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## National Reforms and Rights For All Children

*Prue Warrilow, National Convenor*

It has been a busy time for children's services over the past few months and it is set to continue throughout this year.

The draft Regulations were finally released on 7 March 2011. Consultations started on the same day the draft Regulations were released. Unfortunately this means there was little time to fully prepare to offer feedback on the day – but you can submit written responses to DEEWR by April 14.

We are waiting to see the finalised framework for middle childhood service My Time, Our Place so that services providing programs to school age children can commence integration of this important framework well before its introduction on 1 January 2012.

ACCS has recently made public statements calling on the Australian Government to fulfil its 2010 commitment to release from detention children and their families deemed 'at risk' into communities. Despite this commitment, as of February 2011 there were still 1065 children held in detention facilities across Australia.

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which clearly articulates amongst many important considerations that decisions regarding a child must be made in the best interests of the child, that children's rights are to be respected and fulfilled, governments must act responsibly assisting families as effective nurturers of their children, children are to be protected from being hurt – physically or mentally, and refugee children have the right to special protection and help. (A summary of the Convention is available here:

[http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf).)

At the recent National Children's Services Forum (NCSF) ACCS raised our concern that children are still being held in detention and asked all NCSF members to agree to actively lobby the Australian Government to immediately cease this practice, placing children and their families who are seeking asylum into the community.

I urge you to consider what you can do to ensure that no child and their family remain in detention. Every conversation and every small step you take towards this critical aim may mean one less day in detention for a child. Write a letter to relevant Ministers, meet with your local parliamentary member to talk about this issue, and talk to your colleagues and friends.

ACCS is still continuing its strong focus on Closing the Gap for Aboriginal and Islander children and their families. At the recent NCSF meeting the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) highlighted the need for a longitudinal study on how effective the MACS (Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services) have been in supporting Aboriginal and Islander children and their families. The SNAICC report highlighted some of the positive outcomes that children have experienced attending MACS including a decrease in the number of children in the juvenile justice system, an increase in children who have completed formal schooling and gone on to further education, and higher educational outcomes for Aboriginal children where MACS are located. ACCS will be supporting SNAICC in its request for this study and we will keep you posted on progress.

### ACCS website!

You can find information about your national peak body by visiting [www.ausccs.org.au](http://www.ausccs.org.au)

# Your Peak Body In Action

**Barbara Romeril, National Secretary**

ACCS continues to work hard to capitalise on the national quality reforms that are providing a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Australia's children and their families and the services they rely upon.

ACCS is in communication with Minister Ellis about the misquote in the *Australian* newspaper in December 2010 which suggested that long serving child care staff would not be required to complete minimum Certificate III training under the new National Quality System. ACCS wrote to the Minister expressing our concern and has received assurances from DEEWR that the Minister was misquoted. We are now in communication with the Minister's advisor about the need for a public correction.

ACCS met with the Shadow Minister Sussan Ley and supported her concerns about rural parents and children being put into the 'too hard basket' when rural services are granted exemptions from meeting minimum quality standards.

ACCS responded to the Productivity Commission issues paper on the children's services workforce and the Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill (2010): both submissions can be read on the website [www.ausccs.org.au](http://www.ausccs.org.au)

ACCS continues to participate in the National Quality Framework National Stakeholder Reference Group – this is a large cumbersome group with an unusual range of representatives including various school groups which do not contribute to discussion.

ACCS also continues to meet with:

- the child care union LHMU to find common ground in campaigning for workforce reform to support improved quality
- GoodStart, the non-profit owner for ABC Learning
- the community alliance convened by Families Australia to support implementation of the national child protection framework.

## ACCS Advocacy

### Letter to Minister Ellis 25.01.11

Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) is writing to seek clarification of your comments in The Australian newspaper on 17 December 2010 in an article regarding 'relaxing' the qualification requirements in the new National Quality Reforms for long standing child care staff.

ACCS appreciates the challenges in meeting the requirements for increased qualifications in the COAG reforms. Similar challenges have been faced and overcome in the past. ACCS believes that the interests of children as well as those of unqualified workers will be best met through a rigorous system of Recognition of Current Competencies

so that unqualified staff receive accreditation for their skills and knowledge.

Increasing qualification requirements is based on solid international research of what makes a positive difference for babies and young children. Passion, commitment, dedication and love are insufficient to ensure high quality care and good outcomes for children. The COAG reforms enhance the professionalization of the sector and build its reputation and effectiveness across Australia.

We would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to clarify this matter.

Yours sincerely  
Prue Warrilow  
National Convenor

### Reconciliation Action Plan

ACCS is committed to developing a formal Reconciliation Action Plan to support our commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and closing the gap for children.

We would welcome any feedback from our members about your experience of developing Reconciliation Action Plans and what you believe should be included in a national ACCS RAP.

Please contact us at email: [ausccs@cccinc.org.au](mailto:ausccs@cccinc.org.au)

### Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Development Workforce

Late in 2010 ACCS sent a survey via the ACCS delegates to members to gather information on workforce issues facing the sector to inform our submission on this important topic. These responses were collected and used in the ACCS response to the Productivity Commission – we encourage you to read the complete submission which is available at the ACCS website [www.ausccs.org.au](http://www.ausccs.org.au)

ACCS is very appreciative of the feedback provided – our submission was in depth and backed up with evidence which shows how professional we are as a peak body. We will also be able to draw on the workforce research contained within the Submission to inform future responses.

There will be further chances to offer our input on this submission – a Draft Report will be prepared by the Productivity Commission during the year. We will keep you informed when this report is released.

### Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill (2010)

In December 2010 ACCS sent in a submission supporting the Commissioner for Children and Young People as it provides the opportunity to entrench the intent of key principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) into a separate statutory office which values children as citizens and holders of rights.

The intent of the Bill is that the Commissioner and the office thereof will coordinate policies, programs and funding across

Australia which is preferable to the current fragmented policy approach to funding for children and their families.

The scope of powers is set to include all children and young people in Australia and obligates the Commissioner to listen to their concerns and wishes, and having a Commissioner for Children and Young People will be a positive measure to assist Australia to reach its international obligations.

You can read the entire submission on the website [www.ausccs.org.au](http://www.ausccs.org.au)

## Children in Detention

ACCS has been active in voicing our displeasure at children still being kept in detention in Australia and encouraging the Australian Government to act quickly on their decision to release children and families from detention facilities into the community. We wrote a Letter to the Age on the issue and have also prepared a letter to send to the Prime Minister outlining our firm belief that the rights of children must not be abrogated under political pressure.

You can read ACCS' letter to The Age on the website [www.ausccs.org.au](http://www.ausccs.org.au)

# Government Initiative

## Paid Parental Leave Scheme

The Australian Government paid parental leave scheme came into operation from January 1 this 2011. The government funded scheme is for eligible parents of children born or adopted after January 1 2011 and eligible working parents will receive taxable Parental Leave Pay at the national minimum wage (\$570 a week before tax) for a maximum of 18 weeks.

There is information for employers in regard to the scheme available from the Family Assistance Office at <http://www.familyassist.gov.au/>

# News from the Union

## United Voice – The Childcare Union

**Melissa Coad – Stakeholder Coordinator**

An exciting new chapter in the 100 year history of the childcare union LHMU will begin in March 2011 when the union assumes its new name: United Voice.

United Voice is one of the largest unions in Australia and certainly the most diverse. It was time for a name that was inclusive of everyone – rather than singling out a few industries and lumping everyone else together under the “miscellaneous” title.

We chose United Voice based on the input and recommendations of members. We brought people together from different regions, industries, ages and backgrounds to tell us why being part of a union is, or would be, meaningful to them. We found that the words “united” and “voice” came up over and over again. “United” conveys that despite not all being the same, we come together for a common cause and “voice” as members saw that unions were a way to have their voice heard.

At the same time as this exciting name change we are also embarking on a new chapter in our BigSteps campaign for a quality ECEC sector and professional workforce.

United Voice supports the Australian Government's quality reforms including improved staff to child ratios and the introduction of minimum qualifications as a means to deliver high quality ECEC.

However we fear that without reform to the wages of ECEC professionals the move to quality could be undermined. Professional wages recognise the hard and valuable work undertaken and aid in attracting people to the workforce and keeping them there.

We know that we cannot achieve professional wages on our own. We will need a groundswell of support from the workforce, employers, parents, business and the broader community.

We know that parents and employers cannot meet the increased costs alone. The Australian Government has a major responsibility to deliver, along with United Voice, professional wages to the sector.

We are commencing the new campaign soon with meetings of directors and workers in all capital cities. Over the coming months we will be talking to everyone we can to come together to make this a success.

Stay tuned for more information and visit our website at [www.bigsteps.org.au](http://www.bigsteps.org.au)

# Reports from ACCS Representatives

## National Children's Services Forum

The national executive of ACCS participated in two meetings of the National Children's Services Forum since the last edition of this newsletter.

Major discussion in the Forum in November 2010 included:

- Inequities in Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services receiving significantly less funding than the new Aboriginal Child and Family Services funded through COAG – question put to DEEWR re what do MACS need to do in order to qualify for this higher
- DEEWR definition of Inclusive Children's Service apparently excluding In Home Care
- How the Modern Award is working against national quality reforms.
- Qualifications and experience of assessors in the new National Quality System – consultants are investigating now; E4Kids researchers found that quality assessors in that project were less open if they had EC qualifications
- Quality of Early Childhood Qualifications – DEEWR is currently reviewing the quality of all university courses; National Workforce Strategy could address quality of VET training.
- Proposal for 'Operating Standard' to become 'Foundation' level – a service can stay at Foundation level indefinitely; next level 'National Quality Standard' is higher than current 'Accredited' level. Includes services just over

the line in all areas through to services high quality in all but one area. If a service shows some improvement in its annual assessment it can continue to operate at Foundation level.

The Forum held in March 2011 discussed:

- Concerns about the national forms - DEEWR took note and committed to follow up.
- Formation of the National Disability Alliance in Children's Services which will include children's services organisations and individuals who are committed to the inclusion of children with disabilities and additional needs; a call for expressions of interest in joining will be published in the ECA bulletin
- The amalgamation of two national peak bodies for the commercial child care sector is yet to be completed; in the meantime the Australian Childcare Alliance is attending the Forum in place of Childcare Associations Australia
- Ideas to strengthen Special CCB for children dealing with long term risks
- Concerns about the ability of the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) to support the capacity of children's services to provide education and care to children with additional needs

ACCS is calling for a volunteer with a strong understanding of the Inclusion Support Program to participate in a working party of national peak bodies to work with DEEWR analyse barriers to ISS achieving its purpose and identify solutions.

The Forum resolved to write to DEEWR expressing continuing concerns about the quality of pre-service training and to issue a press release urging the Commonwealth Government to act quickly to implement its policy of releasing from detention children and their families who are seeking asylum.

The NCSF meeting in August will include the biennial lobby day when the national peak bodies meet with dozens of politicians on all sides of politics to present the key strategic issue facing our sector.

## Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children

**Barbara Romeril**

At last ACCS has received a reply from Minister Jenny Macklin to our letter of 23/9/10 which we wrote as part of the Families Australia Coalition campaign for greater action on the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (it took only 5 months to respond to a complaint that implementation is slow).

The letter says that the Government has met 'the vast majority of milestones for the first year of the implementation plan' and lists 51 new Indigenous Parenting Support Services, 8 new Communities for Children Plus sites and new processes for sharing info between Commonwealth agencies and with state and territory agencies.

She repeats her announcement of last October of annual funding for Families Australia to assist members to participate in the implementation.

The Minister is 'interested' in the suggestion of 'further opportunities' for Coalition members to be involved in broader children's issues and floats the idea of a new Children's Roundtable for NGOs to advise Government on Commonwealth policies and programs which affect the wellbeing of children – ACCS will be keen to participate in any such roundtable to provide the perspective of universal early childhood education and care services.

Finally the Minister mentions the outcomes of the Community Services Ministers meeting of 16.12.10 and the historic meeting with Coalition reps to discuss progress on the Framework.

The letter doesn't say anything about progress on improving the capacity of universal services to protect vulnerable children – ACCS will be working with Families Australia to find the best way get this issue higher on the agenda.

## Child Rights Taskforce – ACCS and International Advocacy

**Rhiannon Williams**

ACCS has been participating in The Child Rights Taskforce which is a coalition of organisations, networks and individuals committed to the development of child rights in Australia. One of the objectives of the taskforce is to guide and support Non Government Organisation (NGO) reporting for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and support the development of awareness of child rights and best practice in child rights for policy.

As a signatory of the UNCRC, the Australian Government is obliged to provide a periodic report on how Australia's children are faring and how well the government is upholding its obligations to ensure child rights are protected and upheld in policy and legislative documents – and in practice.

To offer a balanced perspective in the reporting process alongside the government report on children's rights is an NGO report which outlines from an NGO perspective how Australia's children are faring, what the government is doing well and what they could do better. Currently the NGO report is in draft form with UNICEF Australia and the National Children's and Youth Law Centre taking the lead in compiling a response. ACCS has contributed our position on the Racial Discrimination Act and some NACBCS work on poverty for consideration and possible inclusion and it is very exciting that ACCS has the opportunity to participate in advocacy that reaches as high as the United Nations. We will keep you informed on further developments in this important work.

## Corporate Child Care – The Old Empire

**ABC Childcare founder Eddy Groves says he will vigorously defend criminal charges**

**Liam Walsh, The Courier-Mail, 29 January 2011**

Failed entrepreneur Eddy Groves has pleaded not guilty to criminal charges relating to the fall of ABC Learning.

Groves, who founded ABC Learning, appeared along with the former director of the chain's Australian operations Martin Vincent Kemp.

Groves pleaded not guilty to one count of breaching the corporations act while Kemp, who is facing three counts, was not required to plead.

Speaking outside the Brisbane Magistrates Court, Groves denied having been involved in an allegedly dishonest deal with Kemp.

"I've pleaded not guilty today and I will vigorously defend the charge, and that's really all I can say right now," Groves said.

During the mention of the matter, the court was told it was alleged the pair breached the corporations act when Kemp organised for his company to sell three childcare centres to ABC Learning in early 2008, just months before the chain collapsed.

The court was told Groves, who was overseas at the time, sent an email approving the immediate transfer of around \$3 million from ABC Learning to Kemp for the sale.

"We consider this a breach of the corporations act," prosecutor Alan MacSporran, SC, said.

Groves' lawyer, Peter Davis SC, said the email sent by his client was "ambiguous", and entered a plea of not guilty on Groves' behalf.

"Mr Groves vehemently denies that charge and wishes to enter a plea of not guilty now," he said.

Legal representatives for both accused men said they were eager to have the case dealt with as quickly as possible.

However, Kemp's lawyer, Paul Galbally, asked for a long adjournment to enable them to properly consider material still being compiled by the crown.

The matter was adjourned for four weeks when it will be mentioned again.

Both Kemp and Groves were granted conditional bail, and were excused from attending future mentions of the matter.

The charges brought by the Commonwealth Department of Public Prosecutions follow a probe by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission into ABC's collapse in November 2008.

It marks one of the first criminal cases against a high-profile company director since businessman Rodney Adler was jailed in 2005 for offences relating to the failure of HIH Insurance.

Mr Groves co-founded ABC in 1988, growing the childcare business from one centre in Brisbane's Ashgrove to an empire with more than 2300 facilities across four countries.

ABC became a stockmarket darling that ultimately collapsed owing creditors more than \$2.7 billion. Mr Groves, 44, who once owned Ferraris and basketball team the Brisbane Bullets, left as chief executive months before the collapse...

The move is significant as ASIC has previously often taken civil action against directors. It also follows ASIC facing a backlash last year after losing a civil case against Jodee Rich, founder of telecommunications business One.Tel. A criminal case requires a higher burden of proof.

"If ASIC is initiating this action, they're viewing the (alleged) acts of the directors as very serious," said Julie Walker, an associate professor at the University of Queensland's Business School. "Regulators generally have moved, particularly over the last decade . . . towards making directors more personally responsible for their actions while on the board."

## And the Rise of the New Empire

### Child's play not easy

*Colin Kruger, The Age Business Day, January 22, 2011*

When ABC Learning began its meteoric rise nearly a decade ago, the question raised by many community-based childcare operators struggling to break even was simple: how could this corporate leviathan make any money, let alone the fantastic numbers it was reporting?

For hapless ABC Learning insiders, the question was: how could it not?

"This is a business subsidised by government - how can it be unprofitable?" said ABC Learning's former chairman, Sallyanne Atkinson, soon after the collapse.

A submission to the Senate inquiry into childcare highlighted the huge discrepancy between ABC's success story and the brutal financial reality of childcare...

The demise of ABC Learning, and other listed childcare operators, appeared to give a definitive answer to whether profit and childcare could mix despite government subsidies that will top \$4 billion this year.

So it may come as a surprise that most Australian childcare centres are still run under a "for-profit" business model.

In fact, a new corporate player is already emulating ABC Learning's early years, with a voracious appetite for other childcare operations and international expansion.

This was not part of the script when community-based, non-profit operators lined up at the Senate inquiry.

KU Children's Services, the largest non-profit childcare provider in Australia until ABC Learning's carcass was sold to GoodStart last year, said the ABC disaster proved the "emperor has no clothes. Childcare is not a licence to print money and any profits on the scale being reported to be made by ABC were not due to the provision of child care."

This is true. The profits ABC Learning reported are now accepted to be a product of questionable accounting practices.

And the financial performance of the profitable centres sold to GoodStart do not provide much cause for optimism either.

An abbreviated financial account showed the operations barely broke even in May last year.

GoodStart chairman Robin Crawford warned against reading too much into the numbers and says the business is on track to generate more than \$40 million in earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation for this financial year.

"A year in the childcare business varies enormously," he says. "We bought well and are tracking pretty much as expected"...

But to focus on these examples ignores the fact that most childcare in Australia remains in private hands - just a very different set of hands from those we are used to reading about.

A report from the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care last year showed that, even after transferring 650 ABC Learning centres to the non-profit sector, about 64 per cent of childcare centres remain in private hands.

With the collapse of the corporate sector "the major shareholders are mums and dads", says John Wall, an executive with childcare management services company Total Childcare Solutions.

While not offering a simple answer for what keeps these small operators in business, Walls - an industry veteran at the corporate and small-operator level - says these owner-operators work a lot harder at the centre level than a company that owns 1500 centres.

But they also scrimp a little, according to the non-profit sector, which points to research showing it offers higher-quality care - at an inevitable cost.

"Generally the not-for-profit model is more expensive than the ABC model due to such things as the higher quality of care (including higher staff-to-child ratios and better qualifications and experience) and the inclusion of children with additional needs," KU said in its Senate submission.

While it has no real beef with small private providers, KU says there is no place for large, corporatised operations due to "conflicting priorities" that put investor interests first.

KU did not want to comment on the current state of the industry, with corporate childcare providers on the ascendancy again.

But the relative calm since the ABC Learning collapse appears to have benefited the childcare survivors by killing off the irrational exuberance that came with corporate expansion.

As Wall explains it, the collapse of ABC Learning and its predecessors means there are not the "saturation events" of the past.

"Saturation events" refers to the sudden increase in childcare capacity that would accompany corporate expansion. If you were in an expansion area where new operators were fighting for market share - and children were crawling out the door to the competition - the effect could be catastrophic...

An industry report from market researcher IBIS World estimates that long-day care centres require occupancy rates of at least 70 per cent to be profitable.

In what may be a telling tale of how hard ABC Learning had to run to stay afloat, founder Eddy Groves reportedly told institutional investors that 90 per cent occupancy was the magic metric for the company.

Anything above this meant the company would be making good money, he said. Anything less, the company would struggle.

Some analysts were rightly concerned when ABC Learning stopped reporting its occupancy levels well before its collapse in 2008...

The Office of Early Childhood report also backs up the saturation theory.

"In many locations, ABC Learning's growth appears to have created an oversupply in long-day care provision," the report says. "There is considerable scope for occupancy of the remaining centres to grow."

It notes that "the amount of long-day care used as a proportion of total hours available was 75 per cent in September 2009" - comfortably above the Ibis estimate of 70 per cent as a break-even point.

The figures provide some hope that companies can survive in the childcare game, which is just as well - the experiment with corporate childcare is not over.

The ASX-listed G8 Education - the result of a merger last year between publicly listed straggler Early Learning Services and privately owned Payce - has gone on an acquisition spree reminiscent of ABC Learning in its formative years.

In November, G8 said it owned 119 centres in Australia and managed another 21. In Singapore it owns 18 and manages a further 48.

The company has forecast revenue of \$115 million for this year and \$17 million in earnings before interest and tax, but the pace of growth means it is hard to track how much growth is being internally generated and how much is being acquired.

This was also a problem at ABC Learning.

But G8 chief executive Craig Chapman says the company has avoided ABC Learning's excesses like overpaying for the centres it acquires, and using its shares - not debt - to pay for them.

"We've bought on the right multiples," he says. "We had evidence ABC was paying up to 78 times EBIT (earnings before interest and tax)."

Chapman is not shy about naming some of the important factors that allow profit-driven centres to thrive. He says having well-maintained centres and a strong education curriculum are crucial.

"With these factors you can charge a higher price," he says...

Despite getting badly burnt by ABC Learning and other collapses, the financial market is looking favourably on G8, which has doubled its share price since emerging from the ELS listing last March and has strong backing from institutional shareholders.

Three such investors own about 40 per cent of the stock.

As for GoodStart, Wall says he is seeing a greater desire from the company to make each centre more community based and "if so, I believe they will be much more profitable and for the right reasons".

After ABC Learning's debacle as a for-profit listed company, many parties are certainly hoping so.

## Child's play for small cap punters

**Richard Hemming** *The Age Business Day, February 25, 2011*

"Roll-up, roll-up, roll-up..."

That's the call I hear coming from the corridors of G8 Education (which is fortunate to have snagged the ASX code, GEM).

The provider of child care for kids aged "six week to six years" has delivered classic small cap returns of late. Its shares have climbed almost five-fold since the start of 2010, leaping from around 21 cents to about \$1.00. This is the kind of return you are never going to get from its bigger brothers. And G8's market capitalisation is still relatively small at \$183 million.

Since listing in 2007, G8 has increased its shares on issue from 44 million on listing to the current 183 million in order to purchase ever-more child care centres.

Some call it a "roll up" strategy, others call it "consolidation"...

G8 Education is benefiting from the continuing fall-out from the demise of Eddy Groves' ABC Learning.

A lot of Mum and Dad-type operators bought and set up child care centres on the belief that ABC would pay ridiculously high multiples. ABC has largely gone, but these people's debt remains and G8 is proving to be a life-line, albeit at much lower prices.

G8 is expanding, having purchased 120 centres and is taking its model into Asia, having recently purchased Cherie Hearts in Singapore, which has another 20 centres...

## Branch Reports

### South Australia Branch Report

**Alison Wells**

The South Australian branch has written a letter to the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) requesting an extension of funding so child care staff can upgrade qualifications to degree level, but have not received a reply as yet.

A lot of the conversation in the state has been on the topic of the National Quality Standards and the changes that will occur as a result of the reforms. Currently there is a feeling that Centres are frustrated at the lack of answers about how the challenges in the changes will be met by services – particularly related to the impact on budgets. ACCS SA will also be looking to speak to key bureaucrats in DECS on how they can support the sector with these important changes.

ACCS SA has requested a meeting with Kate Ellis for clarification which has been received, but no time has been set.

ACCS SA together with our state association – Community Children's Centres SA (CCCSA), are looking at ways we can work closely together to have a greater voice in identifying and working through the issues related to the pending changes.

## Victorian Branch Report

**Barbara Romeril, CCC Executive Director**

Victoria now has a Coalition Government. Unlike the last Coalition Government which set out to quickly dismantle the social infrastructure of Victoria in order to free up resources for 'wealth generating' activities, the new Baillieu Government is keeping the community services system on an even keel and appears to be working carefully and cautiously in reviewing policies, programs and funding arrangements. CCC has written to the new Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Wendy Lovell offering support in keeping Victoria at the forefront of reform in children's services; we will meet with her in March.

CCC has an established relationship with Wendy Lovell who met regularly with the CCC while she was in Opposition and spoke at our election forum. In these discussions Wendy has shown a breadth and depth of understanding of children's issues, albeit shaped by conservative ideology such as a particular focus on 4 year old kindergarten programs and reservations about government investment in social equity.

CCC continues to build our relationships with the child welfare sector. We are capitalising on the opportunities presented in the Victorian Government's Inquiry into Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children especially in collaborating to present the universal children's service system as an integral part of child protection.

While this new work for vulnerable children builds, CCC continues to work tirelessly on specific issues for children's services. We are participating in consultations on a proposal for a portable long service leave scheme for kindergarten teachers and assistants; it appears that the Victorian Government is determined to proceed with a scheme for kindergartens which is separate from any scheme for the broader community services sector which would include child care services; this is despite our best efforts to alert the consultants for this project to the nonsensical implications for kindergarten programs delivered in long day care centres.

The CCC 2010 AGM was a success, forming part of our state election campaign; over 50 members and stakeholders had the opportunity to hear about what your peak body has achieved in the last year for children, families and communities, and also to hear from all the major parties about what commitments they would make if they formed the next government.

Our members took this opportunity to speak with their democratic representatives, to hear the best they have to offer and to ask the key questions. CCC was proud to host this impressive show of passionate articulation of key concerns of the community child care sector.

### Queensland Branch Report

**Tanya Roessler, Queensland Branch Treasurer**

ACCS Queensland welcomes the LHMU's news re the launch of 'United Voice – the Child Care Union'. This is great news for the sector and has been a long time coming! We believe it is a step towards promoting greater public understanding of the important role children's service educators play in the care and education of young children in this country. We look forward to providing our members with the opportunity to be actively involved in this historic and exciting move. We

particularly look forward to the proposed TV campaign, as the association representing private child care is currently airing TV advertisements across Queensland.

ACCS Queensland has been consulted on the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan for Queensland 2010-2013.

The Queensland Government are discontinuing operational funding for a number of limited hours care centres across the state as of 1 July 2011. These services were established by the state government with federal government occasional care funding. They are licensed as child care services for up to 30 children and can operate hours which suit local community need to a maximum of 20 hours per week. The 2008 Queensland state census reported 55 Limited Hours Care Centres operating across the state.

The Queensland Department of Education and Training, Office for Early Childhood Education and Care has recently opened applications for the fourth round of Early Childhood Teacher Scholarships valued upwards of \$12,000 each and closing 8 April 2011. They have also extended their program of funding kindergarten programs in long day care centres to better meet the needs of working families. This has been a very successful inclusion and welcome funding for a number of our member centres to date.

The Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline is the first state-wide curriculum for kindergarten programs in Queensland and is the recognised learning framework for use by approved kindergarten program providers. The Guideline supports planning, teaching and learning in kindergarten programs, regardless of the setting. Interested kindergarten program providers can also apply to the Queensland Studies Authority to have their own kindergarten learning framework accredited as an alternative to using the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline.

We would also like to thank Karen Struthers the member for Algester for letting us have our meetings at her office. As she has now moved we are in the process of finding another venue for our meetings.

## How to Contact ACCS State and Territory Branches

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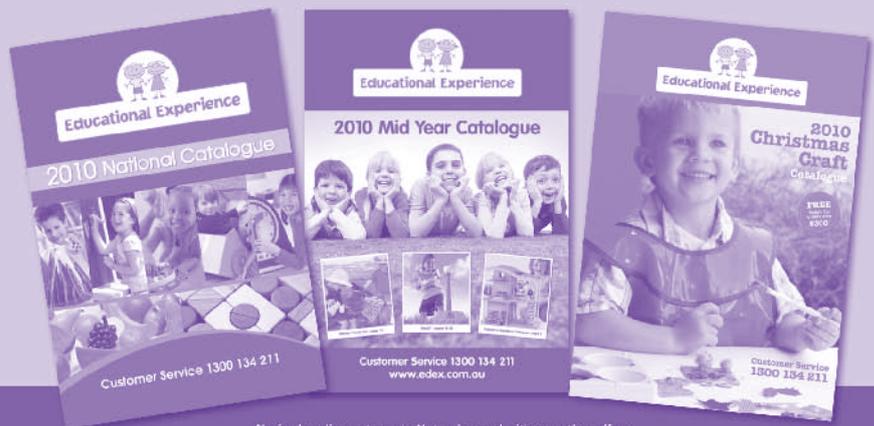


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