Case Study: Bright Futures Family Day Care, WA

‘... the aim in the end, is to be able to make the families manage on their own. We don’t want to be involved forever, and we want them to be able to sort of stand on their own two feet at some stage.’

Bright Futures Family Day Care in Perth operates a combined in-home care service and a family day care service used by at-risk children for short and long periods including extended hours and overnight care.

As many of the families are on the poverty line, they cannot afford to pay for the ECEC services.

‘So we have to work with agencies to provide support letters in order for us to be able to apply for Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB).’ Sarah says

Some families, particularly in the family day care services, use Jobs Education Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) to help them study, though even the co-contribution families need to pay is a barrier for low income families.

‘The barriers to offering flexible services include the payment system, particularly the process in applying for in-home care funding through the SCCB,’ says Sarah.

‘If you can just imagine a scenario, you’ve got a mum that’s really unwell, she has a child with a disability, and every 13 weeks not much changes for that family, especially when that child is so palliative.’

Before and after school placements are the greatest unmet demand for family day care places that the service has been allocated, particularly for children with a disability. ‘The availability of early childhood educators willing to take on a split shift arrangement is the greatest issue,’ Sarah says.

Educators who offer before and after school care also provide transport services as public transport is often not available.

In-home care educators also work with the family around their needs. At an initial meeting the educator meets the children and families, assesses the safety risks, the care

Bright Futures Family Day Care is a local, government-sponsored in-home care (IHC) and family day care (FDC) service in Orelia, WA, on Perth’s Southern outskirts. Orelia is a low socio-economic area, with a significant Aboriginal population.

Manger, Trish Reah, and In-Home Care Coordinator, Sarah Giles, who coordinate the in-home care service say that many of the families that access the services are jobseekers or families receiving welfare payments.

The service has close relationships with mental health and other health services as well as child protection. Many of the families that access Bright Futures FDC and IHC have been referred on by these services. Bright Futures also makes referrals back to these services to provide extra support for these families.

‘The working sector is not the main, I suppose, influx of our flexibility. Our flexibility is for the families that have different needs,’ Sarah says.
that’s needed, and asks about what their life really looks like—daily routines, any special needs, and what would help them the most. Sarah explains;

You know often they’re quite specific. They’ll say ‘Look, I just need four hours on a Tuesday and four hours on a Friday so that I can go to my counselling session and someone is caring for my child’, children, whatever it might be. Some families need a lot, some families need a little. If there’s an agency involved we work with them as well and sort of talk to them about what they feel is needed. And then what we then do is try and match the family with an educator that is suitable, available, has the skills that can manage that family, is flexible to initially offer what’s needed and what’s been identified as needed but then maybe reduce as time goes by, so that we give this family time to sort of adjust and be self-sufficient

Primarily the in-home care service caters for parents or children with a disability and families with more than three children under school age.

According Trish, the key to the success and flexibility of the program at Bright Futures is the close links between the family day care service and the in-home care service.

‘The nice things about these two programmes, I think, that works really well, is that as families are transitioning out of in-home care because they no longer [need it] ... perhaps [families] are starting to not meet the criteria anymore because mum’s getting better, or wants to go back and work or study, or gets on her feet a little bit, well then we’ll transition them in to family day care,’ Trish says.

In WA, all of the in-home care providers currently offer family day care which provides greater flexibility between the services.

Some families are paired with several educators to help meet the needs of the families. In one instance, Sarah recounts that three educators were helping one family to ensure that the work/life balance of the educators was maintained.

‘We’re pretty clear on not burning out, not doing too much, and if we feel that it’s too much for one person we maybe make suggestions around splitting the care and perhaps using family day care as an option for some of the care,’ Sarah says.

Regular home visits are used by the service to ensure that the arrangements are working well for educators and for the children and families.

‘I think the other thing is … to support the educator when the family may not do quite the right thing. Because obviously there are certain safety standards and things in that home we have to make sure are maintained. [For example] … the educator is concerned because there’s a dog that’s a worry, or unsafe things left out and they are not finding that they’re managing to get the parent to hear what they’re saying. Well we can support them in that because that’s pretty clear,’ Sarah says.

Trish says the greatest improvement to the in-home care programme would be to make it more flexible to care for children whose parents are not working, and only need care for one overnight a week or a fortnight.
‘You know I can think of one family I’ve got now and that’s exactly what they want. They want a Friday night and a little bit of time on a Saturday or Sunday or something and that meets their needs and solves the stress in that family and allows them to keep on going,’ Trish says.

Currently, only a few families require late evening care, with some families where children have a disability requiring overnight care a few nights of the week. Educators often work during the early hours of the morning to cater for parents that are nurses or doing other shift work. Educators also often change their weekly routine for the family and what their needs are.

‘The educators are quite flexible, so one week it might be Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 5.00 am to 8.30 am, getting a couple of kids to school. The next week it might be Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, but it might be the afternoon shift until 10.00 pm,’ Sarah says.

For working families, the cap of 50 hours CCB is often not an issue and if more care is needed an extension can be sought from the Department of Education.

‘As an example, we had a parent that fell and broke her leg. And they already had 50 hours but they needed extra because the mum couldn’t weight bear on her leg for six weeks. So we just gave [the department] a bit of extra evidence from the doctor, and that was fine. They allowed us to have 80 hours.’

However, the cap of 24 hours for families not reaching the child care benefit work training study test can prove to be a barrier for the family day care services.

‘Especially when you’ve got sessions of care, and educators are charging for ten or nine [hours] or something, so they only get two days ... some of our educators will charge eight hour days, then [families] can have three days.’

**Tips**

- Think about the links that can be made with other early childhood services to meet the needs of families if one type of service is not meeting their needs.
- Make links with community services and organisations to support families based on their needs.
- Build strategies to support the work life balance of educators and manage workloads, especially with extended hours care.

For more information and resources on flexibility in early childhood services, please visit www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-work/early-childhood-flexibility-practices-patterns/.