

Published by the National Association of Community Based Children's Services (NACBCS).

NACBCS In Action is a quarterly publication.

If you would like to contribute an article to this publication, please email: nacbcsc@cccinc.org.au

For more information on NACBCS visit our website: www.nacbcsc.org.au

In Action

Inside this Issue

Editorial	Front Page
NACBCS National Secretariat Report	Front Page
NACBCS 25th Anniversary	Front Page
National Children's Services Forum Report	Page 2
Child Care Management System	Page 2
Changes to QA	Page 2
Review of National Standards	Page 3
Choice Magazine - 'Caring for Kids'	Page 3
Keeping an Eye on Corporate Child Care	Page 5
NACBCS Branch Reports	Page 10

EDITORIAL

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

The child care sector in Australia is facing a huge amount of change – merging of the Quality Assurance systems for different service types, new management systems for government subsidies, introduction of flexible employment practices – all of which means it is even more important that community based services have a strong, active peak body that can influence these changes at the national level. NACBCS is participating in consultations on all of these developments – see inside this newsletter for more details and information on how you as a member of NACBCS can contribute.

But we will also continue to follow our own agenda especially in advising the Australian Government on policy initiatives that will support and expand the community children's services sector and protect its crucial role in building communities and connecting people for mutual support.

NACBCS will celebrate our 25th anniversary in 2007 – watch out for information about events and publications to celebrate, reflect on and learn from our survival through a quarter century of advocacy for children, families and the communities in which they live. See inside this newsletter for some key dates.

NACBCS NATIONAL SECRETARIAT REPORT

NACBCS attended the National Children's Services Forum in November and contributed to a lively discussion about corporate child care; it is clear that the Forum is not able to fully address this issue given its membership and its purpose, so NACBCS will continue to pursue these concerns through other forums. In the meantime we will assist the Forum in its discussions of the more general issues of quality and accessibility. See below for more information about the November Forum meeting.

NACBCS participated in a national consultation on the merging of the three Quality Assurance

systems in child care. The commercial child care sector is using this redevelopment to lobby for reduced standards; NACBCS is working closely with other peak bodies that represent parts of the community sector to advocate strongly for protection of, and improvement of the current standards in the QA systems.

NACBCS will also participate in a reference group for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on supporting the child care sector to offer flexible employment conditions to staff in order to help balance work and family responsibilities.

NACBCS has nominated representatives for a reference group for the development of a new Child Care Management System; see the report below from the National Children's Services Forum for more information.

NACBCS 25th Anniversary

Your national peak body turns 25 next year. NACBCS was formed in 1982 to advocate for the community sector in children's services; 25 years later we are still going strong while many other community sector peak bodies have come and gone. We plan to mark this important anniversary with a number of activities including a national conference:

**Friday 16 & Saturday 17 November 2007
Melbourne Functions at Caulfield Racecourse**

The conference program will bring together speakers on the history of the politics of child care in Australia and the role that NACBCS has played and continues to play in these debates. And we hope that the conference program will also include the launch of an anniversary publication that will capture recent policy proposals, analyses and advocacy papers produced by NACBCS, linked to national and international perspectives on children, families and communities.

If you have ideas for the national conference or the anniversary publication or if you have historical NACBCS documents which could form part of a display of our history then let us know at: nacbcsc@cccinc.org.au or call 03 9486 3455.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES FORUM

The Forum agreed to lobby the Australian Government in regard to defunding of important innovative services that have been declared 'out of scope' for funding under the new Child Care Support Program; many of these services have successfully met needs in hard-to-serve communities such as rural and remote areas for several decades; without child care funding they will be unable to continue. The Forum was particularly concerned to hear that the Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is taking a narrow definition of 'child care' as being fundamentally separate from 'pre-school education' in order to push services into State funding programs. This is a huge backward step in the move towards recognition that all early childhood services provide care, education, health and welfare services to children, and that the best outcomes for children and their families come from services that recognise this range of roles and deliver them in a seamless, integrated manner. Forum members resolved to write to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Education Minister about this important issue. NACBCS will follow up this issue directly with the Australian Government.

The Forum heard a presentation on the proposed Child Care Management System which the Australian Government is developing; it will streamline CCB administration and enable a single port for collection of information such as data for the Child Care Access Hotline and the Child Care Census. NACBCS has nominated representatives for a reference group to advise on the new system to make sure it actually works for services on the ground. You can read about the proposed new system on www.facsia.gov.au and you can give your ideas via email on ccms@facsia.gov.au

The Forum heard from FaCSIA that the Indigenous Child Care Plan is still under development. It also heard that the redevelopment of the Quality Assurance systems will include information sessions to the child care sector by the end of February 2007; the new integrated QA system will be field-tested in a number of services and locations for 2 to 3 months, and then fully implemented during 2007. We also heard that the Review of National Standards was due to be published and it is now available on www.facsia.gov.au. The Australian Government will now hold talks about the outcomes of the review with state and territory governments.

The Forum heard about the changes to the Child Care Access Hotline, which now collects information about the age group of each vacant place. There was discussion about the practice of some child care services of reporting a vacancy even if they don't have one, as part of their marketing strategy, in order to ensure that their service is mentioned to parents who contact the Hotline. FaCSIA assured the Forum that all services are mentioned to callers, regardless of whether or not they have vacancies, unless the caller specifically limits their request.

Forum members exchanged information about priorities for next year's Federal Election.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Update on the Child Care Management System

The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) has recently commenced the development of the Child Care Management System (CCMS), a national child care computer system that will provide information on child care supply and usage.

The CCMS builds upon the recently announced CCB compliance strategy and the changes to the Child Care Access Hotline.

The key drivers for the development of the CCMS are:

- Provide the most up to date data on child care
- Provide families with up to date information
- Streamline administrative processes for child care providers
- Improve accountability and administration of CCB funds

What will be new and different under the CCMS?

- FaCSIA will make CCB payments to providers and be the point of contact for providers
- New enrolment advance for CCB eligible children
- Providers will no longer need to calculate CCB
- Payments made weekly in arrears, based on attendance records (by session)
- No acquittal process
- Will incorporate Child Care Access Hotline reporting requirements
- Some policy/legislative changes required
- SCCB – services can approve an initial period of 4 weeks
- Allowable/approved absences combined to 42 days

What support will be provided for services?

- Targeted assistance
- Criteria developed in consultation with the sector
- All services will receive some financial assistance
- Training and education material
- On-going Helpdesk support

The CCMS will be gradually introduced over the next two to three years and it will apply to all approved child care services. FaCSIA is currently undertaking a sector-wide consultation and has developed a discussion paper for sector comment. NACBCS encourages services to contribute to the consultation process. If you would like to participate in the consultation process or if you would like more information on the CCMS visit: <http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/ccms.htm>.

Did you know...
NACBCS turns 25 in 2007!

Changes to Child Care Quality Assurance – An Integrated System

Lauren Matthews, Policy & Advocacy Worker, Community Child Care Victoria

FACSIA has made the following announcement:
 “On 18 May 2006, the Minister for Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Mal Brough MP, announced plans for introduction of a new Child Care Quality Assurance system, with core standards applicable to all service types. In developing the new system, the Australian Government’s current quality assurance process will be simplified and streamlined.”

NACBCS delegates recently attended a three day workshop in Canberra. The aim of this workshop was for FACSIA to gain input from a range of child care industry experts and other stakeholders in relation to developing an integrated system for Child Care Quality Assurance. This new system will bring QIAS, OSHCQA and FDCQA together, and has the potential to include other services such as in-home care, occasional care and MACS.

The workshop involved participants looking at the current system of Quality Assurance, focussing on the strengths and problems of the process. As a group we then workshoped what should be the key elements of an integrated Quality Assurance system.

A report of the three day workshop will soon be available and will be circulated to NACBCS branches. From here FACSIA will develop a timeline of the process and will put together a small sector advisory group who will provide FACSIA with advice, input and the various viewpoints of the sector. FACSIA anticipates holding information sessions for the sector on the Quality Assurance changes and the new integrated system in early 2007. Information will be circulated to NACBCS branches when it comes to hand.

Review of the National Standards

Lauren Matthews, Policy & Advocacy Worker, Community Child Care Victoria

In November 2004 Ministers at the Community and Disability Services Ministers Conference resolved that there should be a review of National Standards for long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and in-home care by the end of 2005.

However this report has taken some time to be released and is yet to be available on the FACSIA website; although it is available on the website of the contracted researchers. This article is based on this version of the review; the final FACSIA version may differ from this.

The review was undertaken by the Queensland University of Technology and the purpose of the review of the setting and implementation of National Standards was to identify minimum standards and establish strategies for the future that reflect contemporary evidence.

The review mapped the current child care standards, presented a literature review of contemporary research, undertook a targeted consultation with the sector and identified issues and options for implementation. Below is a summary of the outcomes of the review of the National Standards.

The **mapping** exercise demonstrated that progress towards meeting the National Standards has been slow and patchy across jurisdictions since they were introduced (1993 – LDC; 1995 – OSHC; 1995/8 – FDC).

The **literature review** confirmed that there is strong evidence in regards to paying attention to standards and quality levels in non-parental child care settings, further confirming that children’s experiences in the early years influence their life outcomes.

The **consultations** revealed that the review was timely; that national approaches to standards are welcome; that a national system needs a vision for children; and that a national system needs to streamline bureaucratic demands.

Three **options** were identified for the setting, administration and implementation of standards and quality. These options are:

A **‘systems re-alignment’** approach – addresses short term goals in relation to the standards and quality administration, addressing issues of overlap.

An **‘aspirational standards and coherence’** approach – sets both short and long term targets and a direction to lift child care standards through a more integrated approach, bringing together policy and administration.

A **‘professionalisation’** approach – moving towards both short and longer term new standards and quality targets (possibility in a staged manner). The intent is to lift the overall standard of quality in early childhood services and is directed primarily toward contact staff. At this stage the implications of these options are unclear.

If you would like more information on the review of National Standards visit www.facsia.gov.au or to view this version of the report visit the QUT website:

<http://cli.ed.qut.edu.au/research/projects/nccs/>

CHOICE MAGAZINE – ‘CARING FOR KIDS’

Review by Lauren Matthews, Policy & Advocacy Worker, Community Child Care Victoria

CHOICE Survey: Child Care, ‘Caring for Kids’, November 2006.

CHOICE magazine recently interviewed NACBCS as part of an article they were writing on child care, where they surveyed 1200 parents on issues such as the availability, affordability and quality of child care in Australia.

The outcomes of this survey presented some interesting results, proving what NACBCS has long advocated – community-based child care is the care type of choice, the growth of corporate

child care has resulted in a lack of choice for families and that capital investment in community-based services is required.

Below is an excerpt from the CHOICE article:

In Brief:

- Long waiting lists and lack of choice over which days, the number of days and the type of childcare available were the major problems survey respondents found when looking for childcare.
- Once in childcare, high costs and staffing issues (high staff turnover, too many children looked after at once) were problems many parents had to deal with.
- It's hard to see how the choice, availability and quality of childcare can improve without an injection of funds - and with parents already struggling with costs; many think the government should be responsible for this.

Table 1: Problems with different types of childcare

Problem	Percentage who experienced the problem		
	Commercial (467 respondents)	Community / not-for-profit (289)	Family day-care (130)
High cost	51	17	12
High staff turnover	26	18	2
Too many children being looked after at once	22	12	12
Not enough staff	18	11	5
Fundraising for the centre (A)	13	26	4
Parking when dropping off or picking up children	13	22	5
Unsuitability of staff (not qualified or inexperienced)	13	7	9
Opening / closing times	11	16	15
Old or inadequate premises	9	12	5
Old or inadequate equipment	8	8	9
Difficult access for prams/strollers	7	6	5
Unhealthy or inadequate food	6	4	2
Security of premises (B)	5	3	7

Table notes

(A) For example, having to sell chocolates to raise money for new equipment.

(B) For example, stranger access; children can get out unobserved; no childproof gates.

Table 2: Percentage of survey respondents who experienced problems finding childcare*

Problem	Overall average (%)**
Long waiting lists	64
Lack of choice of which days	44
Lack of choice of number of days	38
Lack of choice of type of childcare	28
Lack of choice of hours	18
Difficulty getting childcare outside normal working hours	14
People behind you on the waiting list getting places before you	12

Table notes

** Based on 1239 respondents, including the NT and Tasmania.

Table 3: Reasons for choosing the type of childcare (%)

Reason	Commercial (467 respondents)	Community / not-for-profit (289)	Family day-care (130)
Convenient location	73	71	51
Good premises	60	53	40
Quality of staff	52	72	55
The only one available	45	28	29
Was recommended to me	37	44	44
Convenient times to drop off and pick up	32	26	33
Good parking	17	11	10
Other	10	13	26
Cost	9	24	49

CHOICE's verdict

It's a hard decision for most parents to put their very young children into childcare. Many have to, in order to go back to work for financial reasons, and others choose to in order to stay in a career and help secure their future.

They shouldn't then find, on top of this, that their choice of childcare is limited and its availability uncertain, the quality is questionable and the cost almost (or sometimes completely) prohibitive.

- While commercially run centres can mushroom as long as private investment is available to fund them, the choice of childcare won't increase unless the government puts greater direct investment into capital costs for more community-based/not-for-profit centres.

- Quality of care won't improve until childcare workers are paid better, with incentives to stay in the industry and reduce its high staff turnover, with all the problems it brings.

- With many parents already struggling with the high cost of childcare, simply charging more for it to fund these changes won't work. CHOICE's survey respondents are in no doubt that it's a government responsibility to put more funding into childcare to help fix the problems identified in the survey. Few families these days have the option of not using childcare, so guaranteeing its quality and availability is simply an investment in the future of the country.

The CHOICE article is available online at www.choice.com.au.

NACBCS was quoted as an 'unnamed expert' in the article and the NACBCS website was linked to under 'useful contacts'.



Want to build strong, positive relationships with your families and support their parenting?

Early Childhood Australia is offering, in conjunction with NACBCS, a special deal on the Everyday Learning Series, where part of the purchase price will be returned to NACBCS if enough orders are lodged.

Early Childhood Australia also knows that parents want information that is up to date, dependable, credible and easy to read. Early Childhood Australia's Everyday Learning Series was developed by early childhood experts specifically to meet these needs. Each year the four books in the series cover topics of real interest to parents such as: brothers and sisters, making friends, maths, imagination and talking.

Having strong relationships with our families is crucial to the quality of a childcare service and to its success. Supporting parents in their parenting is an essential part of that relationship.

'The majority of parents are concerned about the level of confidence in their parenting and the community pressure to get parenting right.'
Australian Childhood Foundation.

To find out more information about the Everyday Learning Series, or to obtain a subscription for your families visit: http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/everyday_learning_series/special_offer_for_services.html.

When ordering the Everyday Learning Services please make sure that you alert Early Childhood Australia that you are a member of NACBCS.

KEEPING AN EYE ON CORPORATE CHILD CARE

Under scrutiny

Liam Walsh, The Courier Mail, October 02, 2006

FINANCIAL ties between childcare giant ABC Learning Centres and director-linked businesses deepened by more than \$65 million last year.

The Brisbane-based company's annual report detailed the payments, made for items ranging from developing centres to fundraising.

Tens of millions of dollars of that related-party work was not put out for tender.

That raised criticism from the Australian Shareholders' Association, although ABC said work was independently scrutinised and done on normal commercial terms.

The annual report shows almost \$27 million – mostly for capital raisings – was paid to stockbroking group Austock, which is chaired by ABC director Bill Bessemer and partly owned by ABC co-founder Eddy Groves.

The bill in fiscal 2005 was \$16 million.

Mr Groves said Austock was used "because they know the company so well" and had the most competitive price. This had not gone out to tender, he said, "because . . . David Ryan (the ABC director who deals with Austock) is very skilled in this area. He understands what the pricing is around the marketplace."

Queensland Maintenance Services, which handles maintenance and helps develop centres, earned over \$74 million, up from \$16 million.

Relatives of Mr Groves and wife Le Neve operate QMS.

"The reason why we don't tender out is because we are satisfied of its independence and because they give us the best price by far, from the point of view of reliability and pricing," Mr Groves said.

"Everyone (also) has to have police checks (due to work near children), so you just can't go and tender this out to a building company and then expect them to all run through the police checks."

So how does ABC make ensure value if work is not tendered out?

"It's all standard work . . . we do the same kind of work for every single building. It's painting the facility, it's playgrounds, it's vinyl and it's wall-carpet."

An assessor also calculated costs, and QMS is "either better than that, or it matches that".

Development work has increased with ABC's expansion -

from 43 Australia-New Zealand centres in 2001 to 933 by last fiscal year.

Mr Groves said he did not partake in board discussions about the related parties and independent accountants checked companies close to ABC.

But ASA chairman Stephen Matthews said any public company with director-related transactions to that extent “needs to very carefully consider whether it should go to public tender”.

Otherwise, the board and audit committee risked shareholder criticism, he said.

“Without competitive tenders for large amounts of work that are presently going to related parties, we can’t be sure we’re getting the best price,” Mr Matthews said.

The report also shows ABC’s sponsorship of the Brisbane Bullets, owned by Mr Groves, jumped from \$255,000 to \$352,000. Mr Groves said this was for tickets given to ABC families.

The report mentions fellow director Martin Kemp, along with Mr Groves and his wife, partly own a debt payment service which earned \$156,000. That was up from \$9000.

“That’s actually only come around basically at a default ,” Mr Groves said.

“ABC itself doesn’t use the company. I’d be doubtful . . . if you’d see it again.”

ABC completes acquisition of Hutchison’s AAP, Sydney Morning Herald, October 31, 2006

Child care centre operator ABC Learning Centres has completed its acquisition of Hutchison’s Child Care Services Ltd.

The world’s biggest publicly-listed child care provider said it had compulsorily acquired the remaining shares in Hutchison’s it did not already own for \$1.50 per ordinary share.

ABC says it expects its former rival to be removed from the official list of the Australian Stock Exchange in the next few days.

ABC Learning Centres throws its toys AAP, The Age, November 8, 2006

Australian childcare group ABC Learning Centres Ltd has moved to sell its toy distributor business and set up an exclusive-supply agreement with Funtastic Ltd.

ABC Learning has entered into a non-binding agreement with Funtastic for the sale of Judius for \$44.6 million, and the establishment of a long-term supply arrangement with the combined Judius and Funtastic.

Under the proposed agreement, ABC will also enter into an ongoing revenue share arrangement with Judius where ABC will receive a percentage of revenues on all sales made to and through ABC childcare centres.

ABC CEO of global operations Eddy Groves said the proposed sale would allow ABC to secure a long-term partnership with Australia’s leading independent children’s products distributor, Funtastic.

“The proposed sale to Funtastic provides a capital gain to ABC and ensures ABC has a secure long-term arrangement for the supply of children’s products to its centres at commercial rates,” Mr Groves said.

Funtastic, which is currently in a trading halt, is the largest toy distributor in Australia.

ABC at home in USA

Alex Tilbury, The Courier Mail, October 29, 2006

CHILDCARE king Eddy Groves predicts ABC Learning Centres’ business will be bigger in the US than it is in Australia within three years.

The 40-year-old Mr Groves also told Sky News that he considered the US his “second home” and that the company he founded with wife Le Neve could possibly be a takeover target.

“By 2010, I would think, at a guess, that we could have a bigger operation in the US than in Australia,” he said.

“The United States for me is pretty much a second home, I’ve been there many, many times in the last 15 years and it is very similar to Australia when it comes to the childcare industry.”

Mr Groves said ABC did not have “to be all things to all people in the US” and would concentrate on five key states.

“We think our formula has worked well for us in Australia and the model over there is exactly the same.”

Mr Groves said he took it as a compliment when critics said ABC was the “McDonald’s of child care” because of its standardised systems. He also could not rule out ABC succumbing to a takeover.

The building blocks of a global empire

Robert Gottlibsen, The Australian, 21 October 2006

While supremely confident, Eddy Groves is well aware of the history of local firms pursuing US expansion writes Robert Gottlibsen

IN little more than five years the husband and wife team of Eddy and Le Neve Groves have built from scratch the \$2.5billion childcare business, ABC Learning, that now has 20 per cent of the Australian market. But, if anything, that initial success has given them a passion to expand even more rapidly.

And so by 2010, they plan to approximately double their current size in Australia and New Zealand. But chief executive Eddy Groves now reveals that he also plans to make the US bigger than Australia by 2010 - effectively a fourfold increase in size in four years. And for Groves, that is just the beginning

and he has long-term dreams of an even larger enterprise. Groves would love to take the market capitalisation of ABC Learning from \$2.5 billion to around \$10 billion so that it is knocking on the door of the ASX top-20. Growth plans of this dimension are rare in Australia so not surprisingly the institutions are nervous, particularly as well-established Australian companies have a bad record in thrusting into the US.

Following the big ABC stock issues, the Groves family now only has 10 per cent of the company but staff and friends hold a further 5 per cent. Nevertheless, ABC Learning still exhibits family company characteristics. So when you raise the remote possibility of a takeover bid, Groves's eyes narrow and he declares he would buy whatever stock was required to block a raider.

... However, there are problems in the Australian childcare market. There is an acute shortage of facilities for children under two as part of an overall shortage for the under-three group. But for children aged between three and five there is over-capacity in many areas. A large number of the 5000 Australian centres were built when the market for very young children was small so they cannot cater for children under three who require greater staff numbers. While the early ABC centres always had facilities for the extra staff required for the very young, it was a small part of the facilities. Conversely, the recently built ABC centres are designed so that half the children in the centre can be under three.

As the US market is scattered, it can see opportunities to buy many more centres and by 2010 Groves aims to have centres in all 10 states and be building at least 10 centres a year in each state - an annual total of 100. About 80 of the centres so far purchased have been organised as a franchise.

...He points out that managing childcare centres in Darwin or Perth presents similar challenges to the US. But earlier this year, ABC received a warning about what might happen if it makes mistakes in a remote market. A couple of accidents in Victoria prompted extensive bad press which harmed the brand, at least in the short term.

Groves says that the company's accident rate is very low and there is constant monitoring of complaints and the company has clear and well-established procedures when something does go wrong. But a major slip-up in the US would be a huge setback for the company's growth plans.

Groves says that if the company found that it didn't have the people to pursue the accelerated growth plan it would simply defer it. But he is supremely confident.

The company recently signed a nation-wide agreement with Australian unions to offer free education to staff up to childcare degree level provided they stay with the company for 18 months after the degree is completed. And while this is seen as being a good employer, in fact, only if the company can generate and maintain its skill base can such an ambitious program be undertaken. If Groves stumbles there will be "a thousand I told you so's" but the ASX needs companies prepared to make a dash to be big global players even though the Australian base is not fully established.

ABC to pay staff to study childcare *Annabelle McDonald, The Australian, October 05, 2006*

CHILDCARE mogul Eddie Groves has offered to pay his employees to study at university in an attempt to tackle the skilled-labour shortage and raise the quality of care.

Mr Groves said yesterday that his ABC Learning Centres, which employ 17,000 workers who look after 60,000 children, had made a deal with the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union that staff would vote on in November.

Under the agreement, staff would be offered free study to complete a certificate III, diploma and advanced diploma in children's services with the ABC-owned National Institute of Early Childhood Education.

The deal would also pay staff to study childcare at the University of Southern Queensland.

Mr Groves said the agreement would cost millions of dollars. But he assured parents and shareholders that the increased costs would not be absorbed by higher fees or smaller profits, saying greater occupancy rates would offset the difference.

"It's something that we have budgeted for for a long time," he said. "The biggest impediment for people in this particular profession is the cost of increasing their qualifications. If we remove that cost impediment, we will find people who want to turn this into a career path."

ABC controls a fifth of the childcare market. This year Mr Groves was named Australia's richest young man, with Business Review Weekly putting his net worth at \$260 million.

LHMU national secretary Jeff Lawrence said the deal, which offers an annual pay increase of 2 percent, was one of the first Multiple Business Agreements reached under the Work Choices legislation.

"It's a recognition of the fact that there needed to be some improvements in childcare," Mr Lawrence said.

NACBCS EDITORIAL NOTE: It is important to remember that the bulk of training will be delivered in ABC's National Institute of Early Childhood Education. Therefore while the offer of training may look generous, ABC could potentially generate a profit from government training subsidies.

Child-care fears spread to five more centres *Christiana Jones, The West Australian 30th October 2006*

The welfare of scores of children in day care was plunged into doubt yesterday after it emerged the owners of the child-care centre accused of binding children's legs operate other centres in Perth.

The Tommie Turtle Child Care Centre in Huntingdale was closed indefinitely after Friday's revelations but owners Gerard and Lina Dornford are free to run other centres in Belmont and Karingup.

Public records show the Dornfords own five centres but it is believed they recently sold the Karrinyup business.

Department for Community Development program and sector development executive director Pauline Bagdonavicius said the department would conduct "monitoring visits" at each of the other centres.

She said the practice of binding children's legs — as happened to seven babies on Thursday — appeared to be linked to one worker at the Huntingdale centre.

But the State Opposition and a union secretary challenged the adequacy of the response, calling for a crackdown on operators and proof that centres were checked regularly.

Robyn McSweeney, the Opposition spokeswoman for community development, said the DCD needed to conduct thorough investigations of the Dornford-owned centres. If anything "untoward" was found, they should lose their licences. She also questioned the regularity of checks.

"I will this week in Parliament call for an audit to see when the DCD has last checked every single child-care centre in WA," she said. "I think there wouldn't be anything wrong with DCD checking each centre every 3-6 months, that's not a hard ask."

Mrs Bagdonavicius said operators were checked within 12 weeks of operating and around licence renewal time. Random spot checks were made.

Another DCD spokeswoman said checks on the Huntingdale centre in May and September failed to prevent the controversial practice.

Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union secretary Dave Kelly called for more pressure on operators, claiming staff levels directly affected child-care quality.

"The dodgier centres staff to the absolute minimum required by the legislation . . . and often when staff are off sick, there are problems replacing them so the staff that are left are put in a very difficult situation," he said.

The Dornfords did not comment.

NACBCS IN THE MEDIA

ABC Radio

PM - Questions raised over adequacy of Australian child care

[This is the print version of story <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2006/s1777016.htm>]

PM - Monday, 30 October , 2006 18:30:00
Reporter: Emma Alberici

MARK COLVIN: In Western Australia it emerged today that the owners of a day care centre where seven babies were found with their legs bound are running four other child care facilities in Perth.

The West Australian Department for Community Development closed the Tommie Turtle Child Care Centre in Huntingdale indefinitely after Friday's revelations.

The case has raised the issue of just how adequate child care regulation and licensing is throughout Australia.

Emma Alberici reports.

EMMA ALBERICI: For many parents of children under one, when it comes to child care, beggars literally can't be choosers.

There are thought to be thousands of babies' names on waiting lists around Australia, and with new private operators sprouting up almost daily, there are now questions being asked as to whether state government regulators have been able to keep up with the sector's exponential growth.

In Western Australia it's a hot topic, after a 15-year-old work experience student last week reported found seven babies with their legs tied together with bed sheets. The centre involved was shut down by the State Government, pending a police inquiry.

Today, Robyn McSweeney, the State Opposition's spokeswoman for Community Development, was pushing for more random checking of child care centres, to ensure standards are being met.

ROBYN MCSWEENEY: DCD (Department for Community Development) does not, it does random checks, but it only checks once the licence ... every two years, when the licence comes up for renewal, and to me that is not enough. So tomorrow I'll be calling for an audit of all child care centres in Western Australia, when they were last randomly checked by DCD, and when they were checked, how many we have of them, and issues such as that.

EMMA ALBERICI: The health and safety of children in child care centres is the responsibility of state governments. They license and regulate providers of care.

Visit
www.nacbcs.org.au

The only time Canberra becomes involved is if a centre loses its licence. That triggers a loss of Federal Government funding through the child care rebate.

Barbara Romerill is with the National Association of Community Based Children's Services. Her organisation is concerned about just how vigilant state government regulators actually are.

BARBARA ROMERILL: We hear stories of child care centres that go years without seeing anyone from their state regulator. That's not good enough. They should be visited several times a year, without notice, and a comprehensive check should be done on each one of those visits.

EMMA ALBERICI: Have you taken your concerns to the governments?

BARBARA ROMERILL: Ah, yes we have. In Victoria here, we're currently just starting a review of the children's services regulations, and there is a lively dialogue going on between different organisations within the sector, and with the State Government, about whether our current regulations are strong enough, and what they should be in the future.

Unfortunately there are some child care types that are not regulated at the moment. Here in Victoria there are no regulations outside school hours care, or for family day care.

The Government has made a commitment to regulating them, but of course there's a huge debate about what should be in those standards.

EMMA ALBERICI: The Community Based Child Care Lobby say there is a direct link between the corporatisation of child care and a lowering of standards.

BARBARA ROMERILL: We know there's been pressure from activists within the commercial sector to get rid of regulations. They see it as, often as an impediment to them running a profitable business.

We say children are far too important to sacrifice their well-being to someone's profitability.

EMMA ALBERICI: It's often said child care workers are among the country's lowest paid. According to the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, they even get less than garbage collectors, and only a third or so of them actually hold any type of qualification.

SUE LINES: The current requirement, and this is fairly standard across Australia, is a diploma in child care studies, that's a TAFE certificate.

EMMA ALBERICI: For everyone who works in a child care centre?

SUE LINES: No, not for everyone, for about a third of the staff.

The regulations are controlled by the states, and whilst they are fairly similar, there are some differences. But the standard qualification is a diploma level, and that applies to about a third of staff.

EMMA ALBERICI: And what about the other two thirds of the staff in child care centres?

SUE LINES: At the moment there's no mandatory training required for two thirds of the staff in child care.

EMMA ALBERICI: Sue Lines is on the national executive of the union. She says her members are also concerned about the ownership structure of child care centres.

SUE LINES: The ownership is another area the union's very concerned about, because, generally speaking, you don't need to have any kind of ... you certainly don't need any formal qualification to open a child care centre. Anyone who buys into a private child care centre is generally required to put a notice in the local paper to say that they'd taken over the licence. But there aren't any police checks or requirements for the ownership of a child care centre, that's completely left to market forces at the moment, and that's entirely inappropriate.

MARK COLVIN: Sue Lines of the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, ending Emma Alberici's report.

A growing demand for help from stay-at-home mothers

Matt Wade, Sydney Morning Herald, October 3, 2006

THE proportion of stay-at-home mothers using formal care for young children grew faster between 1999 and 2002 than the proportion of working mothers using it in the same period, research shows.

Use of formal care for children younger than two increased by 11 percentage points among non-working mothers and 1.7 percentage points among those with jobs, a study by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling found.

However, Dr Justine McNamara, one of the study's authors, said it was inaccurate to accuse stay-at-home mothers of taking child-care places from workers.

"Women not working are usually using formal child care for very short periods, so they are not taking up full-time care places that could be going to working mothers," she said. "Also, many women not working are doing other things like studying, so they are building human capital important for workforce participation."

Lynne Wannan, from the National Association of Community-Based Children's Services, said it was common for families to maintain child-care places that suited them, even when one parent was temporarily out of the workforce.

"Families that have found places at a child-care centre they are happy with, and that fits in with their lives, will go to great lengths to hang onto them," she said.

The report said an increase in demand for places for children aged two or younger was "linked with problems with availability rather than cost".

The researchers found the federal child-care benefit, introduced in 2000, may have improved affordability only until late 2001, when prices began to rise again.

The proportion of children aged two or younger in formal care rose from 13.1 per cent in 1999 to 15.3 per cent in 2002, the report said. Growth in the use of child care was strong among low-income and single-parent families.

NACBCS BRANCH REPORTS

Victoria

Barbara Romeril, Executive Director Community Child Care

The outcome of the state election means that the third Bracks ALP Government is now on notice to deliver on its commitments to integrated children's services, capital investment, quality and regulations and workforce strategies.

It is clear that the issue of integrating kindergarten and child care with other services to families and children will continue to be controversial. Community Child Care/NACBCS Victoria will continue to argue that programs for the care, education, health and wellbeing of young children should be administered by the same government department and that nothing should be done to disrupt the good work that is currently under way in the Office for Children, especially in the development of the Statewide Plan for Victoria's Children. Now that the election is out of the way we look forward to the imminent release of the Plan.

The State Government's Child Care Taskforce report on access to child care has been released, with some good recommendations for all three levels of government to work together to ensure families can get the high quality early learning and care services they need to support them in their role of raising young children. As a member of the Taskforce, CCC ensured that the report recommended capital funding for community based services and that any central register is operated in a way which retains parental choice and strong direct relationships at the local level between families and services.

Consultations have begun for the development of new regulations for Outside School Hours Care and Family Day Care, and the revamping of the existing regulations for centre based children's services. We are arguing for improved minimum standards to ensure that all children's services are good for children.

CCC is preparing a report on a survey of parents expressing their experiences of community management and the important role it plays in their lives.

Our annual general meeting in October included a thought-provoking address by the Child Safety Commissioner on the question 'Are Children Safe in Child Care?' The Commissioner, Bernie Geary raised important concerns about the profit motive in child care and its potential negative impact on child safety. The CCC Committee of Management was reappointed at the AGM, and Dr Anne Kennedy has been reappointed as Chairperson.

South Australia

Linda Turpin from Inclusive Directions addressed the NACBCS SA Committee.

Linda stated that the role of Inclusive Directions is quite different. There is a specific focus on tools

1. Service Support Plans (SSP) – Staff can reflect and look at skills they currently have.
2. Assisted inclusion/readiness plans (AIRP)

Service Support Plans

- Are developed by child care service staff in consultation with Inclusion Support Facilitators.
- Focus is the care environment and the group of children as a whole.
- A service may have several SSP's covering the different groups of children.
- The SSP is based on a reflective theology. It empowers staff to identify inherent skills and built on their to meet their identified goals.
- SSP's are also used in the application for Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) and Flexible Pool Funding (FSF).

Assisted inclusion/readiness plans

- Are developed by the service Director plus relevant staff in consultation with Inclusion Support Facilitators.
- AIRP's will be recognised against the Principles of Accreditation and Quality Assurance Process.
- It will allow the service to identify and build on current capacity to provide ongoing inclusion of all children.
- AIRP assists with the development of an action plan which supports best practice, evaluation and striving for excellence in the child care environment.

Flexible Support Pool \$ are for immediate need.

CALD (Staff) – Culturally and linguistically diverse – a flyer will be distributed to the sector. Are currently getting more referrals. Inclusion SA and Diversity Directions have merged – now Inclusive Directions. They are now ready to consolidate what is happening in the sector.

All resources come from the Gowrie – Professional Support Coordinator

SNSS change to ISS in July (Inclusion Support Subsidy). ISS can only now apply for 12 months or less. ISS is now capped.

You can ask Inclusive Directions to assist in the development of an assisted inclusion readiness plan.

In the past Inclusion SA were able to offer training within a service on a needs basis – this is now the function of the PSC. Training has not been accessed enough.

Bicultural support – through the PSC – the tender has gone to the Australian Refugee Association. Looking at an interpreting service – child/transition to child care.

10 hour limit – bicultural support – info will be sent to sector.

Workforce Development Forum: is a Skills Board developed by SA Health & Community Services it has been operating for

12 months. They are looking at Workforce Planning. There are real issues in getting appropriate staff and retaining them in all community services. South Australia has the slowest growing population and the oldest population in Australia. Have developed a website for Health & Community Services this is a site for employers. They will also have a professional development calendar.

Western Australia

NACBCS – Carewest WA

Regulations / Licensing: The Review Committee selected by the Department held its first meeting last week. The group spent the time identifying areas of concern, how they will work and how often they will meet. The key issues being debated in this round are Staff:Child ratios and Qualifications. Interestingly, Qualifications is a key issue in a number of forums, and the Care & Education debate is again a priority. We are concerned about the implications for our services and are participating actively.

Carewest lodged a submission to the functional review of The Department for Community Development.

In response to the continuing bad press that DCD has been receiving, Jane Brazier resigned; and the Minister announced that Child Care Services would get at least one Licensing visit annually!!

From January 2007, as Police Clearances expire, Childcare staff will be required to obtain a Working with Children Check. Similarly, Managerial Officers and Supervising Officers, will need to obtain the WWCC when their service's licence falls due for renewal.

The Licensing & Standards Unit is responsible for the development of Facts Sheets to support services in keeping up to date with implementing the 2006 Regulations, including advising of any amendments passed.

Strategic Plan: The Promoting of Community Owned Services working party has had an initial meeting with Lotterywest to discuss making application for a grant.

AGM: The Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 20 October, followed by a networking lunch. Unfortunately due to everyone's extremely busy schedules and lack of staff, many were unable to attend. Doreen Blyth was re-elected to the position of President.

DIPLOMA TRAINEESHIP: The issues around establishing this traineeship remain complex and are likely to take much time to resolve, if at all possible. Generally members of the Reference Group support the need for a Diploma level traineeship. Hence it was decided to put the recommendation to the ITAB for endorsement prior to sending it to the Department of Education & Training.

ECA- WA: A "Lunch Bag" meeting was held to discuss the issue of Qualifications. The National Director attended the AGM held on 21 November. The plan is to set an Early Childhood agenda.

Children's Services Industry Development Council

(C.S.I.D.C.): A representative group of the Council made a successful presentation to the Children's Advisory Committee.

The issues of Fast Tracking students and the minimum period of time taken for students to gain a qualification, have been raised with the Council.

The first meeting to be held in February 2007, will focus on the composition of the Council, its terms of reference and membership.

NIFTeY WA: Carewest has continued to work with NIFTeY WA, the WA Primary Principals Association and the Independent Schools Association, in exploring avenues to maintain and extend the implementation of the Roots of Empathy program in schools; as well as introducing the Seeds of Empathy program in our Community Owned Children Services.

Put this date in your diary...
NACBCS 25th Anniversary
National Conference
Friday 16 and Saturday 17
November 2007
Melbourne Functions Caulfield
Racecourse, Victoria

Season's Greetings
from all of us at
NACBCS!



ABOUT NACBCS

The objective of NACBCS is to advocate and assist the development of community owned children’s services providing good quality care, to initiate public action to promote and defend community owned children’s services throughout Australia and to act on behalf of community owned children’s services in relation to governments and other bodies.

NACBCS is the peak representative body for all Australian community owned children’s services including Long Day Care and Out of School Hours Care services. NACBCS is an unincorporated association, which operates as a non-profit organisation. The Association is democratic in structure and relies on participatory and inclusive processes to achieve our goals.

Each state and territory has a NACBCS Branch, which brings together individuals and organisations at a regional level to work toward achieving our goals. Each Branch nominates delegates to the National Executive, which in turn nominates Office Bearers.

Community Child Care Victoria manages the National Secretariat function for the Association from its offices in Melbourne. To facilitate the maintenance of strong working relationships NACBCS holds two national meetings a year for the executive and interested members. Other discussion and communication occurs through electronic processes.

For information about our national activities contact the NACBCS Secretariat on e-mail: recept@cccinc.org.au

There is no individual membership of NACBCS at the national level. To join NACBCS, contact the branch in your state or territory.

How to contact NACBCS

State and Territory Branches:

VICTORIA	Barbara Romeril:	bromeril@cccinc.org.au
NEW SOUTH WALES	Prue Warrilow: Tracey Kirk-Downey:	p.warrilow@familiesatwork.com tkirk-downey@wollongong.nsw.gov.au
QUEENSLAND	Frances Sneddon: Julie Pearce:	frances@qcoss.org.au ecmanager@qld.lca.org.au
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	Josique Lynch:	joonccc@iinet.net.au
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	Deb Chernoff: Robyn Geisler:	deb@econ-outlook.com.au lurra.childcare@intermode.on.net
TASMANIA	Susan Nolan: Tracy Bradley:	oceanview@bbchildcare.org tbradley@burnie.net
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY	Avis Kerr:	nichec@bigpond.net.au
NORTHERN TERRITORY	Irene McCarthy:	graychildcare@octa4.net.au