

EARLY CHILDHOOD PORTFOLIO MOTIONS 2024

A 9. WESTMAR/INGLESTONE BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld, lobbies the Queensland Government and kindergarten service providers, to ensure that no regional, rural, or remote kindergartens and childcare centres are closed or suspended without extensive community engagement.”

Explanation:

Jellybeans Community Kindergarten and Limited Hours Care was established in 2002 in Alpha after extensive community and local government engagement, fundraising and grant applications. The centre was an integral part of our community and provided the only early childhood education and care facility in the township and surrounding areas.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=631070078450209>

At the beginning of 2024, with limited community engagement and no discussion with parents or families, the C & K Jellybeans Community Kindergarten and Limited Hours Care was closed. The community and parents were not given the opportunity to discuss options and solutions, there was no community engagement around attracting staff or enrolments. This has left a huge gap in the Alpha township, with no Kindergarten or childcare services available within 150 kilometres.

The centre is owned by Barcaldine Regional Council and was administered by C & K Queensland. Jellybeans was the only childcare and Kindergarten service available within the Alpha community and has significantly impacted families and children. At the very least extensive community engagement and meetings with prospective families should have occurred, to not only advise of C & K's intentions but also to plan for the future of the centre, the materials and equipment (funded through community fundraising) and canvas enrolment numbers.

A 2022 report by Victoria University and Mitchell Institute outlines that,

“The evidence is overwhelming on the impact of good quality early learning in fuelling children’s development and giving them a great start in life. Children and families in rural areas are among the most likely to benefit from early learning, yet structural problems in the system have abandoned them without the access they need.”

The children attending this centre deserve to be supported and have their ongoing social, cognitive and emotional needs met by the centre. At a time when the Alpha community needed help, C & K QLD were not engaged, not consultative and not across the intricacies of our small community.

Alpha ICPA branch believes that any decisions about "the ongoing sustainability" of remote and rural kindergartens and childcare centres, in particular, when there are no other services available, should have mandated community and parent engagement and consultation mechanisms. There has been no further engagement with the community by C & K Queensland regarding possible models that may work for Jellybeans, so that this facility can be utilised by the families and children it was designed for.

CARRIED

A 10. AUGATHELLA BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), Department of Education, Minister for Education and early childhood service providers to ensure early childhood services are provided in rural and remote locations where no services exist.”

Explanation:

In some small rural and remote communities there is a lack of early childhood services or they don't exist at all and this has an enormous impact on families in these communities and the communities themselves. Without services, families have no options for childcare which can affect a family's decision to move to the area, which is detrimental to the growth of the community, potentially robbing it of residents and professionals. In rural and remote towns with no childcare options, people who have been offered work and have young families, have no option but to turn down the opportunity. It is also extremely limiting for working parents.

People who currently live in towns with no early childhood services have to constantly seek alternative options for their children's care so that they can continue to work, such as calling on unqualified community members or extended family to help out with the care of young children, often resulting in children having several carers throughout the week. This sees the youngest members of our community missing out on the benefits of early childhood education and needs to be addressed. All rural and remote towns need a registered early childhood education and care service to ensure our youngest members of the community are supported and allow parents or primary caregivers the opportunity to access employment.

CASE STUDIES:

Background:

Augathella is a small town in South Western Queensland with a population of approximately 300. Augathella currently has 15 families with pre-school aged children. (April 2024). In these 15 families, there are 22 children aged under 4 years old who have no access to early childhood services. If there are no options for childcare, this reduces the workforce by up to 15 workers. The lack of childcare and early childhood services is a common situation in Augathella. The issue isn't simply about childcare, it means that some children are missing out on the benefits of early childhood education.

Case Study One:

In the case of one family with 2 children under the age of 4, childcare is a constant battle. Mum is a registered nurse, but only works casual between the hospital and the doctor surgery because of the lack of reliable childcare services. Her kids are 4 and 2 years old. They have no family living in the district as her family is overseas and her husband's parents have retired and moved away. She relies heavily on her husband who thankfully is quite flexible with his work, private cash babysitting and generous neighbours/friends who they can call upon in an emergency. Augathella had an in-home daycare until the start of the 2024, but the lady had another baby herself and had to close the daycare.

Unfortunately, no-one took it over. This is a great loss for the community. There is a lady in town who does cash babysitting. It's the only option for most working women who do not have family support nearby. Understandably it is a lot more expensive without a childcare subsidy and the woman holds no qualifications in early childhood.

Case Study Two:

Roughly two years ago my husband and I separated. We were on a property out of town where I

helped out but mostly was a stay at home mum. My husband was an alcoholic and lost his job managing the property and after going to rehab, he still continued to drink. I decided to leave him. I found myself renting a house in town with no financial support from my ex and being a New Zealander, I was ineligible for single parent benefit! I applied for citizenship as soon as I could but that has taken almost 12 months and still has not been finalised (I missed the pledge ceremony due to the flooding 🤦)

I found work very quickly and there are plenty if job opportunities in Augathella but day care and after school care was almost non existent!! My son who was 6 at the time was in school five days a week but my daughter who was 3 wasn't and I desperately needed the daycare! I was entitled to child care subsidies thank goodness! We had an in home day care which was amazing and she fit my daughter in as much as she could so I was lucky in that sense. However if she went away or was unwell and I had no daycare I couldn't work and being casual if I didn't work there was no money coming in! My family is all back in NZ but friends helped out when they could.

Things are better now as daughter is in prep and hopefully citizenship will be finalised very soon and I'll be able to get single parent support which will be a huge help! I cannot describe the financial stress this took on top of everything else and I would hate anyone else to be in this kind of situation. I was lucky to have the small amount of day care I had.

QUOTES:

"I think it is important to mention that even with school aged and/or kindy-aged kids you technically can't work because unless you work at the school, no job is 8.30am - 3pm. So parents would also benefit from before and after school care."

"There are so many job opportunities around right now and I believe the lack of daycare is what stops so many from working or even moving to Augathella. It's such a shame because it's an amazing community."

CARRIED

A 11. ARAMAC-MUTTABURRA BRANCH

"That ICPA Qld lobbies the relevant bodies to fund a facilitator for a mobile daycare program in those rural and remote towns that don't have access to childcare and or early childhood education programs."

Explanation:

The Longreach Mobile Daycare was an amazing asset to the Aramac and Muttaborra communities, providing one day per week childcare in both our small towns, but also the townships of Isisford and Ilfracombe.

It closed in 2023 after 15 + years servicing our communities, and there was always a waiting list in Aramac due to the large demand for childcare and early childhood education, with children from both in and out of town attending. There was always a Director present, plus 2 other staff to accommodate children ranging in age from newborn to 5 years.

The reason given by Longreach regional Council for the closure was lack of staff, and difficulty in recruiting new staff.

With the closest other Childcare services located in Barcaldine and Longreach respectively, distance and costs make these other facilities prohibitive. For some small children from properties, it provided the only regular social interaction with other children, and the only opportunity for their parents to access childcare, making both their ability to work on farm, and their ability to care for the own mental health achievable, whilst their children were in a safe and controlled environment, if only for one day per week. It also provided the opportunity for mothers residing in our Towns to return to the

workforce one day per week, in council offices, schools, service providers, tourism and hospitality. All the communities in our region are facing housing shortages and many job vacancies - providing childcare can contribute to a solution. By establishing childcare centres, parents already residing in these areas can access reliable care for their children. This would enable them to pursue employment opportunities that would otherwise go unfilled due to the lack of childcare and lack of housing for any non locals hoping to move into the area.

CARRIED

A 12. CLARKE CREEK BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education to ensure that kindy students attending a state-delivered kindy facility receive the same support services/ allied health assessment and ongoing support as urban counterparts.”

Explanation:

Kindergarten students are currently not eligible for assessments or support until they begin their prep year. However, providing equal access to quality kindergarten education is crucial. Studies have shown that early intervention can positively impact children's literacy, numeracy, and social skills while also helping them prepare for and succeed in school. The benefits of early intervention can extend to later in life, resulting in improved academic outcomes.

CARRIED

A 13. CUNNAMULLA BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Minister for Education and Early Childhood providers to provide financial support and incentives for an early childhood kindergarten trained educator in rural and remote locations.”

Explanation:

Cunnamulla has one privately operated Kindergarten and is currently only offering 2 days access per eligible child a total of 10 hours. The kindergarten is free for children to attend however families are limited with spacing. Currently the kindergarten service is closed on a Monday and Friday with changed hours of 9am-2pm, however days and opening times continue to change with short notice. The current service is severely limited with ongoing staffing issues therefore children are not able to access the 15 hours of Kindergarten. Staff from the kindergarten service are often placed in the adjoining ELC service, impacting on the opportunity for the kindergarten to operate.

In 2021 the Paroo shire had the highest birth rate per capita in the country, demonstrating a significant need for early education programs to be running and sustainable. Currently there are 30 children enrolled in the kindergarten program with further children being identified in the local area as eligible for kindergarten. In having a kindergarten trained educator it would assist in providing a sustainable and consistent educational experience for the children attending the kindergarten, mitigating the significant risk of children beginning school developmentally vulnerable. There is a currently a huge concern that children attending the current kindergarten program will be unprepared for attending and transitioning to school.

In 2021 the AEDC (Australian Early Development Census) showed that children starting school in the Paroo shire were 47% developmentally vulnerable. At this time, it was noted that Cunnamulla was 1 of 5 locations in Queensland going backwards. Whilst we wait for the release of the 2024 AEDC Data concerns around children's transition to school and preparedness is escalating as the kindergarten and early educational experiences have now worsened since 2021. We acknowledge that recently there was a position offered for a kindergarten teacher in Cunnamulla however due to the lack of incentives this position has been unable to be filled.

CARRIED

A 14. CUNNAMULLA BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Minister for Education and Early Childhood providers to provide housing in rural and remote communities for early childhood educators.”

Explanation:

As outlined in the previous motion we are unable to provide a sustainable kindergarten service to our community, this is largely due to the inability to attract and retain appropriate staff members. A significant barrier in rural and remote locations is housing. Housing would support and encourage trained educators to take employment within Cunnamulla. It is understood that there is currently no housing availability through department housing that the ELC and Kindergarten would benefit from accessing.

CARRIED

A 15. CUNNAMULLA BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Minister for Education and Early Childhood providers to deliver regular and reliable appropriate early childhood programs for highly vulnerable rural and remote locations.”

Explanation:

Cunnamulla and the surrounding districts are in desperate need of early childhood programs, that are consistent and sustainable.

At present, RAFS (Remote Area Families Service) have visited the area, however this is generally on an events-based need. E.g Under 8's Day, Eulo Pink Ladies day and currently do not offer a regular visit.

The KEYS (Keeping Early Years in the spotlight) playgroup is operating once a week for families however there is significant uncertainty as to what happens when the pool of funding for this group is complete. Estimated to be some time in Term 3 2024.

The first five forever program that is run at the Cunnamulla Library provides a wonderful service for families however has only successfully had 6 meets this year, with staff required for other services or suffering from illness with no staff to continue the program each week.

The Gidgee Kids Daycare centre at the beginning of 2024, in an effort to combat staffing issues closed the under 2-year-olds space. This left any family that required care for a child under the age of 2 stranded. Many families in the community suffered from this decision with many unable to have care for their children they were faced with having to leave the community to find employment elsewhere.

as they were unable to work without care.

The recent challenges facing Cunnamulla were highlighted on Channel 10 segment The Project and can be viewed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIEu8QW8gKg>

If you are a parent on a property 150km from or Cunnamulla or are a family leaving in Cunnamulla there is minimal opportunities to access quality early childhood programs.

CARRIED