

THE AUSTRALIAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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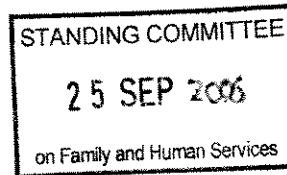
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Supplementary to Sub: 98

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Committee Secretary
Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
House of Representatives
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Dear Committee Secretary

RE: INQUIRY INTO BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

I am writing to request that we may make a supplementary submission in relation to the matter of the needs of infants and babies and work family balance.

In late March, Steve Biddulph published an important new book in the UK in which he set out the most recent findings of major longitudinal studies on the effects of childcare on infants and young children. This research, and Biddulph's presentation of the issue, is highly pertinent to the Inquiry.

In *Raising Babies - Should Under Threes Go To Nursery?*, Biddulph discusses the variety of studies in attachment theory, brain development, cortisol (a physiological measure of stress), emotional development and behaviour.

Biddulph explains why he has changed his position on the benefits of child care as a result of these findings which show harmful effects on the under three age group's brain development and development of empathy and trust. Biddulph explains how the problematic impacts of childcare on infant and early childhood development are found even in very high quality institutional childcare (ie nursery or daycare) settings.

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Biddulph draws on the findings of a range of important studies including:

- NICHD (National Institute of Child Health and Development) NICHD (ed), *Childcare and Child Development*, Guildford Press, 2006 and
- The UK EPPE study, Kathy Sylva, Edward Melhuish, Pam Sammons and Iram Siraj-Blatchford, *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education*, Institute of Education, 2004, London

Biddulph has made available to Australian readers a list of references for a range of important studies on childcare impacts. This reference list is attached.

In addition Biddulph draws on hundreds of conversations with carers, directors, parents and other professionals as well as his own observations of a variety of child care facilities. He cites favourably the work of Australian retired child psychiatrist, Dr Peter Cook, and the recent book by Anne Manne, *Motherhood, How We Should Care for Our Children?* 2005; Allen and Unwin; Australia

Biddulph's book provides an excellent easily accessible guide to the growing body of recent research showing damaged social and psychological development in children who enter nursery "too much, too early, too long".

He argues that new brain research gives us a much clearer understanding of infant and early childhood neurobiological effects of secure and responsive attachment relationships between a child and their parent or other loving attachment figure. In this he echoes the important work of Anne Manne in discussing what happens between parent and infant in a loving relationship.

We submit this material as highly relevant to the matters before the Inquiry Into Balancing Work And Family. Biddulph makes a strong case for proactive policy redirection so that the balance between work and family is viewed over the time frames relevant to infants, young children and their parents.

We believe that families and children will be best served if their needs for strong, loving and constant attachment relationships are recognised in public policy settings.

Biddulph points to new policy shifts in the UK and some European countries that may better enable parents to carve out sufficient time from the span of their working life for caring for their own children. Biddulph is not calling for primary carers to be relegated to the "mummy track" but is arguing that it is important that we enable families to find real solutions that balance work and career aspirations with the needs of young children to be cared for primarily by their parents over the life span of each family. He, like Anne Manne and Peter Cook, is arguing that policies that have the effect of encouraging more and more young children into care will have long-term detrimental impacts on our society and our economy.

The main purpose of this Supplementary Submission is to emphasise the importance of the growing body of important findings on the detrimental impact of childcare on infants and young children. Hence we would argue that parents who aspire to care for their young children in the context of close family ought to be strongly supported. As children grow older, parenting demands become less intensive and parents are able to find additional time for other activities including greater amounts of paid work.

However we believe that it is important to emphasise that there is also growing social science evidence identifying clear links to healthy developmental outcomes of the active, involved presence of parents in the day to day lives of older children and adolescents. Whilst many parents and families gain great personal and financial benefits from parental participation in the paid workforce, most parents have indicated concerns about maintaining sufficient space in their day, week and year for the parenting responsibilities and family involvement they feel is necessary. Many families have expressed frustrations with the time pressures they feel impacting on their capacity to be there for their children.

In a range of studies it is becoming evident that school aged children and adolescents need involved responsive, authoritative parents who are engaged in active guidance, monitoring and support of their children and teenagers.

Studies have highlighted important links between a range of outcomes and the frequency of shared family dinners experienced by adolescents. Frequent experiences of shared dinners are associated with feelings of family connectedness, enhanced confidence in parental support and with low incidence of behavioural, psychological or emotional problems, substance abuse and sexual involvements.

Clear positive links have been shown between the amount of unsupervised time experienced by teenagers and a range of problematic outcomes such as substance abuse, lower educational attainment, antisocial behaviours and sexual involvements. Another study shows that at least some types of non-parental supervision, such as involvement in sport in which coaches are supervising, may not be helpful to the well being of children if parental and family involvement is minimal.

Responsive parental involvement is strongly related to improved educational and behavioural outcomes and emotional development in both childhood and adolescence.

Parental capacity and willingness to be available to help with problem solving, to be available for talking, listening, guidance and other forms of support has been shown to be linked to better outcomes.

Parental capacity to engage in authoritative rather than controlling or permissive parenting styles is also linked strongly to optimal outcomes. Authoritative and responsive monitoring of children and adolescents has been shown to be linked to positive developmental, educational and behavioural outcomes.

A summary of some of the research and references is listed in Attachment 2.

In Australia there has been much discussion over the last few years of worrying increases in the incidence of a range both poor physical and psychological health outcomes, poor educational outcomes, substance abuse and behavioural problems amongst children and adolescents. Professors Fiona Stanley, Sue Richardson and Margot Prior have raised this issue as a matter of urgency in *Children of the Lucky Country* (Pan McMillan 2004).

We submit that, in the light of all these findings and other studies, families further along the life span, with school age children and adolescents also need to at least maintain or even improve their capacity to give time to day-to-day interactions with their children. In addition we believe that it is crucial that an appropriate work family balance accommodate many weeks in the year for shared family holiday experiences.

The kind of work and family balance our children need will change over the life span of individual families. Particularly intense parenting demands need to be accommodated into this balance for young families. The needs of children for close, involved and responsive parenting does not stop at the age of three or upon school entry. An appropriate work and family balance needs to accommodate the changing needs of children, adolescents and parents.

An appropriate balance is one that makes possible family life that is generally happy, generally relaxed and fulfilling for all members. Over the life span of each family, this balance must accommodate the needs of infants, children and adolescents in such a way that their life chances are not compromised for lack of parental involvement.

Accordingly we ask that this supplementary submission together with Steve Biddulph's Book and the references guides set out in the attachments (including Dr Peter Cook's book) be allowed into evidence for the consideration of the Committee in regard to this most important inquiry.

ATTACHMENTS accompanying this submission :

1)Reference List for *Raising Babies - Should Under Threes Go To Nursery?* 2006, Harper Collins UK available at -http://www.stevebiddulph.com/site_files/raising-babies-references.pdf

2)Reference List for research showing links between parental involvement and availability and optimal outcomes for school aged children and adolescents

ALSO ENCLOSED:

Steve Biddulph, *Raising Babies - Should Under Threes Go To Nursery?*, 2006; Harper Collins UK (and available through Amazon.com) -only supplied to Committee Secretary

Dr Peter Cook, *Early Child Care Infants and Nations at Risk*, 1996; News Weekly Books; Australia.

Yours Sincerely



Angela Conway
Spokesperson and Victorian Vice President
Australian Family Association
September 13 2006

CC : Hon Bronwyn Bishop(Chair)
Mrs Julia Irwin MP (*Dep. Chair*)
Hon Alan Cadman MP
Ms Kate Ellis MP
Mrs Kay Elson MP
Mr David Fawcett MP
Ms Jennie George MP
Mrs Louise Markus MP
Mr Harry Quick MP
Mr Ken Ticehurst MP

**ATTACHMENT 1- EXTRACT AND REFERENCES FROM RAISING
BABIES: SHOULD UNDER-3S GO TO NURSERY? BY STEVE BIDDULPH**

Too early, too much, too long

Parenting guru Steve Biddulph enters the childcare debate with a broadside on nurseries, and demands we find a way to allow women to work without sacrificing their children.

It began 30 years ago with a phone call. A friend, a young mother, is on the line, distraught. It's her first day back at work after four month's maternity leave. Her little boy is at a nearby nursery, howling. She is howling too. I'm about to say: "He'll be fine," but instead I ask how she got to this point. She tells a story that is very familiar to me now, 30 years later. Her husband and her boss want her back at work, and her peer group are all doing the nursery thing - but in her heart, she has never really asked, what do I want? And it's taken this separation to find out.

By the end of that day, and with no prompting from me - for in those days I was an advocate of 'quality care', she is back home, and doesn't return to work for 18 months more. And I am launched on a journey of concern. What do we do to parents in our society? We think we are free to choose our lives, but pressures from all around, not least the housing price crisis facing the UK, mean women, like men, are just as enslaved now as when feminism first stormed the barricades. The tyrant has changed, but the choices are just as poor. And then there's the babies, lying in rows of cots, then milling about in garish rooms through their toddler years, aching for one special adult to love them. Twelve thousand hours of this before they set foot in school.

Childhood today is nothing like it was for preceding generations, especially for very young children. In 1981, only 24% of mothers returned to work before their baby was one. Today the figure is over 70%, with 95% of fathers working full-time. As a result, almost a quarter of a million British children under three attend a day nursery full or part-time.

Day care was originally intended for three and four-year-olds, but its use has spread downwards; some babies are now put into nurseries when they are a few weeks old. The hours have got longer too: throughout the industrialised world, millions of children under three are in nurseries 10 hours a day, five days a week. This large scale group care of the very young has happened without prior research (compared with the invention of kindergarten, which was designed with child development needs in mind).

Daycare, nurseries, home carers and nannies are an absolute necessity given our newly hurried lives. Day nurseries are an attempt to slot messy and needy young children into the new economic system, while at the same time reassuring us that it is good for them, socially and educationally. Nurseries are marketed so well that parents at home have even begun to feel that they are not as good for their babies and toddlers as 'experts' might be, despite the fact that these 'experts' may well be teenagers with minimal qualifications, who fell into this line of work. The critical, rarely mentioned core of nursery care is that our children will be looked after in bulk - on a 1:3 or 1:8 ratio, compared to 1:1 at home. Like McDonald's fast food, we can enjoy the convenience of drive-through; through the miracle of mass production.

The rapid adoption of nursery care in the early years has been a social experiment; a gamble taken by millions of parents. The results of the experiment are now emerging. The first generation of babies raised in this way are now entering their teens and early 20s.

Most western industrial countries are reporting record levels of young people with mental health problems. The proportion of teenagers in the UK with behaviour problems has doubled since 1980; the proportion with anxiety and depression has risen by 70%. The incidence of attention problems, violence problems, eating disorders, and of binge drinking and other addictions has also risen dramatically. These are not poverty-stricken children, lacking education, healthcare or food; affluent children are equally represented in this problem generation. In the past 10 years, researchers have learned that a baby's brain grows whole new structures in response to the love and affection, and caring firmness, given during its first two years of life. If this kind of intense love is not given at the right time, these areas of the brain do not develop properly. This is perhaps the most vital message: children raised without sufficient loving care do not fully become the human being they were meant to be.

In the 1990s, because of the critical importance of the whole question and the widespread disagreement among experts, a number of governments were persuaded that something had to be done. In the US, Britain and half a dozen other countries, large long-term studies were set in motion to try and establish the truth. Was nursery care harmful? And if so, under what circumstances, and why?