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**3rd October 2019 – Submission to 600 hours of Preschool - Universal Access National Partnership (UNAP)**

Ross Circuit Preschool provides this submission to the independent review into the national funding arrangements that support access by all children in Australia to 600 hours per year of quality early childhood education in the year before full-time school.

Ross Circuit Preschool would like to address question 3 of the review. “Are the current UANP arrangements efficient and effective and how could the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of UANP funding be improved?”

Opportunities to improve access to quality preschool for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage in the year prior to school has been made possible by the funding provided under Start Strong and Universal Access. Ross Circuit Preschool has experienced a steady increase in children enrolling in its Preschool, a significant increase of enrolments of both children with English as a second language and children from vulnerable/low-income families. This steady yearly rise in enrolments since the start of funding reflects the effectiveness and equity of the UNAP funding.

The Lavington area, in which Ross Circuit Preschool sits, has a growing population of families who are new to Albury and Australia. Their ability to access quality preschool for their children prior to starting school is vital for children’s educational outcomes. The most recent Australian Early Development Census Community profile 2018, reveals that from 2015 to 2018 there has been a significant increase in vulnerability in the 5 developmental domains for the Albury community which is 4% higher than the NSW average.

At a local level, Lavington and surrounds, our location, show vulnerability of children in one or more developmental domains, ranking from the highest percentage of children to the 3rd highest. One example is vulnerability in the Physical Health and Wellbeing domain which sits at 18.2%, in comparison to NSW 8.5% and Australia 9.6%.

Ross Circuit Preschool plays a significant role in supporting the wellbeing and physical health of families and children, we can assist these children because they attend Ross Circuit Preschool. Start Strong Funding supports this attendance and we can then provide access, support and referrals to Maternal Child Health Nurses, Allied Health and Early Intervention services. Attendance would not be possible for many families without Start Strong Funding.

The following statistics provide some data that reflects the continuing increase in enrolment of ATSI, disadvantaged/ vulnerable children, children with English as a second language and children from low-income families. These statistics are from Ross Circuit Preschool enrolled families in 2019

* 47 children – Low Income Health Care Card - 38% of children at RCPS families on low income health care cards or pension cards
* 6 children – identified as ATSI - 5% of RCPS families are ATSI
* 21 children – English is 2nd language (or parents speak it but not confidently) equals 17% of families do not speak English at home (this % is increasing)
* Service capacity statistics Ross Circuit Preschool
  + This Graph highlights the increase in service delivery to meet the demands of families over the last 6 years. This has allowed more families in our community to access preschool during this time.

We hope these statistics show the improvement and increase in attendance, of vulnerable/disadvantaged and ATSI children at Ross Circuit Preschool.

An unexpected outcome these attendance statistics is the increase in number of children attending Ross Circuit Preschool needing significant emotional, social, behavioural, cognitive and English as a second language support. This often requires a higher additional child/staff ratio within the classroom, often not funded, these costs therefor need to be covered by the service itself. Charging families additional fees to recuperate theses costs is not appropriate, so any ongoing Start Strong funding must address these additional costs to ensure all children are provided with appropriate support. This will be vital to moving forward.

Ross Circuit Preschool is a not for profit, community-based Preschool and is not able to sustain these additional costs to the delivery of quality programs to children. Funding needs to cover these costs.

We thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the review and hope our input is helpful

Please feel free to contact us if you require any further information

Cathy Northam

Director

Ross Circuit Preschool