

Hearing Parents' Voices: Choosing Quality
Long Day Care in Northern Regional
Australia

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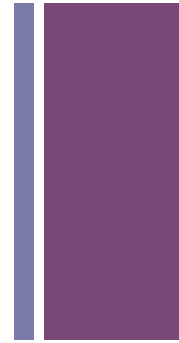
+ Research Aim

- The intention of this research project is to contribute to the early childhood education and care policy dialogue at this time of policy opportunity.
- The objective of this research project is to qualitatively explore, from the perspective of parents and carers who are searching for and using long day care, the impact of the rapidly expanding and changing for-profit child care sector on their opportunities to choose quality child care.



+ Research Methodology

- Feminist perspective
 - Qualitative methodology
 - In-depth interviews
 - Grounded theory analysis
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- 50 respondents in Cairns, Darwin and Mackay
 - 20 respondents from Townsville 2007 pilot study





We are looking for people to be interviewed before June 2009....

Finding Quality Child Care in Darwin... We want to hear what mums, dads and other carers think 😊

Hello! We are a small team of researchers from James Cook University who are passionate about including your voice in the current Child Care debate. Parents and carers in regional cities tell us they face different experiences in their hunt for child care. The debates about child care often include voices from parents in big cities.

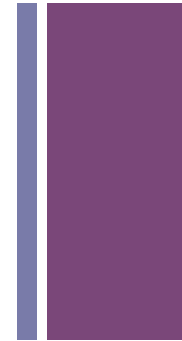
We are wanting to speak to 20 mums, dads and carers from Darwin over the next three weeks if possible.

Interviews take about half an hour to one hour. We can come to you at home or meet you in a coffee shop (we will buy coffee and cake)! Your involvement in this research project will be strictly **confidential**.

**If you are interested in being a participant
please call**

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This research is made possible by a grant from The Ian Potter Foundation and will be used to critique and inform child care policy. For more information about this research please call Dr Nonie Harris on (07) 4781 4898 or Beth Tinning on (07) 4042 1193.



+ Beggars Can't be Choosers - Locating Child Care in a Large Regional City

- *It was really hard, I think it was about 18-20 centres before I was able to get a place (Townsville parent)*
- *We moved to Darwin and I just rang around to see where we could fit in ... beggars can't be choosers ... we are fortunate to get a place. (Darwin parent)*
- *In Cairns, you have to take what you can get really. I imagine in a bigger city there would be more options. For me, I'm thinking there would be more chance of finding services that aren't so white, although at least up here, because of the population groups, there is more chance that there will be Indigenous workers. (Cairns parent)*

+ Compromising on Quality

- *When we arrived in Darwin ... I started to think OK I will need to find care in Darwin, I did not really know anyone up here ... I only really found one centre that had any positions ... so I had to take what ever was available at the time because we both worked and we really didn't have any other options. It (the centre) was OK – it probably would not have been my first choice, it was not ideal ... so if I had had other options available I probably would have chosen a different alternative. (Darwin parent)*

+ A Matter of 'Luck'

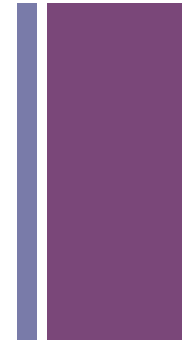
- *It was a fluke ... I got my name down at a lot of centres and found the waiting list was usually six, 12 or even 18 months at that time, and then they opened a brand new centre. So it was really lucky that I got in there before it was even built... I got my name on the list and I was one of the first in the door, so it was really lucky. (Cairns parent)*
- *I have been lucky I think, in the sense that I did get a place for Billy and that was probably - they said that a few people had left because of the uncertainty of the ABC... (Darwin parent).*



+ Looking for Happiness - The Ideal Quality Long day Care Environment

- Low ratio of staff to children
- A balance of play and learning activities
- Culturally appropriate and sensitive environment
- Quality staff child relationship
- Enthusiastic and energetic staff
- A warm friendly environment that was well resourced
- A safe environment
- Emphasis on children's happiness to attend
- Positive relationship between the parent and the centre director
- Outdoor play area – touching the trees and the grass
- Welcoming and interested staff



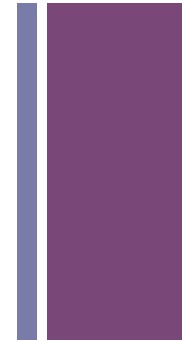


- *I put Tyson's name down at (Community Based Centre) when I was six months pregnant, because I had heard through my work that it was good and culturally appropriate, you know? They really work hard to address the cultural issues for Aboriginal kids and kids from other backgrounds... Firstly I wanted to see if anyone on staff was black or at least not white. Then I was interested in how it looked. For me, it is really important that the kids are in touch with the earth and the ground... (Cairns parent)*



Some were Happy and Some were not

- *The first child care centre, I was very happy with it. They had some fabulous workers in there that, you know their enthusiasm, their energy was right there. I mean I'm wanting child care to add on to what I don't provide, given that I'm putting a kid in care for a long time. Um, so that was, it was fairly important that I felt there you know, there was a lot of happiness. (Mackay parent)*
- *I'm not real comfortable there and I'm sure part of it is that we are the only black family. I'm hoping we won't stay there for much longer, but at the moment the boys have to wait. They're not so unhappy, they seem OK, you know kids, they're adaptable ... But you don't want your kids to have to adapt ... I hate the thought that they are going somewhere second rate, but what I want doesn't exist and the closest thing to it has a six month waiting list. (Cairns parent)*
- *... looking back the first one that you know she was only at for couple of months um probably met my expectations by about 70% ... The second one, everyday I said to myself get her out of here, get her out of here now. (Mackay parent)*



+ Child Care Quality and Market Forces

- *I think it only works if the women have a choice – if you have got a couple of different child care centres to choose from then of course you would pick the best one and that one would prosper and the other one would not... But in reality there is not a market, so women have to choose whatever they can up here ... there is not a choice. (Darwin parent)*

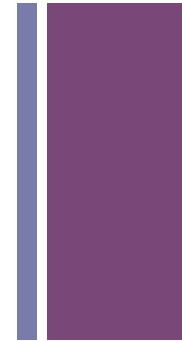


+ A Sign of the Times - The Current Child Care Landscape

- *... but the rise in the number of profit, yeah I just, I'm just trying to be realistic, that's just a sign of the times. I mean look at ABC, who didn't think to themselves I should snatch one of them up, they'll be going cheap, we could make a real, you know, killing here. Um, you forget that your customers are newborn you know, um but I guess that's just being realistic ... So you'd have to be an idiot not to step up and say well I'll open a child care centre and I'll charge whatever I want and people will pay it. Especially in a town like Mackay, maybe not so much at the moment, but I mean it is a boomtown and people will literally pay what it takes... (Mackay parent)*

+ Dollar Signs and Cowboys

- *I just think big dollar signs written all over them... It's actually something that I expected in that they were running a business and it wasn't charity. You opt to go back to work or you opt to use child care for whatever reason, well this is the world you live in. These people are here to make money, they have staff to support, they've got a centre to run, that's life you know, and any other business would do it ... I guess that's just reality. (Mackay parent)*
- *If you open a child care centre, you can do whatever the hell you want... they are for profit, they're on their own, they make their own rules... I just thought to myself you're just a bunch of cowboys, you just do what you want when you want, um and yeah no-one sort of pulls anybody into line on a lot of it... (Mackay parent)*



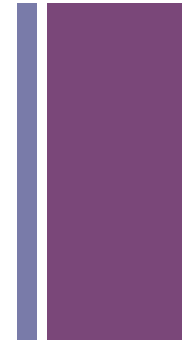
- *I think child care is a problem all over the country and especially for families that need something different from the norm. Because they have to offer whatever the most people want, so they can get lots of kids to make their money... It doesn't make it fair though for those of us who aren't in the majority. (Cairns parent)*





Ask the Community What they Want

- that finding quality child care will be difficult and complicated
- the quality of care will be less than ideal
- where you live impacts your access to quality care
- getting a quality child care environment is a matter of luck
- that child care will be culturally inappropriate- particularly for Indigenous parents
- that child care is a business
- running a business means prioritising profits
- there is a lack of information about child care options such as community-based and for-profit child care services





- there is a lack of clarity about who is monitoring quality - after all anyone can open a child care centre
- for-profit centres make their own rules
- the ownership of centres can change and that there will be constant change of this nature
- the for-profit delivery model is legitimate, because government funds and supports this model of delivery
- flexible responsive services will not be provided unless they make money – i.e. the profitable model of provision is what we have and parents have to accept it

“Well I’d be saying ‘till I’m blue in the face - to ask the community what they want ... find out what is important.” (Cairns parent)

