

INTRODUCTION

We are a community run preschool based in Hunters Hill, NSW. We have a 75 year history and are deeply embedded in the local community which encompasses the suburbs of Hunters Hill, Woolwich and Gladesville. We provide the preschool education for children typically attending three separate primary schools. We take the view that what we do and how we do it has the opportunity to impact approximately 120 local kids every year. Our preschools is operated only to benefit the students and the community and create a strong sense of identity within the community which facilitates a smooth transition to primary school.

We feel strongly that the Universal access national partnership funding has had a positive impact on our community, families and most of all our students. The funding has seen a small increase in attendance of indigenous students – we are largely limited by our catchment. The most notable impacts on the preschool have been that the annual surprise packet of establishing our funding model and fees for parents has become much more predictable. In addition, prior to the implementation of the funding, keeping the preschool full was quite challenging although we mostly managed. Now however, we have a healthy waitlist comprised of in area and out of area students.

We feel that the UANP has achieved most of the outcomes that it set out to achieve, in that it has increased the number of students attending our preschool, and lowered the cost for families, allowing more students access to this service. We are much more competitive with long day care now. We always took the view that we offered a great educational program but the “care” that we offered was limited in terms of hours and also relatively expensive after childcare rebates. Now we are much more accessible as we have been able to reduce our fees from around \$70/day to around \$40/day for fully funded students and from around \$78/day down to \$69/day for partly funded students. Our preschool is a big believer in the value of commencing education early and we were ecstatic that 3 year olds were included in the program subsequently. This adds depth to our preschool and also helps with community engagement.

In addition to increasing the number of indigenous students, and substantially improving the health of our waitlist we have expanded by 100% the number of students receiving 600 hours of education per annum. Prior to the new funding, we offered half of our cohort 600 hours per annum and operated a 9 AM to 3 PM day. Under the new funding model, we extended our hours for both 2 day and 3 day programs thereby ensuring that all students had access to 600 hours per annum.

The increase in the ability of families to attend has also increased awareness of the need for students to attend a program before school, again increasing attendance. This is vitally important as preschool programs have been shown to significantly assist student in their school transitions.

By increasing hours, decreasing costs and underwriting the sustainability of the preschool we are now able to focus much more on improving educational outcomes than day to day and year to year survival. Our preschool has recently developed a vision to achieve an Excellent rating from ACEQUA and without a long-term funding commitment, we feel that this would not occur. A stronger and more viable preschool has also been good for the community in general because it ensures that within a very small radius at Hunters Hill we have thriving educational institutions.

It is also important to consider that the new model of having ECT's in the preschool classroom means that we must also consider funding programs which encourage new ECT, to study to become an ECT. We have large bodies of research that show a significant correlation between a preschool program that is run by a ECT and improved school transition, we must work on implementing this knowledge, in the form of funding preschools with targeted preschool programs and increasing the access to ECT and special needs ECT programming. No one type of preschool should receive more funding than another type of service, funding should be reliant on a preschool program run by an ECT.

Now it is vital to improve these successful steps in that we review the funding and how funding is distributed to various types of preschools, we strongly suggest that funding and the distribution of funding to families should be consistent. Large LDC should not be receiving a larger portion of funding for preschool programs than other centres, and the percentages that are passed onto families should be of an equal amount.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE UANP POLICY OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS BEEN ACHIEVED

From our perspective, results of the policy and funding have been very positive. In our experience at Hunters Hill Preschool Inc, the following things have been noted:

1. Reduction in fees for all students but particularly for 4 year olds and indigenous students
2. Improvement in waitlists and therefore an ability to keep the preschool full at all times
3. Improvement in the sustainability of the business and therefore greater emphasis is being placed on long-term improvements and planning
4. Delivery of 600 hours per annum to all children
5. Small improvement in the number of indigenous students in the program however we are largely limited by our catchment. We anticipate that this would have been very effective in other catchments.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNAP TARGET AND MEASURE, AND HOW SHOULD DATA BE COLLECTED AND USED

There is no standardised student assessment program that can be used to identify whether the program is providing positive results – quality will always be hard to measure as an output. The best way to make sure that quality outcomes are achieved is to measure inputs which would mean ensuring that an early childhood teacher remains the primary manner for delivery of the program.

The size and breakdown of the student body will be known however. It should be clear from census data how the student bodies have likely skewed towards 4 year olds and the number of indigenous students has increased. Data on the hours of education offered can be relatively easily collected as part of our annual census. We would anticipate that this data should be utilised to assess the effectiveness of the program from time to time.

ARE THE CURRENT UANP ARRANGEMENTS EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE AND HOW COULD THE EFFICIENCY, EFFECTIVENESS AND EQUITY OF UANP FUNDING BE IMPROVED?

We are extremely grateful for the level of Federal funding that has been supplied to get us the current point. However, the opportunity remains for the NSW government to increase their levels of funding. In much the same way as primary schooling can be delivered largely free of charge to parents, it should be the ultimate objective to achieve something similar in preschools so that fees would be negligible. It seems unusual that the state government is responsible for the delivery of primary and secondary schooling but has so little involvement in funding preschool education.

HOW DOES THE PRESCHOOL SYSTEM OPERATE ACROSS STATES AND TERRITORIES AND SETTINGS?

We are concerned at some equity issues with regard to how the funding is applied. It is our understanding that the UA funding that is available to preschools is not provided in an equitable manner. For profit LDCs are not required to pass this funding on to parents and have access to CCS, yet a community based preschool does not have access to CCS and must pass on 75% to parents. This requirement means that the ability to support

preschool overheads is quite limited. We believe that this should be more equitable and that the same principles that have been applied to LDC's should be applied to community run preschools.

President
Executive Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne Evans', is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Wayne Evans

Director
Hunters Hill Preschool

Kate Barnes