

8.14. Family Day Care Annual Report 2019/20

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ATTACHMENTS:

1. 2020 Family Day Care annual report FINAL [8.14.1 - 11 pages]

PURPOSE:

To provide Council with an annual report of the operations of the North Sydney Family Day Care Service for the 2019-2020 year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Family Day Care (FDC) continues to be a preferred and affordable option for childcare, and throughout 2020, has seen the recruitment of 3 additional educators, and 2 returning from maternity leave, bringing over additional 20 families to the scheme. This recruitment has raised the number of children enrolled in the scheme by 19.1 %, increasing the financial sustainability of the service, as a result of increased parental and educators' levies.

During 2020 FDC faced many challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government introduced free childcare for families and provided supplementary payments for Educators.

The FDC unit was successful in obtaining Transitional Funding of \$66,283 and the Local Government COVID-19 Early Childhood Education program payment of \$29,250.

During this period, FDC was fortunate to retain most of the families in its care, totalling 156 families. Three families terminated care due to loss of parental employment. The coordination unit team continued to operate and was able to offer mentoring and support to Educators and families throughout this time. Safety visits were in place, to ensure COVID-19 protocols and plans were adhered to as well as ensuring the Educators were adhering to National Quality Childhood Standards.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Family Day Care unit was successful in obtaining Transitional Funding of \$66,283 and the Local Government COVID-19 Early Childhood Education program payment of \$29,250.

This was beneficial as these amounts off-set the loss of parental levies, non-obtainable during the free childcare period.

In 2019/20, the cost of operating the service exceeded income by \$11,062.24 which was subsidised by Council.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. THAT** the Family Day Care Annual Report 2019/20 be received.

LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

4. Our Social Vitality

4.1 North Sydney is connected, inclusive, healthy and safe

BACKGROUND

Family Day Care is a North Sydney Council sponsored childcare scheme providing care for children aged 0-12 years in the homes of carefully selected Educators. The majority of children who utilise the service are aged 0-5 years.

The coordination centre, staffed by Council's Community Development division, is at 96 Bank St North Sydney. These premises host the weekly play group, educator inductions, parent interviews, excursion departure point and incidentally, the administrative services of the Sydney Multi Cultural services.

The emphasis is on developing close personal relationships, and in incorporating children's voices in the learning environments of the home. The service provides a children's interest-based program to assist in the progression of the child and is underpinned by the National Quality Framework.

The scheme is also required to meet the legislative and funding agreement requirements for the provision of Government subsidies (CCS) introduced in July 2018. The new CCS system replaced the former CCMS system.

Family Day Care is regulated by the NSW Department of Education and operates under the Education and Care Services National Regulations and Law.

In July 2015, funding agreements with Department for Education, Employment and Industrial Relations ceased for all Family Day Care Services. The Federal Government cut funding to metropolitan services; providing this to only rural and remote schemes, who meet strict criteria. Resulting, was the need for services to become self-sufficient, and project their own funding. This included recruitment of Educators outside the LGA.

The Nominated Supervisor matches families requiring care to suitable Educators, and the coordination unit monitor the quality of safety and care through regular home visits. This ensures that Departmental Regulations, Law and Family Day Care standards are maintained. Parents and children meet with the coordination unit and Educator prior to accepting the care, where a brief interview offers information on the scheme and background to the operational procedures. Any individual needs the child and parent might have are addressed during this process.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement is not required.

DETAIL

In the 2016 Census there were 7764 children aged 0-12 years or 10.7 % of the population of North Sydney LGA. Of these children, 4414 are aged 0-5 years. This was a total increase of over 1771 children from the 2011 Census.

Although there are several childcare centres within the LGA, many have limited vacancies especially for children aged 0-2 years. The cost of centre-based childcare, especially for children aged 0-2 can be up to \$200 per day. Local community-based centres are approximately \$130 per day. Childcare centres offer permanent care for a full day, as do Family Day Care homes, where the costs and overheads are significantly less, with an average of \$115/day.

Parents often express a preference for the homely, more personable environment of Family Day Care for their younger children rather than centre-based care where children aged 0-5 years are cared for with a ratio of 1:4. Parents often prefer that siblings can be cared for together rather than being in different childcare rooms.

NORTH SYDNEY FAMILY DAY CARE

Annual Report (2019 -2020)

Approved Provider: North Sydney Council
Division: Community and Library Services
Department: Community Development



FDC Coordination Unit: 96 Bank Street
North Sydney, Administration: 1/3 James Pl
North Sydney

North Sydney Council
PO Box 12
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Background

Family Day Care is a North Sydney Council childcare scheme providing care for children aged 0-12 years in the homes of carefully selected Educators. The Scheme operates through the state's Regulatory body, the Department of Education with North Sydney Council as the approved childcare provider. The Director of Community and Library Services holds overall responsibility while Council's Family Day Care Co-ordinator is the Nominated Supervisor. A large majority of the children in care are aged 0-5, a demographic underserved by private childcare services due to its higher staffing costs.

The scheme is required to meet the legislative and funding agreement requirements for the provision of Government childcare subsidies (CCS) introduced in July 2018. The new CCS system replaced the former childcare management system CCMS system.

Family Day Care is regulated by the NSW Department of Education and operates under the Education and Care Services National Regulations and Law. Educators are required to hold a minimum certificate 3 in Education and Care.

Family Day Care was initially subsidised by the Federal Government - since the Scheme's invention in the 1970's. In July 2015, funding agreements with Department for Education, Employment and Industrial Relations ceased for most Family Day Care Services. Funding to metropolitan services was cut completely, continuing only for rural and remote schemes, who needed to meet strict criteria. While funding was cut, childcare safety obligations remained enforceable under the Approved Providership (formally known as Licensee), through both spot and scheduled inspections by the Department, as well as reporting requirements.



Management Model

The Co-ordination Centre, managed by Council's Community Development Division is in Council-owned premises at 96 Bank Street, North Sydney. The Centre also hosts the weekly playgroup, allows for Educator induction and professional development, parent interviews, excursion departure point and, incidentally, the administrative services for the Sydney Multicultural Service.

The Scheme's emphasis is on developing close personal relationships between Educators and children, and in incorporating children's voices in the learning environments of the home. The service provides a children's interest-based program to assist in the progression of each child and the operation of the service is underpinned by the National Quality Framework, meeting seven quality standards, revolving around education and safety, as well as family involvement.

The Nominated Supervisor (a Council staff member) matches families requiring care to suitable Educators, and the Coordination Unit monitors the quality of safety and care through regular home visits. This ensures that Departmental Regulations, Law and Family Day Care standards are maintained. Parents and children meet with the Coordination Unit and Educator prior to accepting the care, where a brief interview offers information on the scheme and background to the operational procedures. Any individual needs the child and parent might have are addressed during this process.

The Law and Regulations require that the Nominated supervisor (or appropriately qualified alternative) to be at work or on call throughout the hours of care (7 30 am to 6.00 pm), throughout the year. Council has managed to achieve this with one full time and one part time position for over 40 years.

For insurance and tax purposes the Educators are self-employed. Council has no liability in that regard, taking out their own public liability insurance as a mandatory protocol.



Assessment of Local Need

In the 2016 Census there were 7,764 children aged 0–12 years or 10.7 % of the population of North Sydney LGA. Of these children, 4,414 are aged 0-5 years, a total increase of 1,771 children over the figure reported in the 2011 Census.

North Sydney Council's Family and Children's Services Strategy 2018-24 found that 82% of local respondents considered childcare unaffordable.

While there are many childcare centres within the LGA, many have limited vacancies especially for children aged 0–2 years.

Parents often express a preference for the home atmosphere, and the more personal environment of Family Day Care for their younger children rather than centre-based care where children aged 0–5 years are cared for with a ratio of 1:4. Parents often prefer that siblings can be cared for together rather than being in different childcare rooms.

Child Care Fees and Comparison with Private Childcare

The cost of private centre-based childcare, especially for children aged 0–2 can be up to \$210 per day a day. Local community-based centres (where the staff are employed by parents at the centres), including those in Council owned premises, are approximately \$130 per day. Childcare centres offer permanent care for a full day, as do Family Day Care homes, where the costs and overheads are significantly less, with an average of \$115/day charged.

One perceived limitation of Family Day Care (FDC) is that in the case of illness, holidays etc., children need to be relocated to other Educators within the Scheme. Parents and children however quickly become familiar with this, and with Educators having close knowledge and confidence in fellow Educators, relocations are achieved without fuss and Council's Bank Street Co-ordination unit plays a central role in this, also providing a place where Educators train and socialise together.

One of the strengths of centre-based care is that they offer marginally longer hours (to 6.30 pm) with FDC mostly finishing at 5:30pm, however, there are several that finish at 6 pm. Centre based care also has more funds available for training, occupational therapists, and speech assessments. Family Day Care Educators generally cannot readily access these. Centre-based care offers meals and nappies and FDC historically doesn't, though this is currently changing with several Educators now offering these services.

FDC provides for children to be taken on outings within the neighbourhood and play sessions, creating community connections replicating the experience of the child's own home environment. These excursions are heavily regulated, to ensure the children's safety. Children in childcare centres rarely go on excursions.

A major benefit of the Family Day Care model is the one-on-one assistance and support offered through the Coordination Unit. Home visits are undertaken monthly, which is best practice.

Consistency of Educator (for the children) is an object of the Scheme and is often achieved.

Mission Statement

To provide childcare of the highest quality in a safe, happy and secure environment. Opportunities are provided for individual children to develop their full potential respecting and valuing their abilities, interests, identity and backgrounds.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Co-ordination centre model (incorporating regular home visits) gives transparency and greater certainty over quality of care and child safety.
- Consistency of Educator - promoting stability for the children.
- Quality Service with Educators who are undertaking further vocational training.
- Experienced, qualified staff in the Co-ordination Unit, with years of experience in children's services.
- An attractive Co-ordination Centre and playground for Playgroup breaks down social isolation.
- Provision of family functions, morning teas, end of year party.
- Strong Council support with community networking.
- Affordable compared to the market.
- Provides the option for parents of smaller groups and mixed aged care – something that is not available in centre-based care.
- Provision of flexible model of care to cater for shift workers or part time workers, outside core hours care.
- No Development Application required to operate therefore quick start-up time.

Challenges

- The need to keep levers of income (Parent Levy and Educator Levy) to acceptable levels to avoid losing Educators to other Schemes, which would undermine the viability of North Sydney Council's own Scheme.
- Some dwelling types (large numbers of town houses) not conducive to the provision of family-based care especially as parents sometimes prefer larger properties with a large play area, however, we now incorporate Educators outside the LGA where dwellings are larger.
- Loss of rental properties due to strata subdivision, and Landlord and Owners Corporations' resistance to tenants being Educators.
- Educators do not have the ability to offer resources/ network of available services as in centre-based care. Hours can be limiting and meals often not an option.
- Working parents not always able to get their children to Bank St to attend play sessions.

Number of Educators and Children in Care December 2020

	Educators	Children in care
2020	24	156
2019	23	159
2018	27	175

Current Staff (77 hrs)

- Nominated Supervisor: 35
- Co-ordinator: 21
- Administrative Assistant: 21

Opportunities

- Scope to increase fees (Parent Levy, Educator Levy) while remaining affordable.
- Ability to look at care models for children and to offer flexible care options to cater for a range of parent requirements – such as occasional care, shorter hours, non-core hour care (i.e. after hours and weekend care), preschool-type sessions, of minimum 6 hours. This would also attract more Educators who do not wish to work long hours or combine Family Day Care with other work.
- Use of Bank St premises for one on one support for Educators and meetings with parents. Bank St can also be utilised for workshops and training.
- Continue recruitment of Educators from out of the confines of North Sydney Council, extending to regions within Northern Sydney. This will generate income for the scheme through levies and fees. This will also enable neighbouring areas and Northern Sydney to be a part of a quality scheme, with children, families and Educators enjoying the benefits of a dedicated staff and service provision.



Catchment

The catchment for FDC, based on personal data where there is full disclosure by parents, is the Lower North Shore - with 63% of children in care residing in or having a parent working in the North Sydney LGA itself, a similar mix to that for Vacation Care. This model underpins the financial viability of the Scheme and was imposed by the withdrawal of Commonwealth Funding in 2015. It responds to the mobility of parents' workplaces and of Educator's accommodation needs. The North Sydney Scheme's strong reputation in the Sector, with results for the National Quality Framework generally exceeding expectations, has developed loyalty in both parents and Educators, often triumphing over convenience of location.



Issues in 2019/20 and during COVID-19

In April 2018 the Department imposed a cap for all schemes of a staff to Educator ratio of 1 full time childcare-qualified staff member to 25 Educators, meaning for 26-35 Educators, 70 hours of childcare-qualified staff members would need to be provided. Council currently provides 56 hours staff hours. In addition, a cap was imposed of 25 Educators for the existing Scheme with current staffing

This was challenged by the Nominated Supervisor of the scheme, and successfully overturned, with the Department awarding an increase in the cap to 35 educators. This is a win for the Scheme as it allowed the potential for an additional 10 Educators. However, under Departmental Regulations, an additional 14 hours of staffing would be necessary to increase from 25 to 35 Educators, and subsequently an increase even by one Educator would necessitate an additional 14 hours of staffing, as under Regulations, the figures are not pro rata.

During 2020 there were challenges for FDC due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government introduced free childcare for families, however, only provided Educators with a minimal subsidy amount, as well as Job Keeper supplement. Several Educators were compromised financially, however, despite this, remained registered and were able to provide quality care for children of essential workers. We fortunately also recruited 3 new Educators in July, who joined our scheme, with full quota of children, thus assisting with levy revenue. FDC also had 40 new enrolments in 2020.

During this period, FDC was fortunate to lose only a few families, primarily due to loss of parental employment, and after July, the majority of families who were working from home, returned their children to care. The Nominated Supervisor and Administration Assistant operated during this period, offering mentoring and support to Educators and families at all times. Safety visits were in place, to ensure COVID-19 protocols were adhered to, as well as ensuring the Educators were well supported at all times.

FDC was successful in obtaining 2 sources of funding to assist during this period, namely the Transitional Funding and the LG Covid-19 ECE program payment.

Conclusion

Family Day Care is a valued and affordable option for childcare for parents in North Sydney, and throughout 2020 has seen the recruitment of 3 additional Educators, and 2 returning from maternity, bringing over 20 families to the scheme. The Nominated Supervisor had previously worked with the 3 Educators, (who had come from a neighbouring scheme) and the basis for confidence within the scheme had previously been established. This recruitment was beneficial for Council and effectively raised the scheme by 20% in enrolments.

North Sydney Family Day Care offers sustainable quality childcare, at an affordable cost to families. The Coordination Unit is well established and has developed professional relationships with the Educators, enhancing the smooth operation of the scheme.

The scheme is likely to continue to be a preferred option for families who value the one-on-one relationships that FDC offers, and the close relationships that can be established with the Coordination Unit.

