



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Family Day Care

SPEECH

Thursday, 23 October 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Thursday, 23 October 2014
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Questioner
Speaker Owens, Julie, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (15:32): I would like to take up a few points that the Assistant Minister for Education just made, and I have to say that they are quite extraordinary. She said that she supports family day care. Well, not in my electorate and not in Western Sydney, where every single family day care service has been told that its funding will be cut—every single one. We know that many of those will be forced to close as a result of it. If that happens to even one family day care service, 1,700 families will be without a place. So how can the minister say that she supports family day care when in all of Western Sydney she is cutting it completely?

She says that, if there are people with genuine disadvantage, there will be family day care services for them. I suggest that the minister get out more. How can she possibly think that there are not casual cleaners in Western Sydney who need the flexibility of low-cost, affordable, quality family day care that starts at five in the morning? I know that a number of family day care providers in my electorate do just that. In fact, some of them even pick the children up at five in the morning because the parents work shiftwork. To assume that that does not happen in Western Sydney and to actually cut the funding from family day care and leave those families in the lurch and then you say you care is quite extraordinary.

A new era in family day care, which the assistant minister spruiks, is actually a loss of family day care. I want to talk about what it is actually worth in my community, because it is not just about affordability and flexibility in time in the area of Parramatta. In the community of Parramatta we also have family day care services that specialise in one language or another. For example, we have a group of Korean family day care educators who speak to their charges in Korean, because in those early years of their life their parents have made the choice as parents to have their children initially speak the language of their great-grandparents. Korean families do that quite frequently. We have women from the African community who have had themselves educated into this field and now operate family day care services in various African languages. We now have a group of 20 Hazara women who have put themselves through training so that they can work in this field and educate young children under the age of four in the language of those children's great-grandparents.

This is an extraordinary thing. We have families in Parramatta who choose to have their children educated through this system because it allows the flexibility. These are not well-off parents. They are quite often working as casual cleaners, as nurses, as aged-care workers and are shiftworkers, who need the flexibility and have found a way to make a choice as parents to ensure that the culture of their children survives through the next generation and the next generation after that. That is a great gift to this nation. As the world becomes smaller, this is a major part of what they do.

We have families in my community who have dietary requirements. I have Hindus who are very strict—do not eat chili, garlic or onion. I have people who are vegetarians and I have people who eat halal. You name it, I have it. We have family day care providers in Parramatta who actually provide the flexibility to match the services they offer with the working hours of the parents and the cultural requirements of the child and the cultural decisions of their parents. I cannot imagine, as we look at Australia moving into the future, that this is the program that you would cut. Of all the things we do that prepare our children for the future world and what the world will look like, I cannot believe that this is the program that you cut.

I cannot believe that you can do this to people who are increasingly casualised, who do not have the certainty of working hours that we used to have, who cannot guarantee that they can get their child and keep their child in a standard nine-to-five five-day-a-week place. This service provides them with certainty. As their working hours shift from day to day, this provides them with the certainty of good quality care for their children. It provides parents with the flexibility they need when it comes to cultural diversity, including dietary requirements. Children who have hearing impairments or visual impairments can actually have family day care service providers who talk to them in Auslan or teach them braille.

This is the service that you want in modern Australia, and this is the service that we want as we prepare our children for the future. This is not the one that you would cut. It actually deserves the support of the minister and it deserves a new era. In Western Sydney it deserves a better one. (*Time expired*)