



Advocating nationally for the right of Australia's children to access quality, not for profit, community owned children's services

## ACCS IN ACTION! June 2016

### NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE

Prue Warrilow

ACCS has been involved in a wide range of activities in 2015 financial year. At a national level we continue to deliver extremely well for a small voluntary-based organisation. This participation has included:

- Early Childhood Ministerial Advisory Council. This is a challenging environment to be in as the conversations are confidential however, members feedback has enabled me to represent ACCS views effectively and enthusiastically
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholder forums and consultations
- ASQA with Brian Newman and Kim Bertino bringing their expertise to proactively represent ACCS views in these important forums
- ACECQA - stakeholder forums and individual organisational consultation
- Department of Education consultations and stakeholder meetings
- a variety of submissions that emanated from the Productivity Commission review, Regulatory Impact Statement and related enquiries
- Families Australia that I Chair as ACCS nominee ensuring that the children's services voice is heard in the wider child and family services arena

- Early Learning Everyone Benefits where ACCS was asked to be a participant in the reference group

In the 2015 financial year I spent around nine weeks (343 hours) actively engaged in ACCS work. I'm not alone in doing this work as I am supported by a strong executive, and other state/territory members who participate as ACCS representatives in a variety of different forums.

ACCS has also managed a significant transition with the secretariat moving from Community Child Care Victoria (CCCVic) to Barbara Romeril. I want to thank Lynn Turner from CCCVic and Barbara for facilitating such a smooth transition enabling ACCS to continue to function throughout this process.

There are a number of critical issues and risks that I think ACCS needs to consider moving forward. These are:

- emerging alternate ECEC voices with extensive paid resources in advocacy and media
- ACCS staying relevant as part of the national agenda including looking at leveraging existing relationships, both professional and personal. Early Learning Everyone Benefits is an example of this kind of leveraging

- the election and ongoing conversations around the Jobs for Families package. This is most likely to be implemented in 2018 financial year, potentially post introduction of a new IT system enabling monitoring and measuring of family attendance by hours used not hours booked. This could result in a shift to funding for hours used only

I want to thank Barbara Romeril in fulfilling the secretariat role in helping to ensure that ACCS voice is out and about.

I want to thank all of the executive and their active participation in driving ACCS forward. Without the executives commitment, enthusiasm and experience this would not be possible. ACCS is only as strong as the member voices that enhance our conversations. It has been a privilege to work with the executive and ACCS members over the past year.

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## ACCS and the Federal Election

In the current federal election campaign, ACCS will be assessing the policies of the major parties against what we see as the key policies that Australia needs in order to support its children to thrive:

- Build a skilled and professional early childhood workforce – no HECS fees, free TAFE
- No children and their families in detention in Australia or off-shore
- Increase the maximum hours of subsidised early childhood education and care for children of non-working parents to 2 days per week or 18 to 24 hours per week
- Increase the fee subsidy for low income families to 90 per cent of the full costs of ECEC and to 100 per cent of the full costs for children who are at risk or vulnerable

We also urge the parties to commit to implementing the following policies:

- Maintain current Priority of Access criteria to ensure access for families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
- Continue full implementation of National Quality Framework
- Invest in availability – capital grants, low/no interest loans to not-for-profit providers; investment in flexible services (mobiles, occasional care, Aboriginal services); investment in planning for early and middle years services
- Provide government paid parental leave

ACCS is also actively supporting the sector campaign Early Learning Everyone Benefits, which is already having an impact on the policies of the major parties.

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## Early Learning: Everyone Benefits National Campaign

ACCS is proud to be an active supporter of the campaign for two days a week of quality early learning for all Australian children.

To find out more visit: [www.everyonebenefits.org.au](http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au)

**Early Learning: Everyone Benefits** is a positive national campaign which aims to:

- increase public awareness and understanding of the benefits of investing in early learning (birth to five years) for Australia's future prosperity
- increase access to quality programs that amplify children's development by securing political commitment to increasing early learning.

It is supported by leading Australian early childhood peak bodies, research and advocacy organisations, and service providers.

**Early learning** means the vital stages of children’s development from birth to age five, including brain development, cognitive skills, motor skills, social and emotional wellbeing—all of the skills needed for lifelong learning. Early learning occurs in formal settings (early childhood education and care) with educators but also at home and in relationships with family members and caregivers. Our campaign recognises that the main vehicle for children’s learning is play.

### **Why invest more in early learning?**

- One in five Australian children start school vulnerable in their social, emotional or cognitive development and will fail to catch up, according to the Australian Early Development Census. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children it’s more than two in five who are vulnerable.
- Australian and international research tells us that attending at **least two days of early learning per week** improves children’s educational outcomes at school up to 13 years later.
- Children who attend a high-quality early childhood program in the year before school are up to 40 per cent ahead of their peers by the time they reach Year 3 in primary school.
- By age five, a child’s vocabulary will predict their educational success and outcomes at age 30.
- All children benefit from early learning, and vulnerable children benefit the most.

### **Why this campaign is important:**

- Australia is in the bottom third of OECD countries for attendance of three year olds in early learning.
- Participating in quality early learning (birth to five years) can greatly improve young children’s:
  - social and emotional skills
  - physical wellbeing
  - communication and cognitive abilities in literacy and numeracy—up to 13 years later.

This campaign is about educating the Australian community and politicians about the importance and benefits of early learning.

### **Our goals**

- To have all Australian children benefit from participating in early learning, particularly vulnerable children who will gain the most.
- To have political parties commit to policies that will support 100 per cent of four year olds and 90 per cent of three year olds to attend early learning for at least two days per week, and for younger children to be able to attend as needed by their families.
- To change the national conversation on the value of early learning and convince our politicians that supporting attendance in early learning today will increase the future prosperity for all of us.

Join us to spread the word that our future prosperity depends on how we invest in our children today!

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## **CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT LOWERING OF SCHOOL ENTRY AGE IN TASMANIA**

Zoe Manning and Josique Lynch

The Tasmanian Government is reviewing the Education Act. The ECEC sector in Tasmania is deeply concerned that one of the key reforms

under the draft Bill is to lower the school starting age. A Regulatory Impact Statement is out, seeking feedback including what impact this

change would have on the operations of ECEC services if children are attending 15 hours per week of kindergarten in a school setting.

Part of the rationale for the change is that Tasmania has the oldest school starting age of all states and territories for children entering full-time school. The government asserts that children in other states and territories are able to begin full-time school when they are three to seven months younger than their Tasmanian counterparts. However it is not easy to compare kindergarten age and attendance between states and territories accurately because relatively few kindergarten programs interstate operate within the school system, as in Tasmania.

Western Australia has a similar system, with the non-compulsory Kindy Year delivered in schools. It has become the year that the majority of children enter the formal school system, primarily because parents believe that their children must attend or they'll be left behind. Also it is less costly than paying child care fees.

The schools do a good job at marketing their Kindy programs to parents with many offering familiarisation sessions for very young children, siblings of Primary School age children, well before Kindy age. Universal Access dollars go only to Education Department early learning programs in WA so the Kindy hours have increased from 11 hours per week to 15 hours.

The school starting age was lowered in WA about 5 years ago; so children start the first year of compulsory schooling if they turn 5 by June of that year.

Another reason given by the Tasmanian Government for the proposed change is that it provides earlier access to quality early learning and development experiences for all children. But what do they mean by 'quality early learning'? It is concerning that the government believes that formal literacy training at an earlier age will improve literacy levels.

In a recent opinion piece in the *Hobart Mercury*, the Tasmanian Education Minister referred to 'benefits of early engagement in positive play-based learning environments ... at ... a school'. There seems to be confusion within the Government about the difference between access to early childhood education and access to education. There is no question that children (especially the vulnerable) benefit from access to high quality early education and care; our concern is that the

formal school setting is not the best environment from a safety and emotional security point of view.

In early learning programs in schools in WA, play is limited in many cases and is timetabled rather than the concept of Learning Through Play being central to the program's philosophy.

### **Impact on Children**

The level of individual maturity and child independence varies significantly within the 3-5 year old cohort. They have vast differences in their level of emotional security and resilience, self-management and practical independence. Many 3 ½ year olds are still requiring sleep or rest during the day and some are still in nappies or toilet training and require assistance. Will kindergartens in schools be equipped to respond sensitively?

The WA experience confirms these fears. There is a lot expected of these young children in WA who are expected to be 'school ready' as early as 3.5 years of age, for example, they are expected to know how to write their names, be able to sit and listen for an extended period of time, count and do simple sums, and 'behave' in structured environments. These young children have not yet developed self-regulation skills, so there has been a reported increase in the level of anxiety among young children as a result.

In Tasmania, there are concerns about young children being in before and after school care, potentially 3 ½ year olds in with 12 year olds. Also 3 ½ year olds could potentially be in 4 different settings outside of the home each week (before school care, kindergarten, after school care and LDC) – not the continuity of care promised in the Early Years Learning Framework.

### **Impact on ECEC Services**

The loss of income to FDC and LDC could potentially close many services and those that can remain open may not be able to provide as high a quality of program due to the loss of economy of scale. LDC estimate that if 3 ½ year olds were to attend kinder 15 hours per week utilisation would decrease 40%; this would rise to 75% for services that run just 3-5 year old programs. If Centres or FDC providers in rural and remote areas become unviable they will have to close.

### **Impact on Families**

If services are forced to close, families will have no choice but to leave children in "backyard care" or

force the parent out of the workforce due to care not being available.

The reduction in utilisation for older children will mean that fees for younger children will need to rise.

The Tasmanian Minister acknowledges the need to invest in changing schools to be able to deliver quality ECEC to younger children, including teacher qualifications and promotion of the EYLF.

Given past history, the ECEC sector is not confident that this can be done.

It was reported in the WA newspapers recently that as a result of falling literacy and numeracy levels it is proposed that the Kindy age children will be tested before they begin school! Is this the future for Tasmania's young children?



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## ACCS WA Branch Update

Sally Griffiths

Western Australian branch of ACCS, Carewest has been working diligently to promote the sustainability of the organisation. With the election of a new Executive Committee earlier in the year there is a new found enthusiasm. Subsequently a subcommittee has been organised to research and implement strategies to promote membership and services for the NFP community based sector in WA.

Members both past and present are being surveyed to identify the challenges they are

currently facing for the peak body to ascertain how it may be able to assist them.

A Professional Development program has also been developed providing very affordable and valuable support for directors reflective of the survey's responses including recruiting and managing employees and maintaining mental health and wellbeing.

There has been a positive response to date and we seek to ensure a strong and motivated approach as we build membership and participation. In addition we have been liaising with the local ECA

branch to support and spread the word about the Everyone Benefits Campaign.

WA delegates have also organised to meet with the state Education Minister Peter Collier to

welcome him and discuss important issues for the sector and introduce the ACCS Election Platform along with supporting evidence to promote NFP quality early childhood services for every child.

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### **ACCS AGM and Face-to-face Meeting in October**

ACCS National Council held its AGM in May and for the first time, we had an election for National Convenor. Prue Warrilow was returned as National Convenor and the Executive is:

National Convenor: Prue Warrilow (NSW)

Deputy National Convenor: Linda Davison (Vic)

Secretary: Kim Bertino (NSW)

Treasurer: Sally Griffiths (WA)

The annual face-to-face meeting is scheduled to be held during the ECA National Conference in Darwin in October. The Executive will plan an agenda to enable members to discuss a key policy issue facing the early childhood sector in the wake of the result of the current federal election.

At this stage, the plans for the meeting are:

Date: Thursday 6 October

Time: lunch break in the ECA national conference program

Venue: Room 4 at the Darwin Convention Centre

We hope you are planning to attend the conference, so keep an eye out for final details of the ACCS national policy discussion.

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**To join ACCS or to unsubscribe from this email list, contact the delegates in your state or territory:**

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