

Honorable Julia Gillard,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care.

My name is Peta Paynter, I am the Director at Cowandilla Children's Centre. I have been a teacher for over 30 years and a leader in early childhood education and care for almost 20 years, developing a deep passion and intent to actively contribute to maximise the health, learning and development for children and families throughout this time. I was honoured to be able contribute to developing the Department for Education's Early Years Strategy in recent years.

I believe the role of Early Childhood Education and Care is to maximise the health, learning and development of all children and families from the earliest stages of life. This means families should have access to high quality health care during pregnancy and supportive guidance of effective child rearing practices. In the first 1000 days, it is critical for children to develop secure attachments with their primary caregiver/s. Children, in the first 1000 days, are naturally growing at a rapid pace in all aspects of their development and are significantly impacted by a broad range of factors. (*Centre for Community Child Health, The First 100 Days: An Evidence Paper, 2017*). If we are intending to provide universal access for 3-year-old children to preschool, it is critical that programs are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of this cohort of children. I believe, strengthened interconnection between health, education, care, social and community services is imperative to the success of such an initiative.

Whilst I understand the societal challenges of increasing workforce participation, I also recognise the importance, and parents right, to remain the primary caregivers of their children. I believe significant care must be taken, to ensure we do not burden families with additional pressures of maintaining a balance between work and child rearing. Wrap around support must be provided to families and service providers to ensure children continue to develop strong attachments to their primary caregivers, and families are enabled to access seamless support to respond to their child's developmental needs to achieve the best possible outcomes in learning, health, development and wellbeing.

Cowandilla Children's Centre is located centrally to the West Torrens City Council area. It is an integral part of Cowandilla Primary School and the collaboration among staff teams working across the multiple sites, enables the continuity of learning for children from Birth to Year 6. We also offer an Out of School Hours Care Service, which is accessed by both children enrolled in the school and preschool.

The local community is significantly diverse culturally, socially and linguistically. Our programs and services are effectively designed to respond to the needs of these children and families, offering culturally responsive universal and targeted programs, hub and spoke services, interpreting and translating services, intensive English classes, social, community and bilingual support.

The Children's Centre houses a large Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) Team who undertake health checks for children from Birth to age 4, provide parenting programs and support for parents to give their child the best start in life. In fact, we begin to establish a connection with

families through ante-natal appointments offered as an outreach service from the Women's and Children's Hospital. The midwife is able to provide expertise to support healthy pregnancies and connect to services for support, including counselling with the Social Worker from the Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) if needed.

Children and families are seamlessly referred to the Speech Pathologist, Occupational Therapist and/or Community Development Coordinator when seeking assistance for identified areas of concern. The Speech Pathologist and Occupational Therapist (both working 0.3) also facilitate a range of targeted playgroups which focus on supporting children's early language, physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Department for Human Services staff, including the Community Development Coordinator and Family Practitioner are integral members of the team and coordinate services and programs to support particularly vulnerable children and families. Our preschool has historically enabled a number of children to access 3-year-old preschool through the Department for Education early entry to preschool policy.

It is through the integrated services model that promotes the collaboration of multi-disciplinary teams, that I believe, provides adequate and effective education and care of children and families during the first 1000 days of a child's life. I also believe this model would best support any move towards universal access for 3-year-olds to a preschool program due to the developmental, health and learning phases of children this age.

Significant investment into the policies, resources and programs that can be offered by an integrated services model, such as the Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development, will maximise the capacity for South Australia to provide adequate education and care to children and families in the first 1000 days. Health care providers, including allied health practitioners and in particular Speech Pathologists and Occupational Therapists are vital to such a vital wrap around service at this stage of life for children and families.

As a committed and dedicated leader who has worked across multiple sectors in education, I feel strongly that any decision about the structures, process and cultures that are created in the quest to improve outcomes for children and families in the first 1000 days, to provide access to 3 year old children to preschool and out of hours care must be made carefully and in consideration of existing models that work well and with a holistic view of the child at this stage of life.

Kind Regards,

Peta Paynter

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