

INCREASED SUPPORTS FOR ECEC'S IN AREAS OF DISADVANTAGE



Early educators provide a crucial role in caring for young children at the most important time in their brain development. We know that children living in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage often experience higher levels of developmental delay, disability, trauma or other vulnerabilities. Services across the ECEC sector face barriers to meet the specific needs of these children, however, services in areas of disadvantage are often less resourced yet dealing with increased challenges. Greater funding needs to be provided to ECEC services located in geographic areas of disadvantage without additional application processes, in recognition of the specific challenges and needs of the area they serve.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Access to 600 hours of early education and care (ECEC) prior to commencing school is recognised as one of the most effective ways to support a child's development and readiness for school, particularly for vulnerable children. All children deserve access to high-quality ECEC, and while children from disadvantaged areas stand to benefit the most, these children are often the least likely to access ECEC at all, especially a high-quality service.

Research has highlighted the clear correlation between accessing high-quality ECEC and lowering developmental vulnerability in children. However, there is also evidence that attending a low quality ECEC service can potentially cause further damage to children's development. It is therefore imperative that children living in areas of disadvantage have access to high-quality ECEC.

THE PROBLEM

ECEC services in low socioeconomic areas such as Mount Druitt are struggling with the challenges facing the entire sector such as educator shortages and complexities of applying for inclusion funding for children with disabilities. However, services providing education and care located in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage are facing additional challenges as their cohort of children are more likely to have developmental delays or disabilities, or have experienced trauma or other vulnerabilities. These services are essential for supporting some of our most vulnerable children and yet they are often some of the most under resourced to do so, and are repeatedly applying for inclusion funding to support the complex needs of their children.

Services operating in these areas are often smaller community-based or private ECEC centre-based services who have less support and training opportunities than larger chain services. These services have less time to apply for funding or access professional development opportunities as they are focused on keeping children safe day to day. These educators are doing the best for their children, however, with limited resources and additional challenges, the quality ratings of services in these areas are typically lower leaving the most vulnerable children with decreased opportunities to access high-quality ECEC.



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THE HIVE'S DATA & ADVOCACY

The Hive recognise that while supporting access for vulnerable children to ECEC is essential, there needs to be a joint focus on ensuring the services they are attending have the capacity to support their needs and provide a high quality of education and care.

The Hive have provided tailored support for ECEC services in the Mt Druitt area since 2017 through providing multiple funded intensive professional development courses which have evolved into the '2770 Early Childhood Educators' Network'. The ECEN is a bimonthly community of practice that provides targeted professional development based upon the areas of need facing services in Mt Druitt such as navigating assessment & rating, supporting inclusion of children with disabilities, navigating challenging behaviours, as well as providing guidance for services to meet the National Quality Standards.

The Hive also provides informal coaching support to ECEC services throughout Mt Druitt, being a listening ear to the challenges they are facing and supporting them by brainstorming and implementing strategies that will work in their context. 'Specialised Support' is another program The Hive have designed and implemented in collaboration with ECECs to build the capacity of educators to include children with additional needs within their learning environments. This includes onsite coaching from an occupational therapist & speech pathologist, with The Hive supporting each centre to find ongoing funding to sustain the program.

Since The Hive have been intentionally working with ECEC services in 2770, the average National Quality Ratings of the 37 centre based services has increased across the postcode with 19 services 'working towards' in 2017, compared to only 2 in 2024. ECEC services also report increased feelings of confidence in their practice & connection to the broader community.

THE SOLUTIONS & IMPACT

ECEC services in areas of social disadvantage require greater resourcing, funding and professional development opportunities in recognition of the increased challenges they face to increase their capacity. This is automatic funding provided to centres operating in these areas in addition to inclusion funding that can be applied for specific needs for individual children.

State and Federal governments should provide incentives for ECEC services to open services in low socioeconomic areas to decrease the 'childcare deserts' and entice larger providers to enter the area.

If ECEC services in disadvantaged areas are well equipped to support the children within their communities, this could reduce the developmental delays and social vulnerabilities in children when starting school and have a follow through positive impact for their lives. Investing in the early years is the best 'bang for buck' for early intervention, and ensuring that the centres welcoming vulnerable children are well equipped will make the biggest difference.

CONTACT US

To learn more and to help us make this change please contact:
hive@unitedway.com.au

