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A Vision for Children's Services

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

I hope all of you are progressing with the National Quality Framework (NQF). Any change creates different challenges for each of us, and the NQF is impacting on all of us in different ways with increased professionalism of the workforce, and enhancing opportunities for the children and families who use our services.

I met with Minister Ellis in May and we discussed how the NQF was going. She was very excited that services were for the most part responding well with educators, staff and carers, stepping up to the brave new world we are operating in. The Minister challenged me with a number of questions for the last session of our National ACCS Conference 18/19 May 2012.

The key question was - what might children's services look like in the future?

And more....how might children's services be able to respond flexibly to changing

workforce participation internally (staff) and externally (parents), and changing demographic profile with an ageing workforce? How will the current exciting quality reforms change and expand the professionalism of the children's services workforce, and what might the future expectations of this workforce look like? The Minister also expressed her concerns about the opposition push to have nannies included in the same funding as children's services as nannies are not qualified and would potentially bring down the recent and current work on professionalising the children's services workforce.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts about the questions the Minister raised, and I'll be reporting back on the discussions these questions raised at the ACCS Conference in the next edition of ACCS In Action.



ACCS Trends in Community Children's Services Survey

Calling all long day care, outside school hours services, family day care, vacation care and preschool services....

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

This quick (10-15 minutes) confidential survey asks you to tell us your experiences with:

- Recruitment and retention of staff
- Implementation of the NQF
- Vulnerabilities in communities
- Fees and utilisation

Go to survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Have_your_say_ACCS or follow the links at www.ausccs.org.au.

For the right policy and government support for our sector and Australian families, the government needs to know what is going on. With your help we can tell them!

Please contact Cara Gleeson, ACCS Research Team if you have any questions cgleeson@cccinc.org.au

Your Peak Body in Action

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

ACCS continues to work hard on both our internal action plan and our external lobbying and advocacy.

We are conducting our biennial national conference in Wollongong as we go to print – the theme of ‘Change and Leadership – who’s the ringmaster’ allows us to focus on the serious issue of sector reform while having some fun with the circus analogy. And of course the answer is – we are the ringmaster! Community children’s services are and have always been the leaders of reform.

Our first ever national survey of the community children’s services sector is also going live as we go to print; the biannual ACCS Trends in Children’s Services Survey will be an important tool in gathering solid evidence to support our advocacy for strong government policies to underpin the continuous improvement that our sector is known for. Congratulations to all ACCS members who have contributed to the thinking, planning, testing and conduct of this vital research. I strongly encourage all members to participate – go to our website www.ausccs.org.au and follow the links.

ACCS is in discussion with a major sponsor, Educational Experience, to renew our formal agreement. This agreement delivers discounts to ACCS members on educational materials purchased from Educational Experience and a rebate to ACCS national that we use to support our advocacy work and keep membership fees unchanged for state/territory branches. The Educational Experience advert in this edition announces the increase to a 20 per cent discount offered to ACCS members. You will also find an article about Educational Experience that shows their genuine attempts to link their products and services to the important work of supporting the national quality reforms and to position themselves as a trusted advisor on resources to support quality educational outcomes. We thank them for their support.

ACCS Advocacy

Meetings with MPs

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

ACCS continues to communicate with relevant Members of Parliament on all sides of politics to promote the rights of Australia’s children to access high quality, not for profit, community owned children’s services. In the last quarter we have had several meetings with Minister Kate Ellis and her staff as well as with Greens Senator Sarah Hansen-Young.

We addressed a local electorate child care seminar on a panel with the Shadow Minister Sussan Ley and with commercial child care peak bodies – see elsewhere in this newsletter for details. We will seek meetings with key Opposition MPs when next in Canberra in order to inject a community perspective into their policy development before the next election campaign.

This is a crucial time to lobby for bipartisan support for the National Quality Reforms which will not be fully implemented by the time of the next federal election and so will be at risk

of a change of heart by an incoming government. We must take every opportunity to shore up political support for the reforms at every level of government.

ACCS observed with interest the Green’s Senate motion in early May, backed by the Coalition, which called for the government to direct the Productivity Commission to inquire into childcare funding. The call specifically asked for an inquiry into the affordability, flexibility, accessibility and quality of early childhood education and care. We wonder if this will be a key theme coming into the election next year.

After the federal budget, ACCS attended a community sector briefing by Treasurer Wayne Swan held by ACOSS. ACCS welcomes the extra funding for the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) which provides parents and carers in disadvantaged communities with the skills and confidence they need to take an active role in their children’s education. It also provides access to a tutor for their child in the year before school and other learning activities to support their development and learning.

Additionally ACCS welcomed the extra \$225 million for child care to help parents who are unemployed undertake training to return to work. This funding is delivered through the Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) program, formally known as JET.

Coalition Policy on Child Care

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

I recently had the opportunity to address a child care seminar on a panel with the Shadow Minister Sussan Ley and with commercial child care peak bodies organised by the Federal Member for Kooyong, Josh Frydenberg. This was an important opportunity to achieve two goals – to hear an update on the Coalition policies for children and to inject a community sector perspective into the Coalition’s thinking.

We haven’t heard much from the Coalition on their children’s policy since the 2010 federal election campaign when they announced if elected they would review the National Quality Agenda (NQA) to ensure provision for addressing issues of cost to families and workforce impacts. This was close to the advocacy positions of the various commercial child care peak bodies who claim to support improved quality while calling for extensive delays in implementation of the NQA because it costs too much and it is impossible to find qualified staff.

The invitation to the forum gave some insights as to the current state of Coalition policy – it stated that the Shadow Minister ‘has been the driving force behind the Coalition’s child care policy calling for a Productivity Commission enquiry into the most efficient and beneficial way tax dollars can be allocated to child care.’ This appears to be a reference to Abbott’s recent call for an inquiry into more flexible child care including a proposal to look into subsidising nannies.

The invitation went on to say: ‘the Coalition is determined to slash the red tape and administrative burden currently faced by child care centres’. Again this reflects the lobbying by commercial interests who inevitably characterise any government intervention in their business decisions as undue interference and unjustified red tape. So it would seem that the Coalition is still a long way off supporting the National Quality Reforms and a change of Federal Government next year will place the reforms in jeopardy – unless we can convince the Coalition that the reforms are worth the cost.

At the forum Chris Buck from the Child Care National Association (the names of the national peak bodies for the commercial child care sector change regularly) claimed that there is 'complete chaos' in the sector due to the new legislation. He called on the government to assist the sector to lift utilisation levels above the average of 60-70%. I am not hearing community long day care centres report such low utilisation levels – could his figures reflect the perception of his member services in their local communities?

Gwynne Bridge from Australian Childcare Alliance complained that while child care staff were happy playing with children 25 years ago, now they are leaving in droves due to the burden of increased paperwork and the requirement that 'learning must happen through play'. She insisted that government must watch the cost of high quality and assure the sector there will be less change in the next 25 years. She will be unhappy to hear that ACCS and other community peak bodies intend to advocate for further improvements in minimum standards during the 2013 review of the National Quality Agenda.

I spoke about the research evidence that high quality in child care improves outcomes for children and called on the Coalition to publicly support the National Quality Reforms and an increase in CCB for low and middle income families.

The Shadow Minister Sussan Ley expressed support for the important voice of the community sector, the Early Years Learning Framework and the improved quality that comes from increased staff:child ratios. She acknowledged that qualifications are important but stated she doesn't want to lose the good unqualified workers and is concerned about advertisements for what appears to be 'backyard' care. She states, that public debt levels mean we can't just increase CCB and CCR and 'the National Quality Framework is not about to be wound back but if it costs too much then we must find a solution.'

Questions and comments from the floor were dominated by commercial child care providers and voluntary committees of management of kindergartens who are going through quality assurance for the first time. Not surprisingly the tone of the discussion was extremely negative and supported the call for delays in implementation of the NQR. Concerns included:

- High civil penalties for breaches of regulations – particularly worrying for commercial operators
- Increased paperwork associated with NQF – perhaps educators participating in reflection and documentation who previously were excluded from these functions
- Kindergarten committees overwhelmed by their first experience of quality assurance

CCC as ACCS Victorian branch is organising another forum for community child care providers in the electorate to meet with the Member for Kooyong to express their support for the NQF; perhaps this is something other ACCS branches can organise to build support among Coalition backbenchers.

On a positive note, discussion at the forum showed real progress in adoption of respectful professional language such as referring to educators (there was only one reference to 'the girls' all night). Also the Member for Kooyong closed the forum with a reference to the best interests of children, perhaps in response to ACCS' focus on what we all agree on – that we want the best for children.

Report from ACCS Representative

ACCS input into the training package review

ACCS continues to advocate for appropriate training packages for our sector that will support robust training to produce work ready graduates to deliver high quality education and care.

As part of this, ACCS is currently participating in the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC) Children's and Youth Services Industry Reference Group. In spite of its long name, this is really the place to be to advocate for more relevant and robust training packages.

The current review, framed around a continuous improvement plan, will take us into 2014. CS&HISC are already acknowledging that the training package must incorporate the EYLF, FSAC and the NQS in the mandated qualifications. Additionally CS&HISC acknowledges that the current qualifications are not reflective of actual industry practice and that this results in some graduates from some training providers entering the workforce without developing understanding or competence in key components of the job.

Some of the issues ACCS is concentrating on and has already raised includes: the need for cultural competence training for educators in mainstream services and increased profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) educators; need for flexibility of delivery and understanding of Recognised Prior Learning (RPL); need to strengthen leadership in ECEC, particularly pedagogical leadership; and the need to for minimum work placements.

ACCS appreciates the strong campaigning and advocating for change in our sector and we strongly encourage all members to stay engaged. Only by hearing your stories and experiences with the current training packages can we advocate for change.

Our ACCS representative on the Industry Reference Group is changing as we write – we will let you know who to contact as soon as the new rep is confirmed.

Changes in our Sector Corporate Child Care Transforms into Community Children's Services

Barbara Romeril, ACCS Victoria

Recently I had the opportunity to attend a seminar on Early Childhood Education and Care as a platform for Social Inclusion. Initially I was perturbed to see GoodStart on the panel speaking on the topic 'Delivering social inclusion in ECEC settings' – was this the beginning of the worst fears of the community children's services sector, that GoodStart would use its sheer size to obliterate the good work that small community owned and operated children's services have been doing for decades?

But it turns out the reality is very different and I am pleased to reassure my colleagues that GoodStart appears to be

genuinely attempting to be a good contributor in our sector – it appears the ball is now in our court to respond.

Firstly it emerged that the reason GoodStart was on the panel of presenters was a very good one – it paid for the participation of the international leader on this topic Naomi Eisenstadt, former Director of the Social Exclusion Task force and Sure Start UK. GoodStart has Naomi touring the country and presumably speaking with their staff – a very good sign.

Further, the panel included speakers from a number of long standing community children’s services including the Brotherhood of St Laurence and SDN Children’s Services.

And most encouraging was the content of the presentation by GoodStart. They are not putting themselves forward as leaders in social inclusion but rather acknowledging publicly their difficult journey of transformation to meet the challenge set for them by the welfare organisations that make up the GoodStart consortium – to transform the existing nationwide network of ABC/GoodStart centres to deliver on their purpose of alleviating disadvantage and including disadvantaged children. The financial surplus is being reinvested in the services to build their capacity to be socially inclusive and to make up for the lack of investment when ABC went under.

But most encouraging was an overhead slide which characterised the GoodStart journey as a shift from “For Greed” to “For Profit” to “Not for Profit” to “For Purpose”. In my opinion this is a courageous acknowledgement of the ghastly culture of corporate greed that drove ABC Learning until its demise and of the enormous transformation that GoodStart is attempting in bringing these services to meet the needs of children, families and communities, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Last but not least, the GoodStart presentation included the goals of:

- Increasing enrolments and duration of participation in ECEC by disadvantaged children
- Strategic sector-wide collaboration, advocacy and affirmative action

GoodStart is acknowledging that they are still on a journey to achieve their purpose. I believe ACCS can and should encourage the community children’s services sector to reach out and accept the invitation to collaborate in the interests of vulnerable children.



Educational Experience is a major sponsor of ACCS and a supporter of our members through their discounts. We invited them to share with us their experiences in this period of change and national quality reforms for our sector

Becoming a trusted supporter of the education and care industry

**Lorraine Walker, (Educational Consultant)
Edright Pty Ltd**

During the implementation phases of the National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care, one organisation in particular has been active in their consideration of how best to support the industry - primarily by reviewing their philosophical intent. This review has determined the organisation’s future direction and the methods they will adopt to achieve this. This is more than a strategic plan – it

is a realisation of their *raison d’être* or the purpose for their operation.

Educational Experience commenced a Results Based Accountability format review with team representatives in early 2011 aiming to determine approaches to become an authentic industry supporter. The key word being authentic as this was, and is, considered a paramount requirement for being accepted and respected by an industry that had so many changes to face and needed an advisor they could trust. Promotional activities and literature were to be aligned with the revised philosophical intent to ensure a consistent and reliable approach. Educational Experience was continuing to enhance its reputation of being more than just a company that sold toys and resources. It was now very much aware of the current demands and expectations of the sector and was improving its ability to respond appropriately.

There were to be no short cut solutions on offer, for example, buy this resource and it will meet the requirements of a certain outcome of the *Early Years Learning Framework or the Framework for School Age Care*.

Current modes of operation at that time were analysed and plans for a continual planning and improvement cycle were established and, with staff engaged and excited about future possibilities, aspirational strategies were formulated. Consultation with industry experts and ongoing communication with practitioners and families gleaned important background knowledge. This coupled with the formation of a Research and Development team, ensured relevance and engendered innovation.

In 2010, the organisation had negotiated the use of Dr John Irvine’s doctorate in children’s play which focused on the educational qualities of play items - **S**kill building; **P**roblem solving; **I**magination; **C**ommunication and **E**go-building (SPICE) and this was initially presented in Educational Experience’s 2011 National Catalogue to great acclaim. Dr John’s work is founded in developmentally appropriate practice which obviously aligns with the two frameworks’ underpinning pedagogical practices relating to the fostering of children’s learning and development.

For example:

Early childhood educators draw upon a range of perspectives in their work which may include:

Developmental theories that focus on describing and understanding the processes of change in children’s learning and development over time (*Early Years Learning Framework page 11*)

And:

School age care educators draw upon a range of perspectives in their work which may include: developmental theories that focus on describing and understanding the processes of change in children’s learning, development and wellbeing over time (*Framework for School Age Care page 7*)

Following the successful introduction of SPICE, the concept of developing a healthy learning pyramid resource was conceived. The project’s rationale was to develop a tool for educators/teachers and parents to facilitate supportive and stimulating learning environments. This would enable children to develop skills and knowledge through play-based learning opportunities, as advocated in the two frameworks.

My Educational Experience Learning Pyramid™ was launched in February 2012 and is the result of extensive

research and input from industry specialists on best quality practices. The pyramid recommends resources in the context of suggested learning experiences for particular stages of development. No one resource can meet the requirements of a particular framework outcome but, the range of possibilities of how a resource can be used, as described in the *What does this encourage* sections, can address certain outcome aspects. These descriptions can also be very useful when practitioners are planning and documenting children's learning.

The pyramid will continue to evolve based on feedback from the industry. Current plans for improvement include broadening the categories of learning experiences within each stage of development and adding more specific links to the National Quality Standard and the two frameworks. Programming ideas based on capitalising on intentional teaching opportunities are also under development. Educational Experience is heartened that this investment has been so well received by the industry.

Spin offs from the pyramid are the already renowned Healthy Learning Handbook whose 2nd issue will be distributed in June 2012 and a new concept art catalogue – Artventures – due for distribution at the same time. Both of these catalogues include visual representations of children actively engaged in learning experiences and articles and/or text explanations which support educators/teachers and parents to meet the requirements of the ideology of the National Quality Standard and the Australian Curriculum.

The focus in both catalogues is on the learning experiences rather than solely on the resources themselves. They are an undoubtable support for the practical application of the frameworks' outcomes and a demonstration of Educational Experience's beliefs in the child's wellbeing being at the centre of everything we do.

Educational Experience is not attempting to replace educators/teachers or to presume that they are more knowledgeable. Educational Experience is instead trying to understand the current demands in the education and care industry and how best to assist and advise educators/teachers/parents on how to resource optimum learning environments. This is how the organisation can authentically prove that they can be trusted advisors to the education and care industry.

ACCS feedback is requested to assist the continual planning and improvement cycle. Please email your input to feedback@edex.com.au

For information on the My Educational Experience Learning Pyramid™, the Healthy Learning Handbook – Issue 1, Artventures (available June 2012), or for the Educational Experience National Catalogue, please contact EdEx Customer Service toll free 1300 134 211 or follow the links at the website www.edex.com.au

Children's Commissioner Announced

Cara Gleeson, Community Child Care Victoria

After years of advocating, ACCS welcomes the Australian Government's recent announcement to establish a National Children's Commissioner with \$3.5 million over four years.

The Children's Commissioner will operate within the National Human Rights Commission alongside the commissioners for sex, age, disability and race discrimination.

So far, we know the Children's Commissioner will promote public awareness of issues affecting children, conduct research and education programs, consult children, and monitor Commonwealth legislation, policies and programs. Still to come are more details about the roles and responsibilities of the Commissioner. In particular ACCS is interested in whether the Commissioner will be an independent advocate of unaccompanied minors for asylum seekers. This would replace the current system, which is fraught with conflict of interests, with the Minister of Immigration acting as guardian for children entering our country without adult companions.

The Government will introduce the relevant legislation later this year and they expect the new commissioner to take office by the end of 2012.

This development follows a long history of advocating by ACCS and many other children's organisations. In the last edition of *ACCS in Action* we reported that ACCS joined 33 organisations late 2011 in submitting a position paper to the Australian Government (available on the ACCS website) outlining what the leading children and youth organisations expected in a Children's Commissioner.

In 2010, ACCS lent our support to the Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill, put forward by Greens Senator Hansen Young. While the Bill was not initially successful in 2010, it was an important stepping-stone to the recent announcement.

ACCS will continue to advocate for a robust and strong Children's Commissioner to ensure children and young peoples' rights are met and their voices heard.

Branch Reports

Qld Branch

Frances Snedden

Since our last report the small Qld ACCS branch has been active.

Letters have been sent to all relevant State and Federal Ministers regarding the importance of appropriate assessor qualifications and experience to the success of the new National Quality Standards. While it is disappointing that responses have not been received to date, information recently received from the Chair of ACECQA, Rachel Hunter, indicates the sector has been 'listened' to. Research is planned to provide evidence to set targets for 2020 with ACECQA considering the best qualifications profile to deliver consistent, reliable assessments across all jurisdictions.

We are identifying changes for the sector with the move from State to the new National Work Health and Safety Legislation in January 2012.

We provided Early Childhood Australia with Queensland parents prepared to speak publicly on the value and importance of quality care, we provided input to the National ACCS Draft Submission on ACECQA's 'Excellent Rating' and we collected Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) case studies for the National Children Services Forum (NCSF).

One of our members has also continued involvement in the ACCS national executive and NCSF while another has participated in the ACCS national conference sub-committee. We are looking forward to joining our state and

territory colleagues from the community based sector at the much anticipated conference 'Change & Leadership - Who's the Ringmaster?'

We have also commenced trialling Management Committee meetings via Skype with the aim of encouraging more active involvement from our members spread across this vast state - for example, our Southern and Northern most members are located 2,210km from each other!

Victorian Branch

Barbara Romeril, CCC Executive Director

Community Child Care is actively advocating for building the capacity of children's services to include children at risk of abuse and neglect. In response to the report on the Inquiry into Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children we convened a round table discussion with state wide organisations in the early childhood and child welfare sectors and participated in a meeting of CEOs and Chairpersons of community service organisations to discuss potential responses to the Inquiry. We have written to the Premier on the important opportunities this offers, and welcomed the positive initiatives in the State Budget.

We provided advice to the Victorian Minister for Children on funding models for rural and remote children's services and we have established communication with the Victorian Shadow Minister for Children.

We continue to build opportunities for active involvement of our members with the interactive newsletter Friends of CCC which is widely distributed electronically. And CCC is leading the work of on the first national Trends in Children's Services survey.

It is interesting to note that the alarmist public campaign of the commercial child care lobby has gone quiet now that the National Quality Framework is being rolled out; in contrast to their dire warnings of huge fee increases and family panic, their spokesperson agreed with CCC at a recent meeting with the Victorian Government that the sector is coping well with the new ratio of one educator to four children under three years of age.

How to Contact ACCS State and Territory Branches

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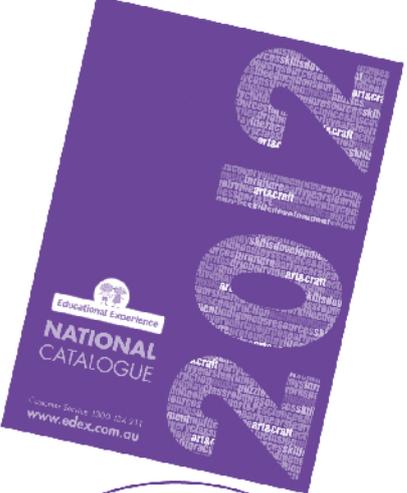


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