

## 17200 - New submission from Early Years Strategy - Public Submissions

In Wollongong where I live, it is incredibly difficult to secure adequate childcare. So hard, in fact, that parents do not have the option to choose a childcare centre that best suits their style and values, because they're lucky if they get a position anywhere. Beggars cannot be choosers. Not having choice over the environment our precious little ones spend their days in is unacceptable.

We are lucky enough to have our two year old daughter at a wonderful centre two days per week. We need at least three days, but the extra day is unavailable to us. We're on a waiting list. As her mother and as a freelance creative, this means I do not work as much as I could, or as much as I want. This impacts my superannuation, my sense of identity, my career development and progression, my reliance on my partner, and my bottom line.

I have friends (women) who are not able to work AT ALL because they cannot secure care for their infant children. This is a feminist issue and needs to be addressed ASAP.

Further, the cost of childcare is prohibitive for many parents on low or middle income. And because of the gender pay gap and the already disjointed nature of the mother's career having taken time away from paid work to give birth and care for a baby, it is almost always the mother who sacrifices her work life because there is no financial gain in working for minimal return and spending all of it on childcare. Just as primary school and high school are free, so too should early education be.

Finally, early childhood educators (mostly women) are among the lowest paid people in society, which is an absolute disgrace. Do we really value our precious babies and young children so little they we think the people who provide care and education to them deserve to live on the poverty line? This is specialist work and IMPORTANT work and it should be compensated as such.

I would like to see:

- More availability of childcare in my area so women can work as much as they want/need and so parents have choice where they send their children
- Free early childcare education so women are not sacrificing their work opportunities because childcare is just too expensive
- Higher rates of pay for educators, to acknowledge the important of this work and address the gender pay gap