



COMMUNITY CHILD CARE CO-OPERATIVE LTD. (NSW)

ABN 81 174 903 921

IEAP Consultation
Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and
Youth Affairs,
PO Box 202,
Carlton South Victoria 3053.

26/2/10

Please find below Community Child Care's response to the Indigenous Education Action PLAN 2010 - 2014.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important plan.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol Lymbery". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent loop at the end of the name.

Carol Lymbery
CEO
Community Child Care Co-op

Community Child Care Co-op (NSW) is a 30 year old not-for-profit organisation that promotes, supports and advocates for quality children's services, meeting the needs of children, their families and the community. We are a peak organisation in NSW representing over 1300 children's services, families and individuals. We are also the lead agency for the consortium that is the Professional Support Co-ordinator in NSW, Children's Services Central.

We endeavour to:

- provide leadership which empowers the decision makers within children's services.
- identify service provision gaps and needs, and proactively target resources to these areas.
- support and collaborate with other children's services providers who reflect similar philosophical beliefs.
- embrace the value of difference and debate.
- be efficient and sustainable in the use of resources.
- be a role model best practice in corporate governance and organisational operation.
- be a respected corporate citizen and a positive force in the community.

Although Community Child Care Co-op represents services in all areas of the children's services sector, our members are predominantly community based long day care services and community based preschools.

1. Community Child Care Co-op is pleased at the recognition in the Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft of the importance of high quality early childhood development and education programs to assist Indigenous children to get the best start in life.
2. Despite this recognition, the action components of the plan in the early childhood area are particularly weak when compared to the action plans for school aged children.
3. Community Child Care believes that this weakness is caused because of a lack of understanding of how most early education and care is delivered across Australia, especially in NSW. The majority of early education and care provision to indigenous children in many states, especially NSW, is undertaken by long day care centres and community based preschools or kindergartens, which fall under the bureaucracy of community service or welfare departments rather than education departments. In NSW early education and care service provision is undertaken by over 1700 long day care centres (operated by community based and private for profit operators), 800 community based preschools and 100 Department of Education preschools. All of these services are licenced by the state Government Department of Community Services. All though some of these services have strong connections with local primary schools on a local level, any Indigenous Education Action Plan that ignores the reality of who provides early education and care will be lacking. Especially important is the role of community based service providers in the provision of early education and care. The reality is that although government action (in the form of measures such as priority of access requirements and additional funding for Indigenous children) impact service provision to and for Indigenous children, it is individual community based services will to and skills in providing education to Indigenous children that has the most impact. Community Child Care understands that it is MCEECDYA's responsibility to determine what action MCEECDYA Minister's will take to help achieve closing the gap targets, but if the role of community based non-government provision of early education and care is omitted from every Indigenous education action plan, Indigenous children will remain excluded from the ever so important early education opportunities.
4. Community based children's services are primarily stand alone community organisations; ie the service is managed at a local level by a management committee drawn from the local community. This reality means that some communities, including some in which MCEECDYA's focus schools lie, will enable Indigenous children to have access to high quality culturally appropriate early education and care, whilst others will not.
5. The three national collaborative actions proposed for the early education area: supporting the National Early Years Workforce Strategy, supporting the use of the Early Years Learning Framework and longitudinal studies into Indigenous early childhood education, are reasonable collaborative actions for MCEECDYA to undertake, but supporting existing

actions being undertaken by other sections of government will not increase access to or quality of early education for Indigenous children.

6. The systemic and school level actions proposed particularly ignore the realities of community based service provision. Identifying “priorities for community based early childhood development” and developing “outreach strategies to connect with early education and care” providers at local and system levels will not result in increased access to or quality of early education for Indigenous children. Community based service providers need additional funding and additional professional development to assist them deliver quality, culturally appropriate, early education and care to Indigenous children in their local areas.
7. The Early Years Learning Framework describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years of age. It describes early childhood as a time of belonging, being and becoming. It is disappointing to see the role of early education and care reduced to a strategy that can ensure “readiness for school”. Access to quality early education and care is important for children in their early years and in later years, not just as a preparation for “real school” but as an end in itself.
8. Community Child Care understands that the jurisdictional priorities are included in the plan for information only, but we feel compelled to comment on the NSW plan, as it epitomises the shortfalls of the draft plan overall. The primary action in the NSW plan in the “readiness for school” domain is providing Priority of access to Indigenous children in the 100 Department of Education Preschools. Indigenous children already have priority of access to these preschools. This is not a new action. As stated earlier even at the preschool level alone, there are 800 community based children’s services and only 100 Department of Education services in NSW. Given that everybody agrees that Indigenous children are missing out on the advantages of high quality early education experiences, and given that the Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft seeks to propose measures that will redress this, how does re-stating an existing action that only impacts on a small proportion of Indigenous children across NSW anyway, help?
9. To ensure that more Indigenous children get access to high quality early education and care, the reality of service provision to this group needs to be addressed. We need to be asking if the reality is that most early education opportunities for Indigenous children are, or could be, offered to them by community based children’s services and preschools, how can MCEECDYA offer assistance to these services at National, jurisdictional and importantly at the focus school level to ensure they can offer high quality educational opportunities to Indigenous children before access to formal schooling?