

20 December 2021

Gowrie SA submission to Treasury

History and credentials

Gowrie SA, formerly the Lady Gowrie Child Centre (Adelaide), opened at the Thebarton site in August 1940. At that time, the Commonwealth Government built Gowrie Centres in each Australian capital city, choosing locations close to industrialised areas in an effort to improve the issues of overcrowding, poverty and poor health outcomes for the communities' children in the years during and following the Second World War.

Over Gowrie SA's long history, the staff at our Thebarton and Underdale services have prided themselves on continual learning. The programs offered for children, parents and early childhood professionals remain true to our original commitment to support the education, care and wellbeing of young children, their families and their educators and promoting understanding in the broader community.

What will make a difference

1. Paid parental leave of up to 6 months
With options to share equally between parents, up to one month jointly, then remainder used as determined by the parents, but consecutively to a total of 6 months or 24 weeks.
2. Early learning as an educational right for all children
Children from six months through to school age are able to access up to three days of fully funded education and care at an accredited early childhood setting. This resolves issues of affordability for all families, with opportunities to utilise the remaining two days as needed for work or choice accessing the current Child Care Subsidy system. This supports access to early learning opportunities in accredited services for all children, while also supporting the government's focus on women returning to work. This makes sense from economic, equity, and gender policy perspectives. This also provides funding certainty for education and care services.
3. Government supported wage increases for early childhood educators in non-government settings. This issue has been ongoing since the last major change in the mid 1990's. The impact of low wages and high levels of casualisation on a female dominated workforce has led to the current workforce shortages. This can only be addressed and funded by government, otherwise families are paying for what would be substantial and unfair fee increases.
4. Increasing qualification levels in the early childhood workforce
Early childhood degree qualified teachers should be employed in all age groups to support improved levels of learning, quality and professionalism. With improvements in wages and conditions, early childhood teacher retention will be supported.
5. Early intervention parenting and attachment programs

Provision of evidence-based programs for families both prior to and within the first two years of the birth of each child. These must be offered by a variety of providers, including not for profit services without a religious base. Funding certainty in the form of five year grants with an evaluative component are essential. At risk families must be able to access both universal and more intensive services in nested models that support development of parenting skills in non-stigmatising ways and settings.

Research

Research focusing on early learning and development has influenced the establishment of Australian policy whereby investments in early learning opportunities for young children have been endorsed by successive governments. Research such as that undertaken by Emerson, Fox and Smith (2015) has been influential in supporting understandings that children's early experiences play a crucial role in their development and learning. Participation in high-quality early childhood services, such as long day care and preschool, is beneficial to children's development and learning, but particularly for disadvantaged children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015; Pascoe & Brennan, 2017). An increasing number of children are accessing long day care and preschool services in Australia, providing important opportunities for early educational intervention.

We hope that these ideas contribute to a deeper focus on and investment in the early years of children's lives.



Lynne Rutherford
Gowrie SA CEO and Program Leaders