



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

## **ACCS IN ACTION!**

### **December 2019**

#### **NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE**

### **ACCS Research Shows Community Sector is Flourishing under the National Quality Framework**

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

ACCS continues to advocate strongly for not for profits children's services throughout Australia. Since the last ACCS In Action in May 2019 there's been quite a bit of activity.

The 5<sup>th</sup> wave report for the Trends in Community Children's Services Survey (TICCSS) is almost complete. TICCSS is ground breaking longitudinal national research into how the national quality reforms are evolving across Australia, in the experience of coordinators who live it every day. Some pre-release snippets include the following.

- Respondents are maintaining reasonable levels of utilisation with just under half of the 2019 respondents operating at full or close to full capacity
- The NQF has not created a crisis in accessibility of ECE services. While there are some fluctuations in numbers of children on waiting lists, the length of time on waiting lists by age has not varied significantly across all waves of TICCSS.
- The sector continues to provide good staffing levels, with all respondents meeting or exceeding the required number of educators for babies and toddlers. Almost half of respondents were operating with a ratio of

better than 1:10 for 3 to 5 year olds and of those around half were doing this out of choice as they were not from a state where they were required to operate with this ratio.

- Of the 8,386 teachers and educators employed by respondents, only 287 educators held no relevant early or middle childhood qualifications, employed by 68 respondents. Some of these unqualified educators are working towards relevant early or middle childhood qualifications.

We'll let you know when the full report is available.

We have compiled some CCS case studies from ACCS members that highlight some of the challenges services and families have experienced with the transition to the new Child Care Package. This has been provided to the Federal Minister, the Australian Department of Education and the Opposition for their consideration. Our evidence, along with others, have resulted in the most recent changes to the Child Care Package legislation.

We also provided questions to the Greens to be included in Senate Estimates.

National ACCS state/territory ACCS representatives held a very productive meeting in

Adelaide on 7-8 November 2019 to discuss national advocacy. During this time we also met with the Amanda Rishworth, the Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Development and Senator Marielle Smith.

Other important advocacy actions we have taken include:

- Joint advocacy for continuation of NQA National Partnership Agreements
- Participation in consultations – NQF Review; formation of National Centre for Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse; AEU forum on ECE funding
- Representation in the VET sector including forming an ACCS position on the proposed introduction of Cert II
- Submission to Senate Education & Employment Legislation Committee inquiry into Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Building on the Child Care Package) Bill 2019

This year we also said farewell to Lynne Wannan, who was a former National Convenor of ACCS. Lynne passed away in June 2019. Lynne made a significant contribution to community owned children's services. You can read more about Lynne in our recent special edition of ACCS In Action! dedicated to memories of Lynne Wannan and her significant service to community owned children's services

We are working hard at revitalising the Queensland ACCS branch and there is now a regular cohort of Queensland community owned children's services that meet together for advocacy.

Looking ahead we are in the planning stages of our next national face to face meeting in Canberra early in 2020.

I hope you all have a safe and festive holiday season; and I look forward to more community owned children's services advocacy in 2020.

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### **ACCS NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING WITH ALP**

The ACCS National Council met in Adelaide in November and took the opportunity to meet with two federal politicians who speak out for the values that ACCS represents – Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Amanda Rishworth and Senator Marielle Smith (maiden speech is [available here](#)).

Shadow Minister Amanda Rishworth addressed the meeting – the transcript is [here](#).

ACCS briefed the Shadow Minister on the key issues of concern to the community children's services sector, including the review of the National Quality Framework and the possibility of reduced standards and inadequate resourcing to bring up to standard services that are not yet meeting NQS.

ACCS also reiterated its concerns about unstable funding for universal access to early childhood education in the year before school and briefed her on the negative impact on vulnerable families of the introduction of Child Care Subsidy.

We alerted the Shadow Minister to our ongoing advocacy in regard to the development of an overarching framework of child wellbeing, concerns about the potential loss of ACECQA, the need for a national workforce agenda and a planning framework for the development of new services.

The discussion led to an agreement for ACCS to share with Amanda and Marielle the case studies on the impact of CCS and the TICCSS research findings.

Both were keen to hear our concerns. The SA branch representatives will use this initial meeting to keep in touch and to investigate further links including possibly involving the federal MPs in the state launch the TICCSS final report, making it a significant event in SA.

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### **ACCS CONTACT WITH FEDERAL POLITICIANS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM**

In the last 6 months ACCS has invested time in maintaining contact with policy makers to feed into policy considerations the voice of the community children's services sector.

#### **Government**

Dan Tehan, Minister for Education received the ACCS Election Policy Platform and a request to meet; this has not yet occurred. We also sent a letter to the Minister supporting the National Partnership Agreements for Universal Access to ECE and the National Quality Framework including a response to the critique of NQF by the Centre for Independent Studies.

The Minister for Families and Social Services also received the ACCS Election Policy Platform.

### **Opposition**

Amanda Rishworth, Shadow Minister for EC received the ACCS Election Policy Platform and an invitation to attend the ACCS National Council meeting in her home state of SA.

Senator Marielle Smith also received an invitation to attend ACCS National Council meeting in Adelaide.

Kate Thwaites, new MP for Jaga Jaga and Linda Burney, Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services also received the ACCS Election Policy Platform.

### **Greens**

Mehreen Faruqi, Spokesperson for education (including early childhood education) received the ACCS Election Policy Platform. We also supplied potential questions for Senate Estimates on the impact of the Child Care Subsidy.

Larissa Waters, Spokesperson for Women also received the ACCS Election Policy Platform.

### **Nick Xenophon Team**

Rebekha Sharkie received the ACCS Election Policy Platform.

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## **ACCS REPRESENTS THE COMMUNITY SECTOR AT KEY NATIONAL FORUMS**

Linda Davison, ACCS Deputy National Convenor

### **AEU National Forum on Early Childhood Funding**

This meeting was held at Australian Education Union (Vic Branch) offices in Southbank and was attended by AEU representatives for all States/Territories as well as other key stakeholders from ECEC organisations.

Kim Little, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Education Group, Department of Education and Training Victoria spoke to the group about significant reforms currently underway in Victoria. This was followed by a roundtable discussion about ECEC priorities and current activities across the country with respect to funding for 3 and 4 year old preschool.

The AEU has started a postcard campaign asking the Australian Government to commit to ongoing funding for Universal Access to Early Childhood Education for all 4 year olds. This will extend to a 'week of action' in February 2020 when services will be encouraged to invite politicians to visit and learn about the importance of early education and will culminate with the delivery of the signed postcards in March 2020.

The meeting also reviewed the letter that was sent to the then Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull in April 2018 with a statement calling for universal early learning for every Australian child. That letter referenced the *Lifting Our Game* report and was signed on behalf of 36 stakeholder groups, including ACCS. Participants at the EC Forum resolved to prepare an updated joint statement, referencing submissions to the Universal Access Review and Australia's standing with regard to international educational achievements, and reiterating the need to commit to funding certainty for early childhood education. The letter will be drafted, signed by a wide range of stakeholders and interested organisations and delivered to the Prime Minister's Office before the end of this year.

### **Consultation Meeting – National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse**

The establishment of a National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse was Recommendation 9.9 from the Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Specifically, the Commission's final report recommended that:

The Australian Government, in conjunction with state and territory governments, should establish and fund a national centre to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, support help-seeking and guide best practice advocacy and support and therapeutic treatment. The national centre's functions should be to:

- raise community awareness and promote destigmatising messages about the impacts of child sexual abuse
- increase practitioners' knowledge and competence in responding to child and adult victims and survivors by translating knowledge about the impacts of child sexual abuse and the evidence on effective responses into practice and policy.

This should include activities to identify, translate and promote research in easily available and accessible formats for advocacy and support and therapeutic treatment practitioners; produce national training materials and best practice clinical

resources, partner with training organisations to conduct training and workforce development programs; influence national tertiary curricula to incorporate child sexual abuse and trauma-informed care and inform government policy making.

- lead the development of better service models and interventions through coordinating a national research agenda and conducting high-quality program evaluation.

The national centre should partner with survivors in all its work, valuing their knowledge and experience.

ACCS was able to contribute to a broad-ranging discussion to inform the establishment and design of the new National Centre, including gaps and opportunities; priorities for action; governance models; measures of success/impact.

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## ACCS GUIDES VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Brian Newman from ACCS Victorian branch continues to represent ACCS and Chair the Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee of the Australian Industry and Skills Committee.

In the May edition of *ACCS In Action!* Brian reported on a proposal to introduce a Certificate II in children's education and care as part of the current redrafting of the Children's Education and Care Training Package.

The key argument in support of this proposal is that it meets a particular need in remote, mainly Aboriginal, communities in children's services that do not fall under the NQF. Brian acknowledged that it must not be seen as a way to lower qualification requirements and believes that the IRC would be unanimous in this view.

ACCS National Executive discussed this with Brian and gave it full consideration. Ultimately it decided that it does not support the introduction of a Certificate II in the Children's Education and Care Training Package.

The reasons for this position are:

- The requirement for educators to have at least Certificate III was hard won by advocates for quality including ACCS; to agree to a lesser qualification even if restricted to unregulated services risks undermining this win

- Cert II would not be recognised as a qualification under the National Quality Framework; therefore it is not a pathway into working in the wider ECEC sector
- ACCS understands that ACECQA and the Victorian Government do not support the introduction of Cert II – we stand with these leaders in the NQF
- The level of training and skill of educators is a key determinant of positive outcomes for children in ECEC; Cert II is less than a Year 10 equivalent which is a very low bar to set for people who wish to work with young children
- ACCS does not have confidence in any assurances that Cert II would not become a recognised qualification under the NQF in future, especially under an Australian Government which sees ECEC as caring, not education
- This risk is exacerbated if ACECQA were to be replaced with another organisation which does not have a strong background in quality ECEC
- ACCS does not see the investment in development of a Cert II in ECEC as the best use of available resources; as part of a workforce strategy these funds could be better put to resourcing culturally appropriate content and teaching styles to assist all educators working with young children to achieve Cert III qualification

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## ACCS NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING NOVEMBER 2019

The ACCS National Council met in Adelaide on 7 and 8 November, with representatives from WA, SA, Victoria and NSW branches.

The Review of the Early Childhood National Quality Framework was the first issue on the agenda. Key questions arising from the discussion include:

- How is NQF and ACECQA funded beyond 2020?
- Moving forward what do we want this to look like, especially assessment and rating visits?
- Services rated Excellent: should excellent services be required to share their knowledge with other services?

The meeting then discussed how ACCS collaborates with other advocacy organisations and fleshed out criteria to decide when ACCS retains a unique voice and when we collaborate in joint submissions with other like-minded groups. It was proposed that ACCS consider collaborating



with wellbeing advocates beyond the ECEC sector.

It was agreed to create a one-page snapshot of the findings of the current ACCS TICCSS research report to support advocacy, for use in state/territory forums and in membership drives.

There was discussion of the opportunities and risks of using the significant new research into the Australian [cost:benefit analysis](#) by the Front Project in support of ACCS policy positions. ACCS is well placed to bring this data into a broad child and family wellbeing framework, which is increasingly the focus of governments in Australia and NZ. It was suggested that ACCS could use the model of an umbrella of child and family wellbeing, lining the umbrella with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and underpinned by Education, Health and Early Intervention services. It was identified that ACCS needs short, medium and long term strategies in entering into economic cost:benefit arguments, marrying the cost benefit analysis with the values that we hold.

The meeting discussed challenges to the sustainability of children's services in the current funding model and difficulties in the introduction of CCS. ACCS will send case studies from members to government and opposition as well as to the department.

The meeting then turned to the difficult issue of how ACCS should advocate for national consistency in delivery of Universal Access to ECEC, given the risk of governments agreeing to adopt the lowest state standards. It was agreed that ACCS would adopt the following policy position:

UAECE should be accessible to children 2 years before schooling in an accredited Early Childhood Education and Care service regardless of setting, with an annual audit linked to the governance of the service.

The current ACCS Policy Platform for the 2019 Federal Election was reviewed and it was decided to draft a document in response to the cessation of ACECQA.

Ensuring the sustainability of ACCS was discussed and it was decided to update the ACCS social media policy to promote membership and to develop a corporate partnership policy to support the work of ACCS nationally.

The Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education, Amanda Rishworth addressed the meeting and was joined by Senator Marielle Smith

to discuss opportunities for ACCS to influence early childhood policy.

## ACCS BRANCH UPDATES

### NSW Branch

The NSW Department of Education has improved preschool affordability for families with its Start Strong funding that commenced in 2016 and will continue to 2022. This funding targets children in the year before they start primary school and is available to help these children attend 600 hours per year in a quality early childhood education program. 75% of the additional funding must be passed on to families through fee reductions. Where children do not attend for 600 hours per year this funding is capped at 50%. Additional funding has been provided to support children of Aboriginal or disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in early learning. Start Strong funding is available for preschools and eligible long day care centres.

The NSW Department of Education is also looking at ways it can support the growth of OSHC in areas of no, or under supply. The OSHC funding includes \$50 million for before and after school services for infrastructure to buy new equipment and expand facilities to create more places; \$20 million aimed at those communities where a standalone service may not be viable, including smaller schools and rural and remote communities; and \$8 million over four years for a team of specialists to help coordinate services and resources on an area or regional basis to provide proactive and on the ground assistance for set-up, contract management and service transition.

### Victorian Branch (Community Child Care)

With 3-year-old kinder reforms on our doorstep for 2020, there has been a state wide advertising campaign launched in Victoria with the tagline 'Best Start, Best Life'. The campaign is to build awareness of the program and also to attract more than 4000 ECT's and 2000 educators who are needed over the next decade. Financial support to upskill or study is available. There is more information available on the website. <https://www.vic.gov.au/three-year-old-kindergarten-victorians>

Also just announced is ongoing grant funding to support provisionally registered teachers in transitioning to full registration. This is an exciting initiative to support our new graduates in their foundation years of teaching.

Earlier this year Community Child Care's executive director Julie Price and the Victorian ACCS rep

Daniela Kavoukas trekked off to Thessaloniki in Greece to present some key findings about the not for profit sector and how it is tracking compared to the national average. The Trends in Community Children's Services Survey research, undertaken by ACCS was a great support to providing this information at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association's Conference.

CCC has been an active part in many consultations with the state to support the continued reforms in Victoria. A key focus this year has been to inform the Education Minister of the importance of OSHC and to think about how OSHC can be included in the infrastructure of new schools and grants across the state.

### **Queensland Sub-Branch**

QLD have been working hard to create a State Sub-Branch of ACCS. With four meetings held this year in Brisbane it has been wonderful to have representation from centre based care, OSHC & FDC. In the latest push to expand interest, we have organised teleconference facilities to support services who cannot make it into Brisbane and to ensure our voices are a true illustration of our whole state.

### **SA Branch**

The AGM for ACCS SA was held on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Carrie Johnson will be continuing as the Convenor; Robyn Geisler will continue as secretary/treasurer. We have a total of 10 members on the Executive Committee who we believe will enable us to have a stronger voice.

A continuing item on our agenda is to seek opportunities to raise the profile of long day care in the broader field of Early Childhood Education and Care given that State advisory committees have not met for extended periods.

#### **Key moments:**

- June 2019: NQF Review - ACCS SA put in a submission
- August 2019: The Advertiser – article titled “Push for childcare zoning” by Tim Williams in response to an earlier article “Childcare Crisis” and “Centres warned on Fee Rises” in which the views expressed by Australian Childcare Alliance SA President that were not in line with ACCS SA views.
- August 2019: Presented at Community Children's Centres SA (CCCSA) to delineate the roles of ACCS and CCCSA in the arena of advocacy and to increase awareness of Directors of ECEC services to the importance of the role of ACCS to increase membership.

- ACCS SA has reviewed its documentation to the sector to attract more members with an improved level of information about our role in advocacy for the sector.
- September 2019: contact with Department Innovation and Skills, invitation to “Industry and Training Provider Forum”. This presented an opportunity for ACCS SA to be represented in the initial consultation process, with follow up sessions to be announced. Contact has also been made in regard to the Industry Skills Councils whose Early Childhood Education and Care representation is made by 2 delegates of Australian Childcare Alliance SA.
- September 2019: request to Minister for Education, John Gardner – seeking a meeting to discuss: Planning Controls for building new services and Qualifications for educators.
- October 2019: National Skills Commission Co-Design Workshop. This is part of the Federal Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business national consultations on the three key initiatives of the Australian Government's \$525 million Skills Package [Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow](#).

#### **Future actions:**

- Attend a face to face meeting with the Minister for Education to discuss our concerns, on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2019
- Participate actively in face to face meetings for ACCS National, both here in Adelaide and interstate.
- Identify our two to three main concerns that could be addressed on a state level, not just nationally.
- Investigate further opportunities to raise the profile of ECEC

### **WA Branch (Carewest)**

Declining Membership has continued to be a challenge leading to the ‘recycling’ of long-standing members to enable the association to remain operational. Furthermore, the percentage of active members is limited.

One key factor impacting on the low level of engagement is the fact that members are Service Directors and the increasing workload of managing one or more services results in minimal time available to commit to participating in activities outside of the day to day operations.

The feeling of overwhelm is compounded by the ever-increasing demands placed on services especially from the changing requirements impacting on service staff. Other issues impacting on this overwhelm, for example, is the difficulty of

staff recruitment & retention, poorly trained staff and the need to keep updated on new legislative requirements.

The members keen to maintain Carewest – ACCS WA as a peak organisation representative of the decreasing number of community services have continuously attempted to try a variety of strategies to engage with the sector and seek to identify the needs. We have asked the simple question, “when considering the future of a peak organisation what would this look like?”

More recently we have identified that there is a gap in relevant and reasonably priced professional development including keeping updated on current training needs. Hence throughout 2019 Carewest – ACCS WA has invited guest speakers from the Regulatory Unit to discuss their initiative to introduce ‘Next Assessment Support and Advice’ (NASA) visits, the new regulation about the requirements for children to be immunised to be enrolled and others to present on the AEDC program.

Carewest – ACCS WA has also used a Lotterywest grant to update its Constitution in line with the Model Rules and meet its regulatory requirement, which in turn centre members have been able to access and utilise to update their own Constitution.

In investigating ways to support services to access and invest in Professional Learning Opportunities since the subsidised PD & LDCPDP funds have ceased, Carewest – ACCS WA has offered a full day seminar with the well-known Caroline Fewster, in partnership with the Outside School Hours Care Association. This has proven successful so we intend to plan a larger conference style PD next year. If time permits, we may even be holding one in each half of the year. The PD has provided some supplementary funds which have been welcomed since paid membership has been decreasing.

We will continue to explore avenues to remain active as a branch by reflecting as follows:

- What do we provide to members for the fees charged?
- How do we work differently to have the presence when ‘not-for-profit’ services are not viewed as core business by all levels of government. (For example Universal Access opportunities are not available for LDC – only in schools)
- What partnerships can we form especially with the larger community players such as Good Start.

The AGM will be combined with the end of year event in December.

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## Contact ACCS

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