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Sent: Wednesday, 15 March 2017 8:40 PM
To: child family. centres
Subject: CFC LEG CO TAS Submission Adam Quarrell

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE TASMANIAN CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

Submission by Adam Quarrell 15 March 2017

Terms of reference

1. The challenges to and benefits of the provision of an integrated collaborative health and well being and early education and care service delivery model.
2. The role of Child and Family Centres in providing early learning to children.
3. The role of Child and Family Centres in providing education and support to families and carers in their parenting role and participation in early learning programs.
4. The outcomes and broader impacts of Child and Family Centres to the communities which they are located in.
5. The level of government funding provided to Child and Family Centres and whether there is a need for more Child and Family Centres in particular communities or locations. (6) Any other matters incidental thereto.

I am writing to make a submission into this inquiry from the perspective of a dad. I would like to address the above Terms of Reference generally by telling you about myself and my family and how our experiences with our local CFC at Chigwell have supported all three of us tremendously.

Our daughter was born four years ago at the end of 2012 and shortly after our family life changed. One would expect this, however at the same time I became very unwell with a rare neurological disease which impacted severely on my everyday life, so much so that I was unable to continue working and have now (very recently) been granted a disability pension. My wife went back to work/study to support us as a family only six months into being a new mum and I became a stay at home dad. This transition was difficult and included many challenges including driving to my wife's work so that our daughter could feed during the day. Like most new parents there was much to learn in the first few months and year, however my health, in particular my mobility and increasing falls were becoming more and more problematic. I adjusted very quickly, to changing nappies on the floor and doing the best I could physically with help from grandparents.

The CFC's Child health nurse was a very early point of contact for us and was an enormous help to us particularly advising my wife about feeding issues as well as our own well being. Our contact with the CFC was limited to these visits for quite some time as I was feeling very nervous about how I would be perceived and what the centre could or would do to support us. The child health nurse was very good at nudging me towards checking out what the centre had to offer and making informal contact with the centre leader and inclusion worker.

The centre staff have always been very welcoming and supportive in a non threatening, inclusive and informal way. This certainly worked for me as I was very nervous about being a dad entering a space I (wrongly) thought was just for mums. Thereafter began a growing number of contacts with parents and grandparents that I could talk to about all manner of things. It was however good to see more and more dads using the space to have informal play with their children and the conversations change slightly.

The centre is run on a drop in basis, meaning I had the freedom to drop in when I could and for as long as I wanted to. Of particular note in those early days for me, was the music/singing program that I could bring my daughter along to, dipping in and out in whenever my health and time away from doctors appointments allowed. Shortly after going to these little sessions my daughter and I formed friendships which have lasted till today. Our attendance also grew as I could see first hand the positive, inclusive and happy environment the CFC was for us both.

During the last four years in particular the centre has been an important, if not essential form of relief from my home surroundings, and has boosted my own sense of worth, confidence and well being. It has provided me personally with the environment and chance to meet new friends at a time when I no longer had contact with work colleagues and when my world had shrunk to either visiting medical people or talking baby speak. It has also had a very positive impact on our daughter, who had been very shy and reserved but began making friends. Going to the centre was also an opportunity for her and I to do something positive together through play/painting/using the slide that was 'normal' and not related to being dropped off or minded whilst I saw yet another medical professional.

The centre has been invaluable in providing a place for our daughter to grow emotionally and physically with many educational opportunities such as painting, making crafty things, reading, counting, running in general as well as some other playgroup sessions run by staff. The staff are very focused on keeping those educational activities and playgroup sessions fresh by changing things up and involving parents along the way.

The largely informal environment of the centre has been great especially for having a quiet place to sit and chat to centre staff or the health nurse about particular issues, such as... "is it normal for my daughter to" questions. When dropping in the staff and volunteers have provided adjunct care when I have needed a break, and laid in my hands a hot cup of tea or coffee all whilst providing a fun and caring place for our daughter to play and grow. The staff and volunteers really do go above and beyond their call of duty in such a positive way.

Not only do the staff and volunteers do an amazing job at the centre but they have gone out of their way to help me with transport to and from home when I have been too unwell to drive, both to the centre to play, but also transport to my fortnightly hospital treatment when needed. The Second bite program has also been beneficial and provided many staples to ourselves as well as other families.

18 months ago I was invited by the inclusion worker to join the Advisory Committee, which again not only bolstered my lagging confidence but gave me a purpose and allowed me to share my first hand experiences with others. I have also since become involved in some parent run art sessions which I have led and which got many people involved from a very diverse cultural background. It is something which I hope to continue again at some stage.

Speaking about community and diversity and inclusion, the centre has a very diverse group of parents and children and one of the greatest strengths of the centre is the community within the CFC itself, which welcomes everyone and includes everyone, no matter your language or background or socioeconomic status. It feels like home and it is a terrific community. I cannot speak more highly of all the staff including volunteers who do an enormous amount of good work and whose job is sometimes particularly stressful dealing with families who

come into the centre in a crisis. This itself should be proof of the trust members of the wider community have in the Centre.

The centre at Chigwell is probably outgrowing itself physically, and could do with more rooms for nursing, for more confidential spaces for situations when staff work with people in domestic violence or other family crises, and in general for storage and play. There is a lack of parking space and though the neighbours must be very used to it, the surrounding streets do become very busy. The park next to the CFC at Chigwell could be used to extend the building, provide parking and support ever growing projects to extend our gardens which both parents and children love to use. There is also scope I believe to expand the role of the CFC slightly to build a place to provide children who are 4/5 with a semi formal/formal space to help with the transition towards easing into kindergarten. This would help in particular my daughter who is very young for her peer group entering kindergarten this year feel more secure.

More importantly, the Child and Family Centres are providing, in my experience, an enormous amount of community wealth, creating well being and healthy families, providing positive educational and play spaces for not only the children but parents and caregivers alike. If there was an investment worthy of continual investment and funding, to benefit not only vulnerable children and families, but other communities and the wider Tasmanian community, then a Child and Family Centre is it.

Many thanks for reading.

Yours Sincerely,
Adam Quarrell.


15 March 2017.