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In Action

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National Convenor's Report

Lynne Wannan, NACBCS National Convenor

NACBCS 25th Anniversary Conference

Our conference was a great event; getting to know new colleagues and catching up with others only seen face to face once a year or so. It was a busy couple of days with plenty of content to keep us all thinking and learning about how others tackle the problems we all share and still time to have fun between sessions, over lunch, at the cocktail party and then dinner. It was fun and interesting to hear reflections of 25 years of advocacy from Deb Brennan and for me to share my recollections with Deb and NACBCS members.

We were very lucky to have Professor Helen May from New Zealand, and timely to hear about the improvements the New Zealand Government is putting in place to ensure that Government (taxpayers) dollars invested in children's services do lead to improved quality outcomes; increased qualified staff and improving staff ratios. Helen gave us hope that it is possible to have a Government say taxpayers dollars will not go into shareholder pockets but will go into the services and to the professionals who work in them.

Our panel of early childhood professionals who work with children in complex family or other circumstances that may disadvantage them as they grow to adulthood was truly inspiring. It was hard not to shed a tear as children's life stories were recounted but the way these early childhood professionals responded to the children's and parents needs was inspirational. It was hard not to be saddened by the low level of remuneration and thus status our early childhood workforce has when we know how professional so many are and what life changing impacts their work with young children so often brings.

The histories of women who began their working life in our sector and have gone on

to hold senior positions in government and community sector roles was great to hear about. Their stories illustrated the value of community management for skilling people, connecting people and delivering fantastic services for young children.

With the Federal election looming we were very pleased to have both the major parties represented on an election policy panel. Senator Kaye Patterson represented the then Coalition Government and Jenny Macklin the Australian Labor Party. The NACBCS scorecard provided an easy to read outline of all parties commitments to community owned early childhood services which perhaps influenced the voting choice of families with young children. As we all now know there has been a change of Government and thus a new opportunity to progress our demands for both strengthening and growing the community based sector. There is much to be done!

For me the biggest message coming from the conference is that NACBCS needs to better target our message that community, not for profit early childhood services are essential if Australia is to develop a high quality system of services available to all families. We have not yet achieved what New Zealand has – Government recognition that for profit companies are taking much needed money out of the system for private interests. We do not have acceptance that universal availability is needed so that those families who want and need early childhood services can access them. We do not yet have wide spread acceptance that the early childhood workforce needs appropriate remuneration, improved training opportunities and better working conditions, including ratios and programming time. Right now children and early childhood are big agenda items for the new Government so the time for change is now.

The conference confirmed NACBCS view

that we share the same goals across the country and can work together to see our vision realised.

Thank you to NACBCS Victoria (Community Child Care Victoria) for planning, organising and hosting this successful event for 2007.

National Secretariat Report

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

The final months of 2007 have been extremely productive for NACBCS, with our 25th anniversary celebrations and the federal election campaign.

NACBCS federal election campaign involved lots of activity at all levels – grassroots advocacy through our election lobby kit, public education through media coverage of our proposals for government investment in community building children’s services and direct influence on the policies of the major parties through a variety of communications with the policy makers. Our election scorecard showed that children’s services are a major focus of most of the parties, with all bar Family First issuing policies which address some of NACBCS demands.

The NACBCS national conference was a great success - it generated some strong proposals for the role of NACBCS in the 21st century, as well as celebrating our first 25 years as the key advocate for community owned children’s services. See inside this newsletter for details of the conference outcomes.

The National Children’s Services Forum scheduled for November was cancelled due to the clash with the federal election; the next meeting will be held in March, which will be a good time for meeting with whichever government department emerges as the one with responsibility for children’s services.

Federal Government

Federal Election

Post Election Wrap-up

Rhiannon Williams, RMIT Social Work Student, NACBCS Campaign placement

Well, the election is over and many would be breathing a sigh of relief and saying ‘finally!’ However as the post-election dust settles and although Labor is in power, it is not a time for NACBCS to be resting on its laurels.

Labor promised children’s services a greater amount of capital funding, but we need to maintain the campaign to ensure this money is invested into community owned services.

Further to this Labor’s proposition to increase the tax rebate for children’s services as the primary mechanism to manage affordability of children’s services is flawed. It will not assist low and middle income families over high income families because it is a flat rebate applied across all income groups. NACBCS will

continue to demand that the tax rebate should be merged with the Child Care Benefit so that the subsidies are greater for low and middle income families.

NACBCS is looking forward to working with the newly elected Labor Government to ensure quality children’s services are at the forefront of their policy agendas, to hold them accountable to their promises regarding workforce development and ensuring the Child Care Quality Assurance System is based on best practice and continuous improvement.

Both parties fail on election scorecard Demand Quality Children’s Services!

NACBCS PRE-ELECTION MEDIA RELEASE 22 November 2007

Neither of the major parties is committing to building community not-for-profit children’s services, the first choice for Australian families.

The National Association of Community Based Children’s Services (NACBCS) welcomes Labor’s election promise to build 260 new child care centres and is cautiously optimistic about the Coalition’s commitment to invest up to \$1million to local governments where no child care vacancies exist. But both parties must make it clear that these taxpayer funds will only go to not-for-profit community service providers.

Only the Australian Greens are offering a commitment to better funded children’s services, and NACBCS is pleased the Greens policy is committed to the growth of the community child care sector.

NACBCS is disappointed with the decision of the Coalition, Labor and the Democrats to use flat rate rebates as the key mechanism to improve affordability of child care for families. Rebates will benefit higher income families most and do nothing to improve quality or increase availability of services.

Lynne Wannan, NACBCS Convenor said today ‘Australian children need high quality early childhood services that also build strong communities. We are looking for the next Australian Government to invest in sustainable community infrastructure and to use taxpayer dollars to ensure the right of every child to be supported in the early years of their development.’

NACBCS scorecard analysis, showing how the promises of the major parties stack up against NACBCS demands for children’s services in Australia is at www.nacbc.org.au.



STOP PRESS

WHO IS LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN THE NEW RUDD GOVERNMENT?

The new Australian Government has announced significant changes to the way that early childhood development and child care will be administered. We have been informed that early childhood and childcare policy and programs will move to the new Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The recently announced Administrative Arrangement Orders show that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will deal with early childhood and childcare policy and programs and administer the Child Care Act 1972.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs will deal with income security policies and programs for families with children, as well as services for families with children. The Administrative Orders state that this department will administer the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Child Care Management System and Other Measures) Act 2007 but our advice is that CCMS will also move to DEEWR. FaCSIA advises that they are still working through the fine details on the administrative arrangements, including agreements between departments on technical IT matters to ensure a seamless transfer. From the perspective of the child care sector, child care software providers and Professional Support Coordinators, continued support, contact and liaison with the CCMS Taskforce will be on the basis of business as usual.

(Thank you to Lisa Bryant of NSW branch for alerting us to this new information)

So children's services will receive attention from a number of key leaders in the new Federal Government including the Deputy Prime Minister.

The new Cabinet includes:

Minister for Education (and Deputy Prime Minister): Julia Gillard

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs: Jenny Macklin

Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (early childhood education and childcare): Maxine McKew

Parliamentary Secretary Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs: Bill Shorten

Other appointments relevant to the work of NACBCS are:

Minister for Status of Women: Tanya Plibersek

Parliamentary Secretary Social Inclusion (voluntary sector): Sen. Ursula Stephens

The NACBCS Executive is writing to the relevant Ministers to offer our congratulations and support in pursuing ALP policy that is consistent with our strategic vision.

NACBCS 25th Anniversary

Children Not For Profit – Community Ownership for a Better World! NACBCS National Conference

The NACBCS 25th Anniversary Conference was held on November 16th and 17th in Melbourne and provided an opportunity for community based children’s services advocates and others to come together and talk about the big issues facing children’s services in the 21st century.

The day prior to the conference there were two bus tours, with one visiting integrated child and family services, and the other visiting innovative practice and governance in children’s services. These bus tours were well attended and a practitioner’s reflection on the bus tour is included in this edition of NACBCS In Action. There was also a pre-conference cocktail party where delegates could come together and network prior to the conference.

We were fortunate to have Professor Helen May, Dean of the University of Otago College of Education, New Zealand come and present a keynote paper on “The Politics of Childcare in Aotearoa – New Zealand: The wins and compromises of successful advocacy for government investment by community early childhood services”. We were all impressed by the work of New Zealand advocates and we have taken away many learnings from Helen’s presentation about how we can continue to advocate for high quality early childhood education and care services.

Panel sessions were yet again another highlight of the NACBCS conference. One panel saw speakers participating in a panel discussion called ‘Changing the World – Past, Present and Future’, where they reflected on their experiences as practitioners, committee members and stakeholders and presented a vision for the future. The practitioner’s panel continued to be the ‘box of tissues’ session at the conference where a diverse panel of practitioners spoke about what inspires them as children’s services workers. Diverse experiences such as working in a therapeutic community, starting a MACS, working with refugee families and supporting children from vulnerable families were all spoken about. This session provided many of those at the conference with some much needed inspiration.

This year’s debate provide a humorous twist to the topic “Are children really too precious for profit?” - complete with a worm and a clap-o-meter. While laughter was the order of the day, debaters were able to unpack the serious issues of the commodification of childhood.

A Gala Dinner was held at the Novotel St Kilda to celebrate our 25 years of advocacy. At the dinner, not only were conference delegates and friends of NACBCS able to enjoy a seafood buffet and dance the night away, but NACBCS also launched the 25th Anniversary publication. National Convenor Lynne Wannan and the inaugural NACBCS convenor Professor Deborah Brennan shared their experiences and formally launched the publication.

We were fortunate to have both the Shadow Minister for Families and Community Services Jenny Macklin and Senator Kay

Patterson attend the NACBCS Conference as part of a Federal Election panel where both parties presented their child care policies. During the Federal Election panel NACBCS launched our Federal Election scorecard.

The entire NACBCS conference was an official NACBCS meeting and scribes were present during all of the workshops to record ideas and recommendations for NACBCS action, which were discussed in a ‘Where to from here?’ session. Below are the recommendations and ideas that came out of the workshops:

Expanding the Community Childcare Sector

- NACBCS to consider setting up a national structure to unite all not-for-profit children’s services to take one voice to the ALP Government and offer to deliver the 260 child care services promised in the election platform.

Defining the Difference and Advocating Locally- How to Sell the Message of Community Based Children’s Services

- NACBCS need to get out to the sector the key messages that they need to be communicating
- National rollout of the Community Ownership Endorsement Scheme
- The need to develop a common language to talk about early childhood education and care, as well as community based services.

From the Local to the Global: How do we do this in children’s services?

- NACBCS needs to encourage services to always seek opportunities within services and the community to talk to children about the issues that affect them – seek their ideas as they are not the problem, they are resources to help solve the problems and work through issues.

Child Care Funding Models

- NACBCS needs to lobby for acceptance of high quality education and care if we want a healthy economy.
- NACBCS could propose to undertake government funded research into the impact of different funding models.
- Doing Social Justice in Programming – The Sky is not the Limit!
- NACBCS needs to propose research that demonstrates that the not-for-profit sector is more inclusive
- Lobby for improved qualifications
- Does Local Government Still Have a Role in Children’s Services
- NACBCS needs to propose research that can prove that community based services are of a higher quality.

As you can see there were some solid recommendations that came out of the NACBCS conference. These recommendations will now be considered by the NACBCS Executive.

The NACBCS 25th Anniversary Conference was a great success and a valuable opportunity for national networking, discussion, debate and visioning. Thank you to everyone who was involved in the conference, including delegates, our sponsors and the Conference Committee.

NACBCS Conference presentations will be put up on to the NACBCS Website as they are received from the presenters. Visit www.nacbc.org.au.

NACBCS Bus Tour of the Integrated Children's Centres

As we set off on our grand adventure, Lovely Lauren informed us we had quite a few miles to cover and that we had some exciting centers to visit.

First stop on this adventure was Laverton Community Centre. The large centre caters for lots of families from various backgrounds and fairly low economic status.

There is long day care for 75 children and Kindergarten for 26 children, that all open out to a very inviting playground with a lovely natural sandpit and lots of various wooden poles and platforms. They also offer Occasional Care for up to 15 children and rooms for parent groups, maternal and child health service, toy library and rooms that the community could rent. The service has worked hard to hand pick their staff and make sure that all staff have the same drive and passion for the center's goals.

After a long drive past Geelong our next stop was Bannockburn Children's Services. This service has become the hub in town for children and their families. With there previously not being any community long day care centers and the local kinders were outside of the main town, this centre provides 2 different kinder programs, one in the LDC setting and another sessional based, as well as LDC for younger children, maternal and child health nurse, a multi purpose room that is rented out to local groups and a staff room that is for all staff within the building. There are 4 consulting rooms that offer families services like family and drought counseling and health issues like dietary and allied services. There was a very large and inviting foyer that had lots of information about the services offered as well as community information and events.

From there it was a drive to Werribee and the Quantin Binnah Centre. This centre has been community owned for 16 years and has built itself up to be a very important part of the local community. They offer LDC, 4 kinder programs, OSHC, playgroup, maternal and child health and adult education. This also means a large team of approx 70 staff and many volunteers. The service is open to care for children from 6am – 6pm and then until 10pm for local meetings and adult training. The OSHC program caters for 120 children and uses the local facilities like the Gym/Hall as well as utilizing Active after schools and the LDC play space later in the afternoons. The building was full of photos of the children enjoying activities as well as lots of children's artwork displayed.

Overall I think the adventure was great and lots of interesting things were learnt.

Thanks NACBCS and Lauren for the great trip.

Sharyn Veale

NACBCS 25th Anniversary Publication

Forward from Dr. Gordon Cleveland, Associate Chair, Department of Management, University of Toronto Scarborough

The National Association of Community-Based Children's Services has played a vital and admirable role representing the interests of community non-profit child care and children's services for a quarter of a century. So much so that its messages and advice have even resounded here in far-off Canada, where I live.

The cause for which NACBCS advocates so tirelessly is one that we share in common – to ensure that non-profit community-based services are predominant in providing quality services for children and their parents. My colleagues and I, who are economists and psychologists at the University of Toronto and other universities, have studied the role of non-profit child care centres here in Canada, using a number of different data sets. Our findings (www.childcarepolicy.net) support the view that non-profits play a distinct and important role in providing the quality of child care that supports children's development, while facilitating parental employment. In fact, not only do not-for-profit organizations hire more trained staff, encourage them to take additional professional development, and pay better wages than for-profit centres, they also support a positive dynamic that makes them more effective at producing quality than corresponding for-profits. Our research suggests that it is their dedication to providing quality services for families, and with the help of families, that creates a virtuous circle making non-profits more efficient at producing this quality.

As if that weren't enough, community-based children's services are also immersed in their communities, spring from their communities, and become part of a network of community services in their neighbourhoods. Community-based services are not part of a multinational corporate network serving interests outside the community.

All of this makes the work of NACBCS even more vital today than it has ever been. Congratulations to all of you who support its work in your everyday lives and actions.

Don't forget that all NACBCS members are entitled to a 15% discount on all purchases from Educational Experience. For every purchase by a NACBCS member, 2% of the value of the sale will be given to NACBCS.

**Phone your order through to
Free Call 1800-025 270 or online at
<http://www.edex.com.au/products/index.cfm?action=order>**

Quality Assurance Update

Due to the change of Government the next meeting of the Quality Assurance National Advisory Group was cancelled. This meeting was going to examine the feedback that was received as part of the review of the Draft Guide to the Standards.

The development of the new Child Care Quality Accreditation System is unclear.

Watch this space for more information on the new Rudd Government's plan for child care quality.

Canada in Crisis!

Rhiannon Williams, CCC Victoria, Social Work Placement Student

On October 1 2007, the province of British Columbia in Canada announced that major child care capital funding would be made available to the private sector.

This is in addition to ABC Learning becoming a presence in Canada, looking to buy out existing operators and expand its operations.

This indicates an ideological shift from thinking of child care as a community service to thinking of child care as a business as has occurred in Australia over the past 17 years.

In Australia in the early 1990s about 15% of centre based services were owned by small commercial operators and the rest were operated by not-for-profit societies.

We know the danger of Canada's situation. Currently in Australia the private-for-profit company ABC Learning provides 20% of all centre based child care. Though numbers of child care places have risen, these have over-served affluent areas at the expense of low income areas, rural areas and children with complex needs.

In Canada in 2004 79% of services were non-profit, and they are looking to stop public money being used for private gain and retain the interests of quality care for children above the interests of shareholders.

Please show your support - write letters and emails of support to community activists in Canada.

For more information visit the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada website www.ccaac.ca

Department of Employment & Workplace Relations

Creating flexible workplaces in the child care industry

A training programme for managers of long day care centres

Many long-day care centres are experiencing difficulties not only attracting skilled employees, but also retaining the experienced staff they currently have. Coupled with an increasing demand for child care services, employers are looking at how to position themselves as an 'employer of choice'. Offering flexible working arrangements, such as part-time or job-share, is one way to help.

NACBCS was represented on the reference group for this national project to support flexible work arrangements in long-day care centres. Flexibility does not just benefit employees.

The Australian Government has developed a training programme flexibility benefits: creating flexible workplaces in the child care industry. The programme, developed with the assistance of the National Association of Community Based Children's Services and centre managers, is designed specifically for managers of centre based long-day care. It highlights the benefits of flexible, family friendly working arrangements for the centre and staff.

Our representative reports that the training program is quite good. While it is unlikely to solve the staffing crisis, it may help some centres to think outside the box.

A copy of the training programme will be available at: <http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Programmes/WorkFamily/>

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 is returned to NACBCS.

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. For every purchase, 2% of the value of the sale will be given to NACBCS.

Industrial Issues

Strategic partnership between NACBCS and LHMU

Lynne Wannan, National Convenor

NACBCS welcomes the LHMU into a partnership that aims to help improve the conditions of staff and the general way children's services are provided. With a new Federal Labor government in place the opportunity is here to get a better deal and see real progress in growing community based services to benefit children, their families and those who work in their services. This partnership, with one of the unions concerned with the early childhood services workforce, can only strengthen our efforts to improve funding and staff ratios and ensure that strategies are developed to better support the workforce.

NACBCS will continue to build constructive partnerships with other unions and other stakeholders that share our vision of a world's best children's system for Australia.

Paul Davies, National LHMU Co-ordinator for Children's Services, welcomed the agreement on behalf of the national Union. "We see this as a major step in the right direction and look forward to working with NACBCS on sector reform through the coming years. During 2008 LHMU organisers will be engaging childcare professionals in community centres, across the country, in a process to build momentum for change. Together with NACBCS, LHMU members will advocate for reform on quality, skills development and all the measures that need to be taken in order to build a robust and modern system of childcare in this country"

Agreement Between NACBCS and LHMU for Joint Advocacy

26 October 2007

Purpose:

This agreement documents the intention of the National Association of Community Based Children's Services (NACBCS) and the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) to collaborate on campaigning and advocacy for a high quality children's services system in Australia. For this purpose the parties agree to develop an agreed charter of principles to be used to promote the development of a national quality children's services system.

Joint Advocacy:

The parties to this agreement recognise that:

- NACBCS represents and advocates for community owned not-for-profit children's services in Australia
- LHMU represents and advocates for workers in child care services

NACBCS and LHMU agree to advocate for high quality accessible affordable children's services through:

- improvements to federal accreditation and the state/territory licensing systems
- improvements to federal funding and planning activities

- improvements to staffing ratios and staff training, and
- the development of models and initiatives to promote the sustainable growth of community sector children's services

As a fundamental principle the parties commit to a relationship that respects the right of workers to act and negotiate collectively through the Union.

NACBCS will:

- assist LHMU to communicate with state and territory branches in order to facilitate good relations with community owned children's services
- support the maintenance of all Award conditions as they are at the date of agreement
- promote industrial instruments/agreements which maintain and enhance employee rights and conditions of employment, including wages

LHMU will:

- actively support the maintenance and growth of the not-for-profit community owned children's services sector
- respond to concerns raised by NACBCS in regard to the relationships between the LHMU and community owned children's services

Both parties will consult to ensure the relationship is managed in a way that accommodates changes in the environment over time.

Dispute resolution:

The parties to this agreement will attempt to resolve by direct communication any disagreements of policy, strategy or other activity.

Where disagreements cannot be resolved, both parties to this agreement accept the right of the other party to disagree publicly.

Review:

This agreement will be reviewed jointly by the parties at least annually.



25th Anniversary Letters of Congratulations from Canada

Dear Lynne and Barbara and members of NACBCS:

Congratulations on 25 years of fine and important work - promoting and supporting high quality affordable non-profit, community-based children's services in Australia.

Our organizations share much in common. Like you our Coalition has determinedly fought for not-for profit child care for twenty-five years. Like you we believe in equity for children and families regardless of where they live or their circumstances and like you we value the child care workforce and seek appropriate training and remuneration for those within it.

Like you we are meeting on November 16th. While your conference is called CHILDREN NOT FOR PROFIT - COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP FOR A BETTER WORLD our public meeting is called BC CHILD CARE – NOT FOR SALE (Say No to corporate child care; say YES to community owned child care.)

This common theme is why we not only send our congratulations to you but we also send our sincere thanks. We may be far away but we are benefiting from the vigilance with which you have monitored, analyzed and spoken out about the commodification of child care over the past years and we are very grateful. Together we are stronger.

Our best wishes for a very successful and productive conference!

Sincerely,
Mab Oloman
On behalf of the Board and Members of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC.

November 13th 2007

Dear Lynne, Barbara and Members of the NACBCS:

It is a pleasure to extend our congratulations to the NACBCS, on celebrating 25 years of advocating for nonprofit, communitybased children's services in Australia.

Over the past 25 years, the National Association for Community Based Children's Services has been dedicated to the creation of highquality, affordable and accessible children's services in Australia. The NACBCS' perseverance and dedication to the children of Australia continues to be a source of inspiration to child care advocates everywhere. Through turbulent times you have maintained your belief that community based children's services are fundamentally different to commercial services, and you have taken that position into national and international policy debates. For this we thank you.

On behalf of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada's Board of Directors, Staff and Members, I would like to extend

CHILD CARE IS
A POLITICAL ISSUE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF COMMUNITY BASED
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS
1982 – 2007

In celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the National Association of Community Based Children's Services (NACBCS), NACBCS has released a commemorative publication called 'Child Care is a Political Issue', in honour the title of the first NACBCS Conference in 1983.

This publication, which was launched at the recent NACBCS 25th Anniversary gala dinner, documents the remarkable history of NACBCS, today's reality and the NACBCS vision for the future. The papers from the first NACBCS Conference are also reproduced as an essential component of NACBCS history.

Contributors include Canadian Economist Gordon Cleveland, NACBCS Convenor Lynne Wannan, Academic and inaugural NACBCS Convenor Professor Deborah Brennan and NACBCS National Secretary Barbara Romeril.

If you would like a copy of this exciting publication please contact your State and Territory NACBCS branch (contact details on the back page of NACBCS In Action) who will then put in a bulk order with the Secretariat. There may be a small fee to cover production, postage and handling.

The publication will also be available online at www.nacbc.org.au.

my congratulations and best wishes as you celebrate this momentous anniversary.

Sincerely,
 Jody Dallaire
 Chair, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

Keeping an Eye on Corporate Child Care

The Australian Experience

ABC Learning earnings forecast down

The Age, November 21, 2007

Child care company ABC Learning Centres Ltd has downgraded its earnings guidance for the full year, surprising investors who sent its shares down by almost five per cent.

ABC says its earnings per share (EPS) is now expected to grow by 15 per cent or more this financial year, down from an earlier forecast of growth of more than 20 per cent.

ABC shares fell 28 cents, or 4.87 per cent, to \$5.47.

While the high Australian dollar was impacting, ABC said it had mitigated some of its US dollar exposure by ensuring that part of its debt is denominated in US dollars.

“ABC confirms that its operations in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and United Kingdom are all trading to expectations in constant currency terms for the 2007/08 financial year,” it said.

ABC also said it was continuing with its program of non-material acquisitions of childcare centres.

In the meantime, the value of its 17.99 per cent investment in toy company Funtastic Ltd was declining as the share price fell.

“At 30 June ... this resulted in a gain of \$7 million with Funtastic’s share price at \$1.85,” ABC said.

“Subsequent share price fluctuations below \$1.85 will have an impact on earnings.”

ABC in August reported a net profit of \$143.10 million for 2006/07, up 76 per cent on the previous year.

It had recorded EPS growth of 29 per cent to 17 cents.

The International Experience

Cradle Snatch

Emily Lambert, Forbes Magazine, 1 October 2007.

... In the \$55 billion U.S. child care industry, nap time is officially over. Nursery school chains are consolidating, and chief among the buyers is ABC. Headquartered in Brisbane, Australia, ABC jumped into the U.S. market early last year and has spent \$555 million in deals for La Petite and two other chains.

Already the world’s biggest babysitter, ABC is now the number two player in the U.S., second only to Knowledge Universe Education, cofounded by former junk-bond king Michael Milken and his brother, Lowell. Privately held Knowledge Universe, headquartered in Santa Monica, Calif., boasts 2,000 centers in the U.S. ABC, which is listed in Sydney, has 1,100 centers here and 2,238 worldwide. Both companies see lots of opportunities for more dealmaking: The U.S. industry is so fragmented that the ten biggest chains account for just 5% of the market.

The honeypot drawing ABC is a growing stream of government money. The U.S. already spends \$25 billion a year on babysitting and preschool for poor children. Now some politicians want taxpayers to fund voluntary “universal preschool” for all 4-year-olds (and some 3-year-olds) no matter what their parents’ income bracket. States are spending \$4.2 billion this year on pre-K programs, up 45% in two years. Hillary Clinton wants the federal government to chip in another \$10 billion over the next five years.

ABC told investors in May that 25% of its U.S. revenue comes from government contracts....

Indeed, while politicians debate whether public money should go to privately run grade schools and high schools, they’re already sending cash to private nursery schools. Georgia, which launched universal pre-K in 1995, gives centers \$4,000 per pupil; the centers are lobbying for a raise. In Oklahoma, which adopted universal pre-K in 1998, providers contract with public school districts; Learning Care runs 7 nursery schools there. It has similar contracts to run 6 in New York and 40 in Texas....

Back home in Australia, where 10% of children up to age 5 attend one of its centers, ABC has come in for quite a bit of criticism. Last year Labor politician Michael Danby attacked the company’s founder and chief executive, Edmund Groves, on the floor of Australia’s House of Representatives: “What he has done is get rich by milking government subsidies.” The Australian press has branded Groves Fast Eddy, with the Sydney Morning Herald running an article about him under the headline “Cradle Snatcher.” The Australia Institute, a think tank, put out a 38-page report last year that anonymously quoted ABC employees saying the chain didn’t provide adequate food to the children and understaffed its centers. The report urged more government regulation. Groves calls the criticism unfounded and adds that ABC’s staff turnover is a low 10% a year. “We like to chop down the tall poppy here,” he says. “We’re not like the U.S., where they embrace people who have been successful.”

ABC certainly owes its success to government funding—it represents 40% of its revenue in Australia. In 1988 Groves, then a 22-year-old milkman, started with one day care center in a Brisbane suburb. ABC grew slowly, until the Australian government started offering generous child care payments to parents. For-

profit centers now have 70% of the market versus 40% in the U.S. Groves, who bought the Brisbane Bullets basketball team in 1999, took ABC public in 2001 and expanded by buying up competitors. Then he moved abroad--to New Zealand in 2004 and last December to the U.K. He's poised to become the biggest child care company in the U.K., where he announced in August that ABC will buy Leapfrog Nurseries for \$63 million. To raise cash, Groves sold a 12% stake in May to Temasek, the Singapore government's investment arm. He and his wife, Le Neve--who has a background in early childhood education and is ABC's chief executive of education--own a 9% piece worth \$210 million.

Daycare centres no place for big-box mentality

Lorraine Sommerfeld, Toronto Star, Nov 05, 2007

I used to work in a business that created and sold things. The catch-all word "widget" fits well, so we'll use that. We sold widgets. Some of the widgets we sold were bigger than others, some were definitely more fun to sell, and some were pretty boring but at least we made money from them -- and the focus, after all, was to make a profit.

When my son decided he wanted to sponsor a child in a developing nation, the very first thing I set out to learn was how much of my son's paper route money would actually go to the well-being of the sponsored child. I wanted to make sure that, after reasonable administration costs, our Rwandan widget benefited from the cash. The focus after all, shouldn't be to make a profit.

The nature of any economy insists that if money is spent, some of it will go to places you didn't intend or realize. There are extremes; some corrupt foreign government may pocket all international aid, which isn't what I intended with my disaster relief donation, or my son may use his allowance to buy firecrackers. Either way, the control freaks among us often find it tough.

If there is one issue, however, where societies need to step off the profit-powered money wheel, it is child care. Australian Eddy Groves has specifically tapped into countries with government daycare subsidies, and his cost-cutting measures have led to ongoing political and legal battles regarding substandard care and employee treatment.

He has figured out how to wring every last nickel out of the management and care of little Australian ankle-biters. He has turned children into widgets, and can now tally his profits from his yacht.

Eddy has announced plans to come to Canada. The opposition parties in this country are fighting to get Bill C-303 passed to maintain quality care for our children. The Conservatives will probably show up for Fast Eddy's first ribbon cutting. Not their kids going in there.

Have you ever shopped at one of those cavernous warehouse places that promise "we pass the savings on to you"? Have you pushed down box-crowded aisles, picked through busted up packaging, scoured best-before dates to avoid hazardous conditions?

Should any child, even if he's not yours, be subjected to similar conditions? When the profit margins are narrow, those seeking profit will scrape for every dime. Profit margins on decent,

licensed child care are already non-existent. Workers are paid poorly, government standards are blessedly high, and parents are already squeezed in the middle. For someone to come in and start skimming money from the process means only one thing: the kids will suffer.

Let me be perfectly clear: I do not subscribe to the sterile thinking of some who embrace an ideology about children that includes the words "you had 'em, you raise 'em."

Any animal that forms herds -- and that would be us -- protects the young. All of them. Some parents are better than others, but in a resource-rich society like ours there is no reason all children can't have a decent shot at success.

And forget basking in the warmth of knowing that your own kids are okay. They are going to go out in the world and form relationships with kids who perhaps weren't raised with the same strengths. Yep, the offspring of someone who didn't get to dip into the horn of plenty may be calling you Grandpa or Grandma.

Where is the moral outrage that we have become a community that would rather incarcerate a 16-year-old than teach a 3-year-old? How backassed has our thinking become?

Some kids need daycare; some kids need after-school care; some kids don't require either outside of the home. Regardless of the composition, every one of those children needs a safe, educational experience.

Where do the broken widgets go?

Branch Reports

Victoria

Community Child Care has taken the lead in establishing a consultative process for the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to consult actively with the early childhood sector; we facilitated a meeting between a number of peak bodies and statewide organisations and the Secretary of the Department, as well as senior management. The issues we identified were:

- the transition process especially on-going consultation with the early years sector
- possible formal partnership structures
- common information technology and data collection across early years service system and schools
- issues for culturally diverse communities especially translation and interpreting
- the education/care debate, common quality framework for birth to 8 years, professional development/recognition, regulations and COAG
- role of parents in OSHC management in schools as a model for participation in schools
- common curriculum framework birth to 8 years
- local planning networks

Senior management agreed to take on board our issues and to

report back before the end of the year.

CCC has published a research report on parent experiences of community management, entitled *A Very Empowering Feeling* has attracted interest from academics and other peak bodies and is being distributed widely in order to challenge misperceptions about the willingness by parents to participate in community management. We also hosted meetings between Professor Helen May of New Zealand and advisors to the Minister for Children and with other peak bodies, to hear first hand about the world leading developments in qualifications, curriculum and integration of early childhood services in that country.

And of course, we have been busy as the national secretariat of NACBCS hosting the national conference at which Helen provided the keynote address, the 25th anniversary dinner and publication of a document capturing NACBCS policy positions, ranging from papers for the first NACBCS national conference in 1983 right through to this year's federal election policy statement.

Western Australia

Carewest

The new Constitution was finally launched at the AGM held on 18 September.

The Research in Stress in Child Care, conducted by Margaret Sims, of Edith Cowan University and which Carewest sponsored, was successfully launched on 27 November by Hon. Minister Sue Ellery. The final report will soon be available on NACBCS' website.

Regulations / Licensing: 1100 submissions were received by the Department on the Discussion Paper prepared by the Departmental Policy officer and in consultation with the Child Care Consultative Review Committee. Since 19 October 2007, the closing date for feedback, a Draft Recommendations Paper has been produced and is being deliberated by the Committee. As expected, it has resulted in much debate and it has been decided to delay presenting the final recommendations to the Minister until the New Year.

Changes to Support Agencies & Sponsorship: The Resource Unit for Children with Special Needs is yet to appoint a new CEO.

NIFTeY (WA): Out of this group, a WA Coordinating Council for Early Childhood has been formed and already it is getting much support and approval including from Government. In conjunction with the Association of Independent Schools of WA and the Smith Family, a grant application has been submitted with Lotterywest to fund some project consultants to forward the coordination.

In addition NIFTeY has again engaged in negotiations to reconnect with the Roots of Empathy program of Canada, as we are keen to implement an "Emotional Literacy" program in classrooms and Community services.

Conference: WA was very pleased to be represented by a group of 10 at the recent Conference. It was the first NACBCS Conference for most. Much networking was done and we are looking forward to the New Year before sharing with other members what we

learnt and which ideas we would like to explore further. Of course making connections face to face is invaluable.

Everyone is frantically completing end of year processes whilst getting into the Xmas spirit.

The WA Branch of NACBCS wishes everyone a safe & happy festive season!!!

Looking forward to more NACBCS action in 2008.

NACBCS
wishes
you a safe
and happy
festive
season

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: nacbcsc@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 Carol Lymbery	p.warrilow@familiesatwork.com carollymbery@cccncsw.org.au
QUEENSLAND	Frances Sneddon Julie Pearce	fs.csmg@gmail.com ecmanager@qld.lca.org.au
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	Josique Lynch Kathy Holt	joonccc@iinet.net.au cobcccslv@iinet.net.au
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	Deb Chernoff Robyn Geisler	deb@econ-outlook.com.au lurra.childcare@internode.on.net
TASMANIA	Susan Nolan Tracy Bradley	oceanview@bbchildcare.org tbradley@warwyn.tas.gov.au
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY	Kerry Fitzroy	kerry.f@adfact.org and childdir@adfact.org
NORTHERN TERRITORY	Irene McCarthy	grayccc@bigpond.net.au