



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

## ACCS IN ACTION! March 2021

### Children's Services are a Key Part of the Village

#### NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

Your national peak body has continued to represent the community non-profit sector in Australian Government policy for early childhood education and care. Since our last newsletter 6 months ago ACCS has consulted with members through email surveys, collecting statistics and case studies especially on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting children, families and the services they rely on.

Inside this edition of our national newsletter are details of our advocacy to the federal Minister for Education and senior department personnel, to Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority and to the vocational education and training system.

I am particularly proud that despite the stresses of the pandemic, the ACCS National Executive has been able to continue our unique longitudinal study of how the community sector is implementing the National Quality Agenda from 2012 to the present. The report of the 5<sup>th</sup> wave of the Trends In Community Children's Services Survey research was published in December and distributed to the Minister and departmental officers, the ALP and Greens, state Ministers and regulatory authorities

and sister peak bodies with an interest in our research. It has been very well received.

Wave 6 of the survey was launched at the same time and we are pleased that with some tweaking of deadlines we have gained responses from a good number of services around the nation, despite the pandemic and summer close downs. The findings are now being analysed and we plan to publish the report in time to inform our advocacy for good policy in the lead up to the next federal election which is due late this year or early next year.

The National Executive has started to prepare a policy platform for the federal election and plans to circulate a draft for input from branches before we meet for the Annual General Meeting.

It takes a village to raise a child, and this has never been more true for me as I looked at how the children's services sector responded to the global pandemic. As an essential service all of you were at the front line supporting children and families grapple with major health concerns, anxiety, stress, job losses, financial pressure, increased incidences of family and domestic violence, and substance abuse (just to name a few); all while

having to support your colleagues, and look after your own families and friends, many of whom were dealing with exactly the same issues. Children's services connected with children and families in innovative ways during and post locks downs and for many children and families this ongoing connection provided stability, a sense of well-being, and safety when many other elements of life were out of their control.

We can all be very proud of how we responded, supporting children and families, and our colleagues. I challenge you to take time to think about what you have learned over the past year professionally and personally. To think about what practices you will continue and what you may change as we work our way to understanding our new normal, as we are never going back to where we were in February 2020.

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## **ACCS – THE VOICE OF COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN KEY POLICY ISSUES**

The ACCS National Executive has commenced planning for our contribution to policy proposals for the next federal election due later this year or in 2022.

In the meantime the pandemic has not impeded ACCS' strong advocacy for high quality early childhood education and care. We continue to identify emerging issues in the early childhood sector, support state branches in their advocacy and provide a national voice to the Australian Government and to state governments on request from the ACCS branch.

### **Untrained Probationers Included in Ratios**

ACCS SA branch alerted the National Executive to a concern about the sub-regulation enabling the inclusion of untrained probationary educators in the minimum ratio of staff to children mandated in the National Quality Framework.

The National Executive checked with members in other jurisdictions and found that there was little awareness of this sub-regulation.

We wrote to ACECQA expressing concern at the potential for this sub-regulation to be exploited by unscrupulous operators of early childhood education and care services to minimise their staffing costs by churning through new entirely untrained staff at the end of every probationary

period. We asked that ACECQA develop a system to track and report on the use of this sub-regulation broken down by jurisdiction.

ACECQA replied explaining that the intention of the sub-regulation is to allow a short period of time for potential educators to gain first hand experience of early childhood education and care before deciding whether to pursue an approved qualification and to offer a pathway for a more diverse range of potential educators, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, individuals in regional and remote areas and individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They acknowledged the potential for this sub-regulation to be exploited by unscrupulous operators.

ACECQA is hopeful that relevant questions will be included in this year's Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census. This will enable Regulatory Authorities to identify employers who engage in a pattern of misuse. ACECQA is also aware that if a national registration system for all educators is developed this could also monitor the employment of untrained educators.

### **WA Reportable Conduct Scheme**

The WA Ombudsman invited ACCS nationally to provide comment on the development of a scheme to support mandatory reporting of child abuse in that state. The National Executive nominated the National Treasurer Sally Griffith and delegate of the WA branch to act as our representative to the consultation. Sally consulted with the WA branch as well as with delegates from other states that had already participated in consultations for reportable conduct schemes.

The WA branch shared with the National Executive the key points that it planned to provide to the WA Ombudsman on the draft Bill to establish the reportable conduct scheme. The National Executive wrote to the WA Ombudsman supporting the opinions of the WA branch including:

- Supporting mandatory reporting and calling for appropriate training in-service and in diploma courses
- Limiting the obligation to report to educators with a diploma or degree qualification, nominated supervisor and approved providers
- Noting that clarification will be needed on how this will operate in Family Day Care

- Calling for clarity of communication to educators from diverse backgrounds and where English is a second language.

### **Thrive by Five Campaign**

ACCS is watching how this campaign is progressing and in particular its call for free child care. While ACCS does not directly support a policy of free child care we are aware that this may gain traction in the next federal election campaign. The National Executive is concerned that the choice of which Australian Government department administers free child care would have a significant impact on how the policy affects children and their families.

ACCS will prepare a policy proposal on this question for the next federal election campaign in consultation with branches.

### **ACECQA National Workforce Strategy**

ACCS is actively participating in the ACECQA stakeholder consultative group for the development of a national early childhood workforce strategy. Members are consulted on upcoming agenda items via branch delegates.

### **Streamlining of Approvals Regulatory Impact Statement**

ACCS responded to the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement: Streamlining Early Childhood Education and Care Approval Processes Across Jurisdictions. We noted that this RIS provides a comprehensive description of some of the issues inherent in the current approval processes. In particular it highlights the negative consequences resulting from the two separate, sequential processes as currently required for registration under Family Assistance Law and National Law. ACCS supported the option for fully joined up approval processes.

### **Evidence Institute**

ACCS National Executive met with senior people from the newly formed Evidence Institute within the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. We followed up by sending to the Institute the report on wave 5 of the TICCSS research. This received a warm response that

described the report as very impressive and informing us that it will be read by personnel across the Early Childhood and Child Care Group. They also forwarded the report to the Australian Institute of Family Studies to inform its evaluation of the child care package.

### **Participation of Children Facing Vulnerability**

ACCS recently wrote to the incoming Minister with responsibility for early childhood education policy welcoming his focus on increasing participation of children facing vulnerability. We drew his attention to our views on this contained in the ACCS policy platform for the last federal election and the TICCSS research on changing vulnerabilities among families in community children's services.

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### **ACCS RESEARCH – Trends In Community Children's Services**

The final wave of the Trends in Community Children's Services Survey has now been closed.

We are grateful to the over 600 services who took the time to complete the survey in such a busy time with the aftermath of COVID. Respondents were from all states and territories in Australia and across all service types except for the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services.

The TICCSS data is crucial to the ability of ACCS to provide governments with research evidence of the wonderful practices that are taking place across Australia.

Currently a working group is being put together to guide the drafting of the report. If you would like to be involved in this process please contact Daniela at [dkavoukas@cccinc.org.au](mailto:dkavoukas@cccinc.org.au).

The fifth wave of TICCSS was released at the end of 2020 and distributed to Members of Parliament and regulatory authorities across Australia as well as like minded national peak bodies. You can find it [here](#) along with reports of all the previous surveys right from the start of the National Quality Agenda.

Congratulations to the winner of the \$500 WINC voucher - Gowanbrae Children's Centre in Victoria.

## **ACCS GUIDES VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

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

The revised Children's Education and Care (CEC) Training Package was considered by the Australian Industry Skills Committee (AISC) at its February meeting. A part of its submission included feedback from State Training Authorities and a number of concerns were raised by states. This led to endorsement of two courses being deferred for further consideration.

The qualifications approved were the Certificate III and Early Childhood Education and Care, the Diploma of School Age Education and Care, and the Certificate III and IV in School Based Education Support.

The AISC questioned the value of retaining the Certificate IV in School Age Education and Care, given its low enrolments and that it is not a prescribed qualification in any jurisdiction. A Certificate III in School Age Education and Care is presently being drafted and is widely supported as a more appropriate qualification. This should be resolved at the next meeting of the CEC Industry Reference Committee (IRC) later this month.

Whilst no concerns were raised about the content of the revised courses, some states raised issues around implementation of prerequisites. The potential impact on workforce supply of entry requirements for the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care has also been raised. One of the main issues was around primary teachers wishing to undertake the Diploma. In IRC discussions there was strong agreement that primary teaching qualifications are very different from Early Childhood. Firstly, working with infants and toddlers is quite specialised and distinct from classroom teaching but also early childhood pedagogy is very different from school curriculum and methodologies. Given that most of the content specifically in relation to infants and toddlers is in the Certificate III, direct entry to the Diploma for primary school teachers is problematic.

Options to resolve these issues are currently being developed and considered and the IRC is meeting directly with AISC members to try to reach an outcome that creates suitable pathways without compromising the integrity of Early Childhood VET qualifications. It is hoped that resolution of these issues can be reached before the next AISC meeting in April, enabling the revised Training Package to be published before midyear.

Most importantly however, the content of the courses is comprehensive and contemporary and the assessment requirements have been tightened. This should lead to better education and training for our future workforce.

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## **ACCS BRANCHES IN ACTION**

### **ACCS South Australia**

Carrie Johnson, SA delegate and observer on National Executive

The focus has been on supporting services and Directors with questions to navigate the information from various departments throughout the pandemic. This included doing semi-regular check-ins to ask questions to support ACCS National's work with advising the Federal Government. The experiences across the sector were varied and were reflective of the experiences across the country that were shared by other state branch representatives.

Whilst South Australia has not experienced the levels of restriction that other states have, the short lockdown the state experienced late last year was challenging for the sector as the question around fees and fairness for families was raised given it was a state government decision to enforce significant restrictions and the CCS is Federal funding. There were services who chose to not charge families fees, there were others that chose to – this was a source of debate within the community.

The branch actively encouraged the sector to participate in the TICCS survey this year. In the past South Australia's response rates have not been sufficient to provide analysis for the state. This is something which we felt strongly about as each state experiences different issues particularly with the varying responses to the pandemic from governments.

So far in 2021 the branch has been invited to participate in engagement with key departments that have not consulted with us for some time. This is exciting as it is one of our goals to highlight the work of ACCS, both state and national in more arenas that has been possible in recent times.

### **ACCS Victoria**

Daniela Kavoukas, Community Child Care & observer on ACCS National Executive

It is pleasing to see that Victoria has bounced back in many of the education and care services with the help of the Department of Skills and Employment Recovery Package extension until the end of

January 2021. With recent lockdowns allowing the early years services to continue to operate, services are reporting a sense of normality across the state. Out of School Hours Care Services are still finding the mornings quite slow and afternoons at a reduced capacity however they are doing okay.

In Victoria services in the final cohort are ramping up to offer funded 3 year old kindergarten which is now available to every child in Victoria. There have been significant improvements in Aboriginal participation rates in kindergarten and these have been achieved as a result of sustained collaborative work between multiple partners and stakeholders. It is crucial that we sustain these gains by continuing to reach out to those that might still be missing out. Recently Victoria has released a state wide advertising campaign for the 'kinder tick' initiative to boost awareness of funded kindergarten programs and the variety of service types where families can access these programs.

In recent months our state representative met with Federal Minister Tudge to thank the Australian Government for their support throughout COVID, talk about what the sector needs to create a sustainable future in education and care and to outline the issues relating to attracting people to our workforce, career development and retention.

## **ACCS Western Australia**

Sally Griffith, Carewest delegate and ACCS National Treasurer

It has been a busy start to the year and there are many changes ahead for WA. On 16<sup>th</sup> February Carewest held its first meeting of the year and it was well attended. Bec Nguyen creator of the [bright tomorrows](#) app through the Telethon Kids Institute attended the meeting to share how this app can be best utilised to support families with parenting. Many services have now made a commitment to support the promotion of using the app through their services.

## Mandatory Reporting

Carewest was also involved in the consultation with the Department of Communities regarding the implementation of mandatory reporting for Educators. Carewest in principle support the move for Mandatory Reporting however highlights some areas for consideration including:

- Mandatory reporting should come into place once an Educator has completed their training.

- This should be included in the training package in order to ensure every educator understands their responsibility in this space.
- Mandatory reporters should be 18 years or over.
- How this scheme will operate in family day care needs further clarification.
- How educators for whom English is a second language will be supported.

## Reportable Conduct Scheme

In addition national ACCS were called upon to discuss the Reportable Conduct Scheme with the Ombudsman who is responsible for consultation and overseeing implementation. The scheme would oblige heads of government, non-government and religious institutions to notify any reportable allegation, conduct or conviction involving harm to a child by its employees.

It was reassuring to hear that the implementation will seek to align with already established schemes such as the Working With Children Check and aims to mobilise schemes to work more closely and effectively. An independent oversight body aims to closely monitor organisations with child related work to avoid the problems of the past, prevent abuse occurring in the future and respond swiftly to allegations when they occur.

## Making Paid Work Work for Families

In Western Australia how universal access to early education for children in the year before school (UA) is rolled out to families has always caused much controversy in the sector. Currently only the services operated by the Education Department receive UA funds which provides difficulties for working families in particular when children transition from the early childhood education and care sector to school.

In order to access UA families often find themselves making difficult decisions around how they will balance this with work obligations which results in many children moving through multiple organisations in a week to make this manageable - for example Education Dept Kindy combined with OSHC as well as attending LDC on non Kindy days. This model does not support the workforce participation of women in particular which holds back careers and increases the gender gap. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia consulted with the sector on this very important issue. You can read more about the report here: [landmark report on the disincentives for women re-entering the workforce after having children.](#)



# ACCS NATIONAL MEETING

## FIRSTS FOR ACCS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The ACCS national AGM will be held in May. The National Executive will survey branch delegates shortly to find a suitable date. For the first time the national meeting will be held via Zoom so participants can see as well as hear the meeting.

At the request of the Victorian branch, the ACCS National Executive has decided to open the 2021 AGM to current financial members of branches and sub-branches – another first.

In the past the AGM has been limited to the branch delegates to the ACCS National Council - two delegates from each branch and one delegate from each sub-branch. This year while voting will be limited to these delegates all general members of branches and sub-branches are welcome to participate as observers. Any general member who wishes to speak at the AGM may register their interest via their branch delegates who will alert the National Executive so arrangements can be made.

This is an exciting innovation for ACCS and will enable state and territory members to see the National Council and its Executive in action.

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## Contact ACCS

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