



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

ACCS IN ACTION!

August 2020

NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE

Speaking Out for Community Children's Services in the Pandemic

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

The COVID-19 pandemic has overshadowed the achievements of the last 12 months but it has also enabled us to learn lessons to inform our future work. ACCS remains the only organisation which represents non-profit ECEC exclusively – this is an important consideration in planning our future.

ACCS has established traction with the Opposition with a face-to-face meeting with the Shadow Minister and ongoing communication with her advisor who reaches out to us for advice. We also maintain a good connection with the Greens especially in regard to questions for Senate Estimates. The Minister and the department have been less forthcoming; however you can see a summary of recent responses to our advocacy in this newsletter.

ACCS continues to compete with organisations that have full time paid lobbyists; to support our voluntary effort we leverage relationships with other organisation who support our views. It was instructive to collaborate with GoodStart, Australian Childcare Alliance and Early Learning and Care Council of Australia in the occupancy survey which had a good outcome and established working relationships for the future.

ACCS advises the federal government in a range of ways. One example is our participation on the

Information Transition Support Group through which we influenced the transition to Child Care Subsidy. We also advise the Vocational Education and Training sector through Brian Newman's chairing of the Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee of the Australian Industry and Skills Committee and Kim's participation on the technical advisory group. An update on what is happening in the Vocational Education and Training sector is inside.

It is good to have new people on the ACCS National Council and a strong Executive which meets fortnightly to frame ACCS business and keep us focused on where we are going.

ACCS Advocacy for ECEC in the Pandemic

ACCS has regularly consulted its members to gather information about how the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions and lockdowns are affecting children, families and the early childhood services they rely on. Thank you to all members who provided case studies and general feedback.

In May ACCS submitted to the Select Committee on the Australian Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We alerted the Committee to the strengths of the community children's services sector to remain resilient in this crisis, citing the social capital intrinsic to community owned and operated services through the mutually respectful partnerships between the moral owners of the service – children, families and the broader community – and those who deliver the service. We also acknowledged the value of the Government's Business Continuity Payment and free child care for families and noted that in some cases Job Keeper payment has been useful. However we spelt out the enormous variations in the experience of the ECEC sector varies across jurisdictions and the stress on coordinators attempting to manage the financial viability often in the absence of significant reserves.

We recommended that Government recognise that ECEC services cannot 'snap back' to business as usual and provide additional supports including a staggered transition back to CCS and parent fees.

In June we drew on vital information from members to write to the Minister and the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to alert them to the impact of the Transition Support Package for early childhood education and care services in the pandemic. The letter addressed issues in affordability for families, inconsistencies in the Package and differential impact on diverse service types, emphasising that one size does not fit all ECEC services.

We concluded with clear recommendations for more flexibility once families made their intentions known after free childcare ended, continuation of JobKeeper support for management and removal of the activity test until the end of 2020.

The Minister replied by emphasising additional supports that were available as the CCS and ACCS were reintroduced, including a relaxed activity test and a new Transition Support Payment for providers. The Deputy Secretary also referred to a specific fact sheet for vacation care to address its special needs.

In July ACCS again wrote to the Minister and the Department with an update on how the Transition Package was affecting availability and affordability of services. We provided information about the widely varying impacts from state to state including the heightened needs of ECEC services in lockdown in Victoria.

We recommended that government provide targeted support to services in lockdown areas, increase allowable absences for the whole of the 202/21 year, re-establish the Community Child Care Fund to cover the costs of forced closures and allow services the autonomy to approve ACCS financial hardship where families lose their job due to the virus.

While a raft of supports for services in the lockdown areas have been announced we await a specific response to our letter.

In the meantime we have also briefed the Opposition and the Greens. The Shadow Minister released a statement this month expressing concern that the Government did not have a plan in place for ECEC in the event of another lockdown and criticising the complexity of the rushed measures, noting the burden that this places on services.

ACCS will continue its important role of collecting information from our members and bringing it to the attention of policy makers.

Advocacy Through Partnerships

ACCS continues to strengthen its influence on policy makers through partnering with like-minded organisations in campaigns on issues that accord with our values. Recent examples include formally registering as a Supporter of the [Early Learning Matters Week](#) and signing up to the national [Raise the Rate](#) campaign spearheaded by ACOSS to increase the base rate of income support for people who are unemployed.

Capturing the Voice of the Community Children's Services Sector - TICCSS Is Coming

The report of the most recent survey of Trends in the Community Children's Services Sector is nearly ready for release. It will include a new look pictorial summary of the key findings on how the sector is progressing in implementing the final stages of the National Quality Standards (NQS).

The next survey will be conducted in October. This survey will focus on both the NQS and how ECEC makes a major contribution to child and family wellbeing by providing a safe space during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. TICCSS will also collect important information about the workforce issues in the pandemic.

ACCS firmly believes that the community sector has unique qualities that enable it to step up to lifting standards while finding the resilience to continue to deliver the best quality early childhood education and care throughout the pandemic.

TICCSS reports give us the data to support our advocacy with policy makers.

So watch out for email invitations to provide information on your service and its recent experiences.

ACCS GUIDES VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Children's Education and Care Training Package Nears Completion

Brian Newman (ACCS Vic), Chair, Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee

Draft 3 of the new Training Package for Early Childhood, Out of School Hours Care, and Education Support has been released for a final phase of public consultation.

It has been a long journey, but there is some confidence that the new package addresses not only the concerns ASQA raised about unduly short, inconsistent and low quality outcomes from VET courses but also delivers a package in keeping with contemporary thinking and practice.

The process has been hindered by the impact of COVID-19 but the Industry Reference Committee, working with our funded Skills Service Organisation SkillsIQ maintained its commitment to doing it well rather than rushing for unrealistic deadlines.

There are a number of significant changes in the revised package, including moving to a specific competency around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understanding and cultural safety and extensive rewriting of the Health, Hygiene, Safety and Wellbeing content. In response to strong demand for the sector it also includes stronger placement requirements.

However, there are concerns that in response to the current pandemic, placement hours are being reduced for degree Early Childhood Teaching courses, and that this may lead to pressure from some for similar reductions in placement requirements for VET qualifications in Early Childhood and OSHC.

One contentious issue that has been endorsed by a significant majority of the Industry Reference Committee is making the completion of the Certificate III in Early Childhood an entry requirement for enrolling in the Diploma course.

Once the third consultation is complete the package will be sent to all state and territory training authorities for review prior to being submitted to the Australian Industry and Skills Committee for final approval. This should happen before the end of 2020.

Your ACCS representatives have played a significant role in this large project at both a strategic and content level.

For further information, please go to www.skillsiq.com.au

WA Reportable Conduct Scheme

The Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse recommended that each state and territory work to establish a reportable conduct scheme. The scheme will make an important contribution to protecting children from sexual and other abuse and will enhance safe environments for vulnerable children. In Western Australia the Ombudsman's office has responsibility to plan and develop the scheme. Currently the Ombudsman is liaising with many organisations in the Sector to develop the Scheme which will oblige heads of institutions to report certain allegations, conduct or convictions involving their employees and volunteers and allow an external body to investigate allegations and scrutinise institutional systems for the greater protection of children and more transparency of institutions.

ACCS was approached for a representative to participate in these consultations and Sally Griffith of WA branch has accepted the role.

ACCS BRANCH UPDATES

ACCS SA Branch Report

Carrie Johnson, Convenor, ACCS South Australia

The Executive Committee remained stable this year with no new members being elected. The existing members are passionate and dedicated to the sector and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the discussions.

Many of the advisory and reference groups at the State level have not met for extended periods of time or they have ceased to exist, which lessens the opportunities for the sector to have a strong voice. This remains an item on our agenda to seek opportunities to raise the profile of long day care in the broader field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

The key moments so far this year have included:

- March & April 2020: supported the wider not for profit sector through reaching out to Directors during the pandemic to seek their views on current issues and provided the collated information to ACCS National
- June 2020: advocated for the NfP sector to the Department for Education (SA) regarding changes to the NQS legislation that do not support quality Early Childhood Education and Care

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge each member's knowledge, experience and unique skillsets that are brought and shared openly at the table for the betterment of the Early Childhood Education and Care sector in South Australia.

Carewest - ACCS WA Report

Sally Griffith, Carewest member (ACCS WA branch);
ACCS National Treasurer with Josique Lynch

Like all states Covid-19 has had a serious impact on service operations in WA for 2020. A number of services were ineligible for the Job Keeper package which compromised service delivery greatly for some. Many services were forced to resort to capping numbers and refusing care to families in order to maintain sustainability. Carewest surveyed the NFP community and lobbied both state and federal governments for more support which was not forthcoming. The state response to the ECEC relief package was heavily influenced by the fact that Universal Access to Early Childhood Education is rolled out in the Education system. For this reason the State Government did not feel compelled to support the sector like in other states and territories.

The introduction of the Transition Support Package is welcome news for some as the package at this stage seems to include all services and so creates a more level playing field. There are concerns however with the 'one size fits all' approach. Many states are in very different positions with regards to

COVID-19 which means that the Transition Package could have a negative impact should families again start to pull their children out of care. The process for application for Job Keeper and other supplementary payments also has been rather arduous. For the government to continue to change the goal posts is causing much fatigue in an already tired sector.

It was discussed at the last face to face meeting of ACCS and further highlighted by COVID-19 that there is often a lack of business financial literacy in the operations of NFP ECEC services. This can impact on the long term viability of the NFP sector. We are considering how this can be addressed.

It was disappointing that the ECEC sector did not receive the recognition and support it deserved despite being identified by the Australian Government as an essential service. Carewest believes there is a window of opportunity to build on the concept of 'essential service' and so has made a commitment to more actively lobby Governments to maintain momentum and traction.

Carewest membership has been declining and we are exploring options to encourage membership such as providing professional learning. Late last year we invited Caroline Fewster to deliver a customised professional development workshop for members. The PD was well received and made a small profit for Carewest. Post COVID-19 we will certainly explore doing more of this.

In a post COVID-19 environment Carewest will be focused more on re-building relationships across NFP services. We are hoping that stronger connections will provide for greater membership and sustainability in the coming year.

Victorian Branch

Daniela Kavoukas

The last few months in Victoria have been particularly testing on the sector once again. With the second wave of COVID shutting Victoria down even harder we have seen numbers reduce drastically in OSHC to 5% in some cases due to schools teaching remotely.

With the stage four restrictions in Melbourne many of our community services are reporting a drop in attendance of about 40-50%. This is quite varying based on location with much higher attendance at some services. Unfortunately this means that there are still high numbers of adults in services which makes remote learning challenging. Services with

low attendance have opted to create A and B teams in the hope of reducing transmission and also to support remote learning and preparation for a potential COVID shut down.

The administrative tasks of waiving fees weekly and gathering permits and hours of attendance for children is another burden on our already exhausted directors.

With restrictions reaching all of Victoria in recent weeks more services have had to reflect deeply on what this means for them including mask wearing, COVID closures and the ever growing risks to the financial viability of services with the unknown future.

Currently services are working through whether the DESE transition payment increase to 30% for LDC and 40% for OSHC will be enough to get them through the next few weeks. The top up payment for services with a low CCS seems as though it won't benefit many centres as many have not had a low enough drop in attendance due to the two permit system for families.

We welcomed the state governments recent funding to support the cost of a COVID clean for funded kindergartens and additional school readiness funding. Sessional kindergarten was also made free again this term to support families staying enrolled.

Earlier this month the Victorian ACCS branch spoke to KPMG about the health of OSHC bringing perspectives from our colleagues in Queensland also. This was a great opportunity to talk about the benefits of not-for-profit OSHC and what it offers children, families and schools.

Queensland Sub-Branch of Community Child Care/ACCS Victoria

With the COVID restrictions in place, the Victorian Branch has not been able to visit Queensland for the usual ACCS catch ups this year. Queensland services are reporting that attendance numbers on average have increased back to almost 'normal', however OSHC in some suburbs is still struggling with due to families continuing to work from home and not requiring before school care.

OSHC services in Queensland have had to reduce budgets and juggle funds to remain viable into this next period.



ACCS NATIONAL MEETINGS

NATIONAL COUNCIL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The annual general meeting of the ACCS National Council was held in June and was attended remotely by all active state branches.

The meeting made significant decisions to sustain the viability of ACCS as the national voice of the community children's services sector during the pandemic and agreed to a new focus for the next survey of Trends In Community Children's Services (TICCSS).

The National Executive was reappointed:

- Convenor – Prue Warrilow (NSW)
- Deputy Convenor – Linda Davison (Vic)
- Secretary – Kim Bertino (NSW)
- Treasurer - Sally Griffiths (WA)

Carrie Johnson (SA) has been co-opted to the Executive as an observer.

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2020 | EARLY
LEARNING
MATTERS
WEEK

