

### EARLY CHILDHOOD PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT – June 2023

The Early Childhood sector across the country continues to have many challenges, particularly with ongoing shortages of trained professionals. These shortages are more pronounced in rural and remote areas where attracting and retaining early child educators is an ongoing concern. Access to suitable training for interested rural and remote residents is also a barrier.

There were two early childhood motions presented at conference in 2022. These motions related to access to learning support for State Based Kindergarten programs and for the funding and establishment of early childhood programs in rural and remote areas.

#### **State Delivered Kindy (SDK)**

There are 140 schools delivering State Delivered Kindergarten across remote parts of Queensland enabling 700 students to have access to Kindy where there are no other opportunities. At delegations in July, the Department of Education assured ICPA Qld that many resources are available to assist with Learning Support for children with identified specific needs enrolled in State Delivered Kindergarten programs. The department indicated that they would follow up with regional SDK advisors to clearly communicate the availability of these resources to principals.

In addition, the Department is committed to ensuring that any school with SDK have suitable infrastructure and general resourcing.

#### **Prioritising and funding to re-establish early childhood programs in highly vulnerable and remote locations.**

CUNNAMULLA: There has always been a want and a need for Cunnamulla to have an early childhood program, the difficulty has been in having someone there suitably qualified to administer the program. The funding is available, and the DoE (Department of Education) can pay for an educator in a structured setting in Cunnamulla - if one is found. The lack of available educators to provide a program in Cunnamulla highlights the shortage across the nation in this area of expertise.

The private provider, BUSHkids, supports the community of Cunnamulla to build upon existing strengths in supporting children's development, in particular reaching vulnerable families. The BUSHkids team consisting of a Bundaberg-based Senior OT; and Brisbane-based Speech Pathologist are currently supporting 38 children and families and providing capacity building programs and education for early years' educators in Cunnamulla. In partnership with Cunnamulla Aboriginal Corporate of Health (CACH) they are in the process of recruiting a locally based Allied Health Assistant to provide on-the-ground supports to support the families and the clinicians. The team recently visited Cunnamulla (3 to 7 April) and were part of a Kids Health Expo co-organised with CACH and service provider Vital Health. The team travelled to Cunnamulla again recently for a week's visit to follow up with families who attended the Expo and had their children screened; and there are further trips scheduled for throughout the year. The team continue to provide tele practice in-between face-to-face visits.

BUSHkids has been contacted by Western Queensland Primary Health Network (WQPHN) to deliver the Cunnamulla service model in Boulia and are currently working with WQPHN and stakeholders to plan an approach to commencing services.

FCP Moreton are running the Long Day Care Centre and Kindergarten in Cunnamulla and, since taking over, a lot of added resources have been introduced to the centre with a strong focus on gross motor skills. Currently the Centre has a retired local qualified educator as a mentor supporting educators with overarching observation of the program and broad support for the educators themselves.

Since conference, The Mums and Bubs group has been set up within the Cunnamulla community and are well attended.

Bush Kids are working with both schools supporting educators and have connected and supporting the Narooma Playgroup.

ST GEORGE: St George has a new program called Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) which supports Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander school leavers (at this point) to gain an educational qualification. This allows the school leaver to stay within the community and goes some way towards addressing the shortage of early educators in this area.

GENERAL: Bush Kids are looking at initiatives for 4<sup>th</sup> year Diploma qualified educators to be recognised as having a Bachelor of Early Ed at this stage have had no success.

## **Ekindy**

Ekindy continues to offer an essential program for our very remote students. There are 159 students enrolled in 2023. The Ekindy program is no longer a standalone program and has now been absorbed into the Brisbane School of Distance Education.

The department assures ICPA Qld that there will always be a face-to-face component with the Ekindy program, regardless of any changes within BSDE, and has reiterated that a dual mode of delivery is critical with both online and field services being offered. There are currently teachers based in both Longreach School of Distance Education and the Emerald campus of Capricornia School of Distance Education.

The DoE are amending the Medical Policy from consecutive to accumulative 10 weeks for students to be able to access medical admission to Ekindy.

The Department encourages families to enrol early in the Ekindy program, so schools can be prepared. There is an annual Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Education and Brisbane School of Distance Education. An Annual Review takes place as the numbers and locations of Ekindy students will be variable in numbers and locations such as Emerald, Longreach & Charleville which then, therefore, necessitates an annual review of the MOU so appropriate funding agreements can be set up for the projected year ahead. This agreement for the Ekindy program is intended to be completed by August for the following year. It is noted that there is a general decrease in numbers as more SDK's come online. The decreased numbers will not impact on the continuity of the Ekindy program. In certain locations, Bush Kids continues to facilitate Ekindy pods with 1 educator to 4 children in a kindy pod at a local school. Currently there are eight (8) pods in the following locations with some pods running more than one day per week:

- \*Bauple
- \*Condamine
- \*Goovigen
- \*Rollingstone

- \*Bloomsbury
- \*Forrest Beach
- \*Kenilworth
- \*Seaforth

## **In Home Care**

The In-Home Care program continues to be challenging for rural and remote families, given that the eligibility criteria does not align with the lifestyle of our families. ICPA Qld works closely with ICPA Australia in its advocacy to find equitable solutions to streamline the program in rural and remote settings.

ICPA Qld met with representatives in the In-Home Care sector at November delegations to share our concerns. As a result of this contact State Council was able to contribute to the In-Home Care review that is currently being undertaken.

## **Louise Martin**

**Early Childhood Portfolio Leader**

[President@icpaqld.com.au](mailto:President@icpaqld.com.au)