Case Study: Choices Family Day Care, QLD

Choices Family Day Care in Ipswich provides extended hours ECEC services to the Ipswich Community.

Choices Family Day Care is a small ECEC provider with approximately 70 educators serving the community of the greater Ipswich, Springfield and Brisbane areas. It caters for approximately 500 children each week.

Service director, Annette Steley says that ‘the service caters for a large cross-section of the community. Families in our area include many with diverse needs’. Annette says that through offering flexible family day care, ‘we are able to meet the long hours of care and the flexible needs of these families’. Family Day Care is the only care option for parents requiring care outside of the conventional hours of 6.00 am to 6.00 pm offered by centres.

‘Many Families in our area need flexible care. Many travel long distances commuting into Brisbane for work. A lot of families live in outlying areas such as Jimboomba or Fernvale etcetera, and travel into the city, which is an hour and a half to two hours each way,’ Annette says. ‘We also have many shift workers who need flexible hours of care.’

Families requiring care may be working at local hospitals, gaols and the local meat works. Shifts can include overnight, early or late shifts. Care outside of normal hours is often required. An early start at the meat works could mean a drop off for the children at 4.00 am, Annette says, and early childhood educators work with parents to meet their care needs around their rosters.

‘At present we have a majority of working parents, many of which are working rosters. Some of them also work Saturday mornings,’ Annette says.

Families may access the service for the first time through contacting the coordination unit or family day care educators directly. Many of the individual educator’s details are listed on the website www.careforkids.com.au.

‘Care for Kids is very popular with parents. Parents can access the site to view all the educators in the area, see who’s got vacancies, then they are able to contact the educator direct. The educator asks the family to ring Choices to arrange a time for an enrolment interview.’

Coordinators assist in placing a child in care, and will then monitor and support the ongoing care of the child with the chosen educator.

‘Our service is a not-for-profit company committed to the protection, safety and wellbeing of children from all cultures and family backgrounds. We strive to meet the flexible hours of care needed by all families. Children are nurtured and cared for in a natural learning environment, learning through play and exploration. Our service has a huge demand for “flexible care” from parents in this area. Some educators work closely with community organisations such as disability services, through providing care for families with children with special needs. Disability services and families really appreciate the assistance offered in the form of the overnight care.’

Family day care educators offer emergency care to children with special needs/circumstances. Annette says that about half a dozen educators have put their hand up to offer this special care in emergency situations. We
look closely at the care that’s needed, and match this with educators that have vacancies. ‘It’s usually certain ladies that have had experience in the special needs area that are available to provide this valuable service to our community’, Annette says.

The service keeps track of individual workloads of educators and closely monitors their work life balance. This usually isn’t an issue, because each educator has an individual plan which helps to guide their direction and includes professional development and training.

The service has a fee charging policy which allows educators to set their own fees within a recommended service fee range.

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