



Victorian Gender Equality Strategy Consultation 19 February 2016

Community Child Care Association (CCC) is the peak body for community owned and not for profit early and middle childhood education and care services in Victoria. CCC is the Victorian peak body for Outside School Hours Care Services and the Victorian branch of National Out of School Hours Association (NOSHSA). CCC is also the Victorian Branch of the national peak body for community managed and not for profit children's services, Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS).

Community Child Care Association (CCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy consultation process. As the peak body for community owned and not for profit early and middle education and care services in Victoria, we are concerned about the impact of gender inequalities in our communities. While CCC believes it is essential that action is taken on many levels to address this, our submission will focus on issues pertinent to the delivery of and access to quality education and care:

- Balancing work and caring responsibilities - access to high quality childcare
- Addressing inequities in the education and care workforce pay and conditions.
- Educating children about gender equality

Balancing work and caring responsibilities - access to quality childcare

Community Child Care is concerned that in discussions about women's workforce participation and improved productivity particularly in the national conversations connected with the Family Assistance Amendment (Jobs for families Child Care Package), Bill 2015, that the rights and bests interests of children are not privileged as a first principle. Ignoring this principle means that measures currently being promoted to increase women's workforce participation and improve productivity will not be effective.

International research evidence indicates, that women return to work in greater numbers when they are confident the services provided for their children are not just affordable and available but most importantly, that they are of high quality and reflect children's best interests in the way they are funded, managed and delivered (Brennan & Adamson, 2014). The policy and funding for low cost, quality childcare in the province of Quebec, Canada provides compelling evidence that, affordable, *quality* childcare promotes increased workforce participation by women. The evidence shows that Quebec's GDP has increased by 1.7% and the number of single parent families (mostly female headed) living in poverty has also reduced (Brennan & Adamson, 2014) as a result of a dual focus on **quality** and **affordability**.

The economic modelling undertaken by Price Waterhouse Cooper in 2014, provides robust and 'local' evidence that expenditure on *quality* education and care is a sound economic investment in the long to medium term for improving children's outcomes, increasing women's workforce participation and GDP growth (PWC, 2014, p.4). An OECD report (nd) identified several benefits for women and children especially from investing in high quality education and care:

- Working mothers improve family income overall and can lift a family out of poverty.
- Women can continue their careers and raise children with greater financial independence.
- The capacity to work while raising children because of access to affordable, quality childcare means that there will be fewer older women with inadequate superannuation pensions.

The increased expenditure on quality education and care recommended by an overwhelming body of research, economic modeling and analysis, will be offset by an increase in the tax base through an increase in women working and higher female earnings over their lifetimes, as well as a reducing demand on public income (pensions) support by families. In addition to these economic benefits, there are significant social and educational benefits for children being raised in more secure economic contexts with the additional support to families that is possible with their access to quality education and care services (OECD).

While many families in Victoria do have access to high quality education and care many do not. Access is not equitable. There is an urgent need for a coordinated review of the supply, demand and gaps in the availability of quality education and care services in Victoria.

CCC recognises that funding for childcare is an Australian government matter, but we urge the State government to continue lobbying for and supporting *quality and availability* in education and care as a matter of equity for families and children and as central to improving women's workforce participation and increasing productivity.

Recommendations

It is essential that the discourse on women's workforce participation and improved productivity has a focus on both the quality and affordability of education and care services for their children as a matter of equity and economic good sense. We urge the Victorian State Government to contribute to this discourse on a state and national level and recommend implementation of the following strategies by the State Government to ensure all women have access to high quality education and care services including

- **State wide assessment of supply and demand for early and middle childhood education and care services including the availability of community owned options in each area**

- **Investment in community owned education and care facilities to fill identified gaps**
- **Maintenance of pay roll tax exemptions for not for profit education and care services**
- **Universal provision of school owned and operated OSHC services on every school site where the profits made are directed back into that local community**
 - **Requirement for all Victorian State Primary schools to provide Outside School Hours Care services, where demand is sufficient with direct delivery of OSHC services by Victorian state primary schools or engagement in a partnership delivery model with local government or other not for profit provider's**
 - **Additional investment in schools to support the provision of outside school hours care services including capital investment in facilities and grants for equipment and infrastructure**
- **Advocacy to prevent and action to address any diminished subsidised access to education and care in 2017 that flows from changes to federal government policy.**

Addressing inequities in the education and care workforce pay and conditions

The early and middle education and care sector, which includes, long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschool services, has a predominantly female and increasingly highly culturally diverse workforce. Many educators are paid at award rates below that of less skilled and qualified workers, while others with degree level qualifications are paid considerably less than their teaching peers working in the school sector. In addition to these wage disparities and inequities, experience suggests that a highly feminised workforce often faces a lack of opportunity for career progression and due financial recognition for gaining additional qualifications.

CCC believes that these workforce inequities need urgent attention from both federal and state governments. When the quality of provision and improvement of outcomes for children and families depends on this workforce, it is unfair and unwise to ignore educators' awards and conditions. Failure to address this equity issue means that the sector will continue to suffer the loss of qualified, skilled and experienced educators as they leave to find higher wages and better conditions in other workplaces.

CCC argues that given the disparities and unfair wages and conditions in the education and care sector, we are exploiting one group of women so that another group of women can work. We understand that improving wages and award conditions for educators cannot be achieved by increasing fees for service which would place an unfair burden on families and especially low to middle income families. As in the community-based sector, government will need to provide funds to address this inequity.

Recommendations

We urge the Victorian State Government, through direct representation to the Australian Government and through the COAG process, to advocate and garner support for a national

commitment to address the pay inequities for the education and care sector. We also recommend implementation of the following strategies by the State Government, which will help improve conditions of employment and support women’s career progression and opportunities in this underpaid sector:

- **Increased affordable access to Certificate III and Diploma level qualifications through TAFE. CCC still hears of educators opting for cheaper qualifications through private RTOs, even though they know that the quality of the training is likely to be poor. For women on low pay rates choosing quality training is not always an option at the moment and it should be**
- **Ongoing scholarships and employment incentives for educators to improve qualifications**
- **Employment incentives in hard to staff areas**
- **Ongoing provision of professional development for teachers and educators in all education and care services.**
- **Provision of an early childhood teacher subsidy for all teachers employed in early childhood settings (not just kindergarten) including teachers working with 0 – 3 year age groups.**

Educating children about gender equality

CCC believes that like many social issues, perhaps the most important strategy in ensuring that we meet our objectives in relation to gender equity, is how we educate our children. The role of teachers, including parents as children’s most important and enduring educators, and educators working in education and care settings, in teaching children about respect for every person and gender equity needs to be better understood and supported.

Educators working with children from birth need to pay serious attention to how gender equity is embedded or underpins their curriculum or practice. CCC suggests that we need ‘local’ research in order to better understand how gender stereotypes may be inadvertently conveyed to children who are forming their values and understandings about gender and equity matters much earlier than we previously thought. Targeted professional learning for educators in how curriculum or practices either support or hinder children’s learning about gender and equity issues would be a helpful strategy. Working in partnership with families and other professionals in this important aspect of children’s education also requires providing educators with access to ongoing professional learning programs.

Recommendations

We urge the Victorian State Government to

- **Invest now in professional development about gender bias and gender equality strategies and curriculum for teachers and educators in all early and middle childhood education and care services including outside school hours care, family day care, kindergartens, occasional care and kindergartens**
- **Collaborate with other stakeholders including universities, the not for profit sector and corporations, to undertake research to inform improved understanding about**

the impact of gender bias and the best ways to educate children about gender equity.

Conclusion

CCC congratulates the Victorian State Government for recognizing the importance of achieving gender equity for a civil and inclusive society. We believe that this work begins very early in a child's life. This means families and educators working with young children need to be conscious of their roles and responsibilities in this aspect of children's education. In collaboration with our members, who understand their significant role in supporting or enabling women's workforce participation and the importance of their work in relation to gender equity education for children, CCC is ready to work with government on achieving the goal of gender equity.

References:

Brennan, D., & Adamson, E. (2014). *Financing the Future: An equitable and sustainable approach to early childhood education and care*, SPRC Report 01/14, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

OECD (no date). Education and Training Policy, *Investing in High Quality Early Education and Care*. www.oecd.org/education/schools/48980282/pdf

Price Waterhouse Cooper, (2014). *Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia*, PWC, Melbourne. www.pwc.com.au

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