through the early years was the best predictor of social competence at six years, which in turn predicts schooling success (Cook 2002).

A US study into the effects of childcare by the Early Child Care Network of the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD) concluded that regardless of the type and quality of daycare, research shows that the more time children spend in any kind of non-maternal daycare before they are 4 1/2 years old, the more truly

aggressive and disobedient they are - not just more assertive or independent. This has adverse implications for parents, as well as for teachers and fellow-pupils, who are all disadvantaged by the disruption to learning which such children can cause in the classroom (Cook 2004).

The NICHD researchers warned that even modest adverse effects on behaviour can have serious social consequences when large numbers of children are affected (Cook 2002). As each generation passes we are more and more seeing children put into childcare at earlier and earlier ages. What type of society are we producing? We don't have to look far to see that our society is getting more disrespectful and disobedient of authority and the people in our society are becoming more aggressive.

I do not believe roles such as mother and father are socially preconditioned. Children learn their roles in life that of being a father or a mother from their parents while they are children even if subconsciously. It is only when we are adults do we realize all that our parents have done for us and how that role modeling shows us how to be good parents of our children. Also institutionalized care is an unsustainable way of helping women, because it deprives the next generation of women of mothering while they are infants, and also deprives the little boys who will be their partners, and the fathers of their children. Preparation for life, marriage and parenting of the next generation begins at birth. So how can we support the family, allow the mother to stay at home, and raise a well adjusted and healthy new generation of Australians?

Dr Peter Townson PhD

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