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## Early Childhood Report

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**Madam President, distinguished guests, members of ICPA, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I present the Early Childhood Report for 2020**

### **Update on mobile children's services**

July 2018 saw the end of the Budget Based Funding (BBF) for Services, with up to 20 mobiles who were unable to transition to the childcare model being placed with the Department of Social Services with two years secured funding. The changes have resulted in enormous administration work and a lot of trial and error with reporting.

For mobile children's services that transitioned to the new Childcare Package and or preschool, the transition has also been bumpy. Some services are finding that they are no longer viable under the model and it has been a long-held concern of ICPA-NSW and other likeminded organisations that mobile services would become slowly extinct without guaranteed funding.

- Access to care is being denied to country children. Venues have been lost due to unviability under the new funding model. Ratios have become a problem. Services didn't operate as they had been. Playgroups have been depleted due to low population in rural and remote areas.
- In some areas, parents have assigned care over to educators, rather than attending play group sessions. In other areas, parents assign care but are still present, even though they are paying for childcare.
- Flexibility within the service to support different communities is required eg. If one venue doesn't have the numbers, then you could open in a more viable area.

Therefore in 2020 ICPA-NSW has been informed of examples which illustrate our concerns:

In order to make the service self-sustainable, there is now a policy which states mobile resource units must only operate with a minimum of five children. In response to community research and strong opposition from parents one mobile resource unit is continuing however the other district service is in the tenuous position of being possibly mothballed after 12 months.

We know that the NSW Government is committed to ensuring that all children in New South Wales, no matter where they live or what their circumstances are, participate in 600 hours of quality preschool education in the year before school. However due to lack of children in remote areas, mobile resource units' operation must be supported by the NSW government.

ICPA-NSW believes that the funding for all mobile services should come under the control of NSW Department of Education.

### **In Home Care (IHC)**

In Home Care was also plagued with difficulties since the transition, but after speaking to Karen Lennon she assures me that they have a much better understanding on how SOTA and DE operate, this has helped them improve the payment system and understanding the increased costs.

One point made by Karen is that there is an additional Child Care payment and they were hoping that drought affected families would be able to apply for this extra payment. However the criteria is that the event has had to happen in the last six months, so most drought families are being rejected as the drought has been longer than this. They have met the politicians, but they are not hopeful of changes. The only outcome is that the politicians are now aware of this anomaly.

We are now pleased that for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, TAFE NSW through the Bourke connected Learning Centre (CLC) are offering the Certificate III which caters for students who require a national qualification for home tutoring student learning support officers (SLSO) and TAFE education support officers. This is available as a flexible delivery online or in class.

## **Preschools**

ICPA-NSW identified ten remote or very remote village public schools as having no access to pre-school. Of these, the Gidgee Preschool at Weilmoringle opened in Term 3 2018 and has been operating successfully, to date it is the only one of those ten.

Louth and Wanaaring preschools were announced at Mudgee conference 2017. Louth had its meeting with Nat Heath from the Early Childhood and Education Care Directorate (ECECD) and Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA) about the steps to opening Louth in October 2018. To date no preschool is up and running at Louth or Wanaaring.

CCSA assures ICPA- NSW that they have the capacity to facilitate several implementations of remote preschools simultaneously.

There have been many delays with the process. ICPA-NSW would like to see from the initial community working group meeting that all the following issues at the one time:

Choosing of providers – That an expression of interest be offered to all providers in an area and if they have the capacity to become a provider they put in their interest, from there the working group decide which provider they would like for their preschool.

Site – an appropriate site decided upon and the necessary works started as soon as possible.

Staff – find the qualified staff so that if accommodation and travel are needed that can be decided upon early.

A preschool cannot start without the above three criteria and tackling each of them one by one has proved a very lengthy process and resulted in the preschool taking way too long to get up and running.

ICPA-NSW and CCSA would like to be informed as to the very remote schools which are to receive preschools and for these to be signed off on immediately by the Minister for Education and Early Childhood.

Identification of the remote schools who, according to the ARIA standard are not eligible for preschool implementation would be appreciated by ICPA- NSW and the strategy to deal with discussed.

### **No drought funding for School of the Air and Distance Ed Preschoolers.**

The majority of drought affected preschools received drought funding to be used by the centre how they see best. It is hoped that the Distance Education and School of the Air preschools who did not receive any drought funding, who however have very isolated and severe long-term drought affected pre-schoolers will be offered funding. Following are two case studies which address the hardship of SOTA parents getting their children to preschool classrooms.

#### **Case Study 1:**

Each term, Broken Hill SOTA Preschool hosts a two Preschool Classrooms to enable children the opportunity of face to face sessions.

Recently, one of our members drove a 500km round trip for her son to attend the two-day Preschool Classroom in Broken Hill. This parent also left her two other primary school children at home with a Governess to supervise their primary school lessons whilst the parent was away. The parent also stayed overnight in Broken Hill at her own cost, so that her son could take part in the full two-day preschool classroom. The parent noted that many of the students did not attend this classroom.

After attending the SOTA Preschool Classroom session, the parent was advised that the educator had concerns with the child's development and could benefit from more face to face preschool. In order to ready him for

school via SOTA next year, this parent is now deciding for her son to stay three nights a week with grandparents so that he can attend face to face preschool in the nearest town.

Had this parent not attended this classroom, the additional intervention required would not have been identified or addressed.

### **Case Study 2:**

A member whose son attends a preschool that has been the recipient of \$3,000 in drought funding has advised that she is considering dropping one day of preschool per week. This parent drives 160km each day the child attends preschool. The drought funding has not allowed for any transport assistance for this child to attend.

Both Case Studies are current recipients of the Farm Household Allowance.

ICPA-NSW therefore requests, as a matter of urgency, that isolated families with pre-schoolers who are receiving the Farm Household Allowance, be eligible for a subsidy paid once a term to assist towards the travel and accommodation costs of attending face to face preschool.

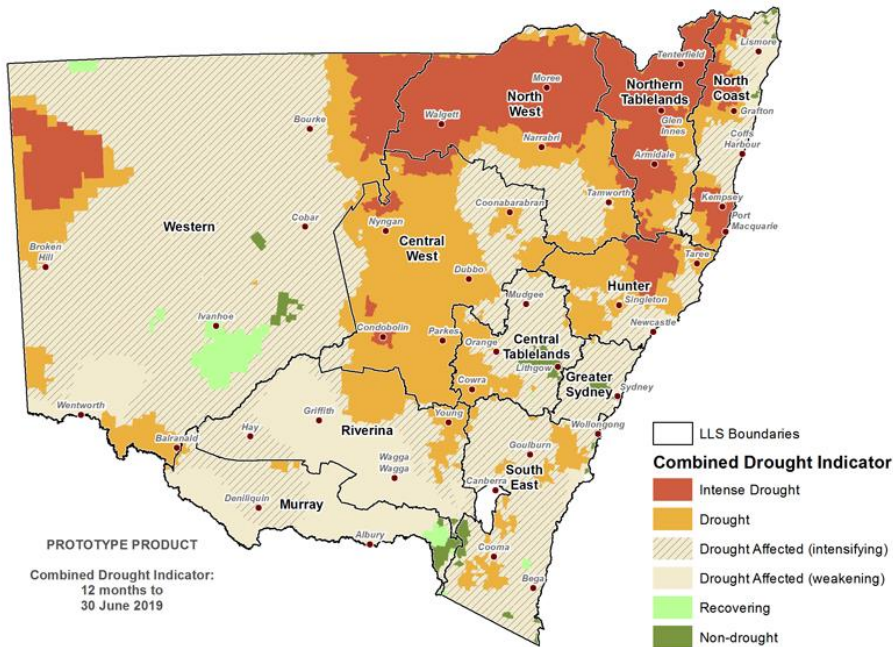
This would ensure that all preschoolers facing severe hardship due to the drought would receive critical support.

We have also seen other services such as Royal Far West and the Royal Flying Doctor Service focus services in the early childhood and family's sector and expand further into Telehealth that will provide much needed services to remote children. We thank these organisations greatly for the contribution they make to rural and remote NSW. As satellite schools have such slow internet the use of telehealth services in these centres is almost impossible.

There is still much work to be done for ICPA, with a focus on obtaining funding for remote preschoolers via the School Drive Subsidy (SDS) and Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC). With reopening of the Pooncarie Public School, the community is keen to commence discussion regarding the possibility of a preschool operating from the school grounds.

### **Combined Drought Indicator Map (CDI)**

The use of Combined Drought Indicator (CDI) Maps which are prepared by the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has meant that some early childhood services have been disadvantaged in recent Drought Funding rounds to Early Childhood Services. This mapping as at 30 June 2019 assessed towns such as Bourke, Cobar, Wilcannia, Louth, Wanaaring, Tilpa as being at the lowest rate of drought impacts, meaning their funding was at the lowest rate. The CDI map does not consider the length of drought or socio-economic impacts. The Department of Education have advised they are working only to the map. Children from those listed areas also missed the opportunity to be involved in the Sport & Rec camps offered in the school holidays as the same mapping criteria was used. You may also be aware that a recent NSW Cabinet meeting was held in Bourke as a direct result of our Drought Status.



**Annabel Strachan and Skye Bragg**  
**Early Childhood convenors**

