



Families at the Centre research project
Insights into child care and early education:
Caboolture



Social Policy Research Centre

SPRC

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Thank you

We are very grateful to the families who gave their time to talk to us and share their stories, and to the organisations and people who helped us get in touch with families for this research.

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What is this about?

This is about families in Caboolture with young children aged up to 5 years. We were interested in what kind of education and care services these families want for their children, how they like the services they are getting, or why they are not using these services. We wanted to find out how to make services work in the best way possible.

Therefore we did a research project in 6 neighbourhoods around Australia, including Caboolture. We talked to families about their early education and care services: the services that they use or not, whether they like their situation, where they find information, whether they get any payments from government, what good care and education means to them and what would help them with getting the care or education they want.

This booklet says what we found out in Caboolture.

Who did the research?

We are from the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. The researchers are Deborah Brennan, Jennifer Skattebol, Fiona Williams, Christiane Purcal, Elizabeth Adamson, Megan Blaxland, Bridget Jenkins, Trish Hill and Saul Flaxman. We did the research together with several early childhood education and care organisations: Early Childhood Australia, Gowrie Queensland, Gowrie New South Wales, Gowrie South Australia, Mission Australia and Brotherhood of St Laurence. These organisations and the Australian Research Council (ARC Linkage Project 100200297) paid for the research.

Why was the research done?

We wanted to find out what kinds of services families need so we can tell governments and service providers about it. Each family with young children is different. Some may want early education or care services, some not, some may want services for a few hours each week, others for several days. For some it may be difficult to find the right services or to get government child care payments.

We were particularly interested in families on a lower income, as it may be harder for them to pay for the services they want.

Where was the research done?

The research was done in 6 neighbourhoods in different parts of Australia: Caboolture in Queensland, Marrickville in NSW, Orange in NSW, Fitzroy in Victoria, Dandenong in Victoria and Elizabeth Grove in South Australia. Some of these neighbourhoods were in the inner city, some in the outer suburbs, and some in the country. We wanted to find out what care and education services people in different kinds of neighbourhoods wanted.

How was the research done?

In each neighbourhood we talked to around 20 families about the care and education of their young children. We talked to the mothers and fathers, grandparents and aunts. People volunteered to take part in our research, and we gave them \$50 for their costs and to say thank you. We spoke with them for about one hour each. Their information remains confidential, that is we will not tell anyone who said what.

We met people at various places in the neighbourhood and through early childhood and family services, at playgroups, libraries and neighbourhood centres. We also talked to early childhood workers and service providers in the neighbourhoods.

We talked to 31 families in Caboolture in April and May 2012.

What does this booklet say?

This booklet says what we found out in Caboolture. It starts with some information about the town, the kinds of people who live there, and the care and education services available in Caboolture. It then describes what kinds of families we spoke to in Caboolture and, most importantly, what they told us.

How can I find out more about the research?

You can find out more about our research by contacting:

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You are welcome to distribute this brochure to other people.
An electronic copy is available at: www.sprc.unsw.edu.au.

About Caboolture

Where it is and how it developed

Caboolture is a town 44 kilometres north of Brisbane and 15 kilometres from the coast. It is in the Moreton Bay Regional Council area.

The name Caboolture comes from the Aboriginal word 'Kabultur', which means 'place of the carpet snake'. The Kabi Aboriginal people were the first inhabitants. White settlers arrived in the 1840s, cutting timber and farming vegetables, sugar cane and cattle. The town of Caboolture was established in 1867 as a trading centre and a stopover point for coaches. It serviced both the farmers in the area and the miners who travelled from Brisbane to the goldfields near Gympie.

Caboolture remained a small town until the 1980s but has grown quickly since then. People moved here from Brisbane because housing is more affordable than in the city and they can commute to work in Brisbane. Travel time is less than an hour along the freeway or the electric rail line. Caboolture is now regarded as part of the Brisbane urban area.

Most people live in single family homes in new suburbs, which were built in and around Caboolture since the 1980s. There are no public housing estates. Low income families get rent assistance to live in privately rented homes. Bus lines between the suburbs are not well developed so that many people use cars to get around. There are small shopping areas in central Caboolture, but the main shopping centre is a few kilometres to the south in Morayfield.

The Moreton Bay Regional Council has recently built a modern community hub in the heart of Caboolture. This contains a library, art gallery, and learning and business centre.

The people of Caboolture

Caboolture is growing fast. About 81,000 people lived here in 2011, up from 63,000 in 2006. Caboolture City includes the town of Caboolture itself, the suburbs of Bellmere, Bracalba, Burpengary, Burpengary East, Caboolture South, Elimbah, Moodlu, Morayfield, Rocksberg, Upper Caboolture and Wamuran.

Most people are from a white Australian or British background, and about 3 per cent of the residents are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. A relatively small percentage, about 5 per cent, come from a non-English speaking country. Among them, the largest immigrant groups are Filipino (563 people), German (340) and South Korean (191). Smaller groups come from the Netherlands, India, Italy, Malaysia and many other countries. Caboolture is a preferred location for new migrants. Many arrived in the last 5 years, often because housing is affordable and there are others from the same country.

Compared with the entire Moreton Bay Regional Council area, people in Caboolture City have lower incomes overall and are more likely unemployed, fewer have a university degree or are managers, professionals or clerical staff. More people work as labourers or trades people.

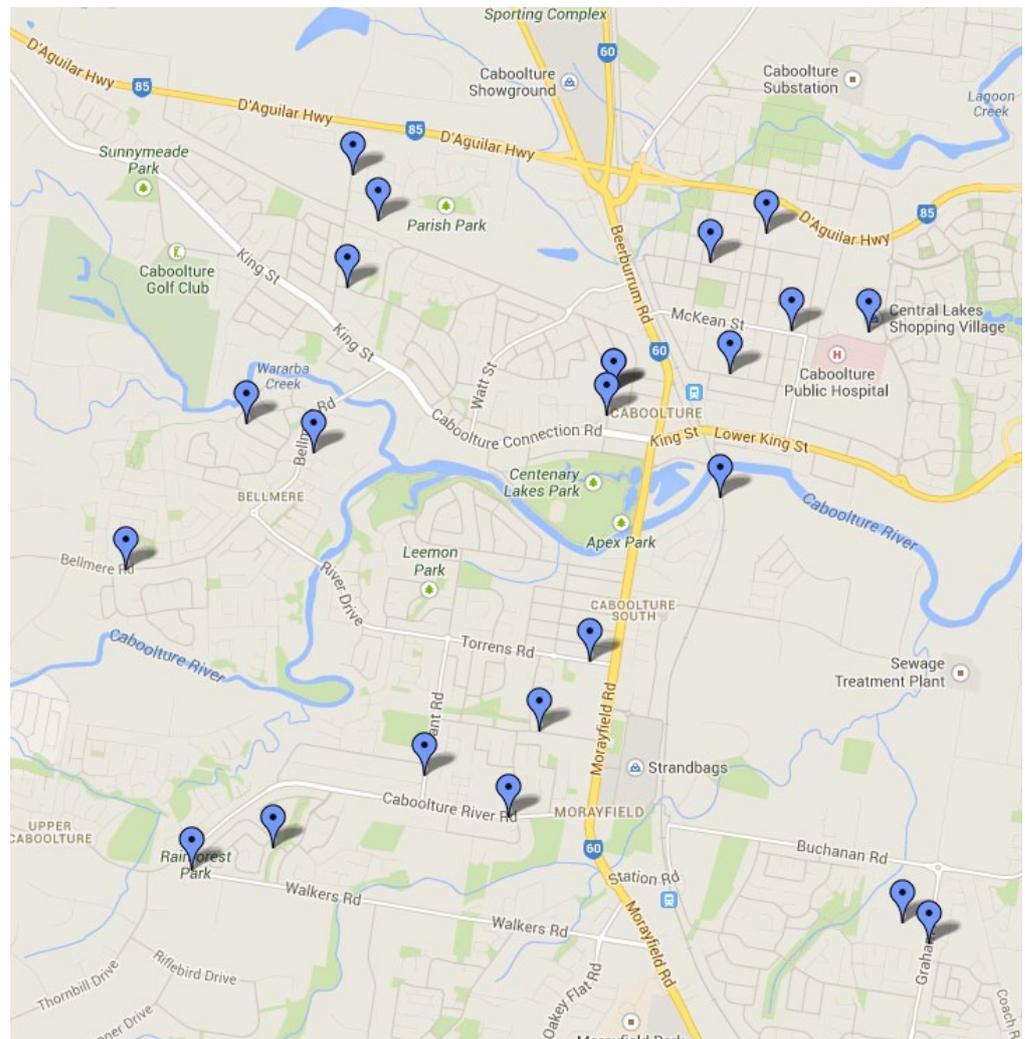
Caboolture seems attractive to families. Nearly one in two households (48 per cent) is a couple with children, and a further 15 per cent of households are single-parent families. Almost every family lives in a house, and there are few apartments. Homes are more affordable than closer to Brisbane, and more than half of all families (59 per cent) in Caboolture own their home or are paying off a mortgage.

One in three families is renting, among them most of the new residents. Rents are more affordable than in large cities, and most families pay under \$375 a week. Low income families get rent assistance from government or help with finding affordable housing, for example through the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

Child care and early education in Caboolture

There is a different mix of services in each state. In Queensland, almost all children attend the Preparatory (Prep) Year before they start school year 1. Of the younger children, 44 per cent go to long day care, family day care or occasional care, and another 31 per cent attend kindergarten, which is also called kindy or pre-prep.

MAP 1: CABOOLTURE CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION SERVICES



CABOOLTURE

Three out of four long day care centres in Queensland are privately managed, while around 85 per cent of preschools and family day care services are community managed. About 44 per cent of children attend long day care or family day care, and 31 per cent go to kindergarten. Some children go to both. The Queensland government helps low income families with the cost of child care and early education through the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme (QKFS), and the Australian government provides Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate for families who use approved long day care, family day care and out of school hours care. Other programs bring extra services to disadvantaged areas and Indigenous children, for example the Early Years Centres, Children and Family Centres and Bound for Success programs.

Caboolture has an Early Years Centre, where children and their families can find child care and early education, help with parenting, and health services in one place. There are several playgroups, a pre-kindy, family support, and baby and child health drop-in clinics provided by the hospital. The Early Years Centre also provides outreach services, mainly supported playgroups, in other suburbs like Morayfield and Narangba.

The Caboolture Neighbourhood Centre offers multicultural playgroups and general family and community support. Families have a variety of child care and early education options. Apart from the playgroups, there are more than a dozen long day care centres, both private and community run, in central Caboolture, plus family day care providers and services offering kindergarten programs.

About families with young children in Caboolture

Among the 80,855 people living in the Caboolture area, 6,460 (8 per cent) are children aged 0-4. Here are some of the things the Census tells us about the 0-4 year old children in Caboolture:

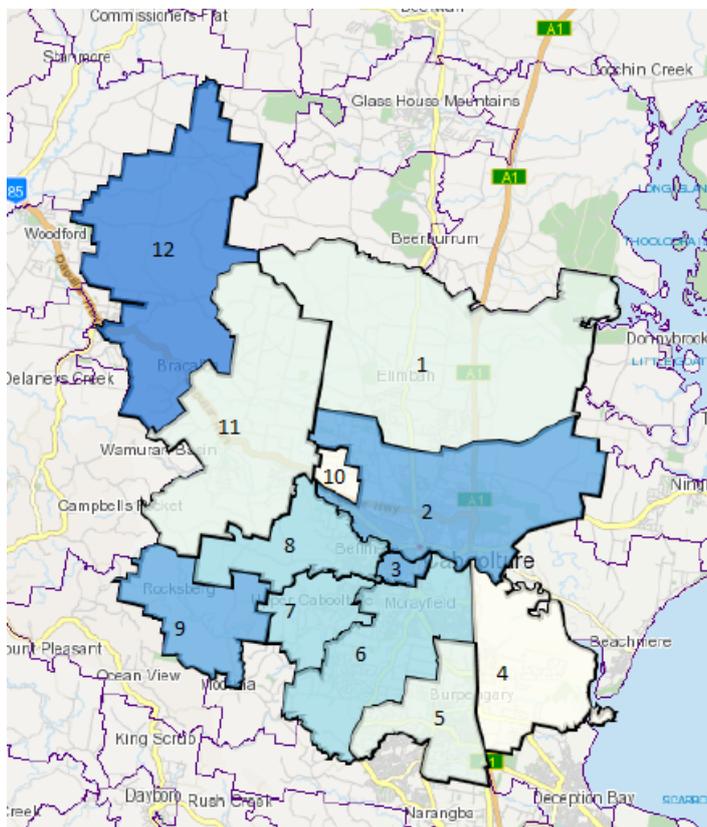
- 1338 have one or both parents born overseas
- 394 are identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both
- 1,466 live with a single parent
- 1,569 live in families with a weekly income under \$800
- 2,730 live in houses that their family owns (either fully or with a mortgage)
- 3,306 live in families who are renting
- 187 live in families who pay \$375 or more per week in rent
- 5,984 live in a house
- 133 live in a flat, unit or apartment
- 4,460 have one or both parents employed

Map 2 shows that in the Caboolture area, central Caboolture has a relatively high proportion of families with young children who live on a low income, between 31 and 40 per cent. Caboolture South and Rocksberg have similar proportions, while Bracalba has more.

MAP 2: LOW INCOME FAMILIES IN CABOOLTURE

Percentage of children aged 0 to 4 years in low income families, Caboolture area

1. Elimbah
2. Caboolture
3. Caboolture South
4. Burpengary East
5. Burpengary
6. Morayfield
7. Upper Caboolture
8. Bellmere
9. Rocksberg
10. Moodlu
11. Wamuran
12. Bracalba



We can find out about the child care and education services that families in Caboolture use by looking at the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), which surveys children in their first year of school. It tells us that more than 80 per cent of them were in child care or early education programs before they went to school: 40 per cent went to long day care, 40 per cent to preschool, and 3 per cent to family day care. About 10 per cent were looked after by a grandparent or other relative.

About the families who talked to us

In Caboolture 31 people talked to us about child care and early education for their children. Of these conversations, 12 were with one person, and the others talked to us in a small group of 2 to 3 people.

We met most of the families through different early childhood and family support services: the Early Years Centre and the Neighbourhood Centre in Caboolture, a community centre in Morayfield, and Playgroups Queensland. The families lived mainly in single family homes in new housing estates around Caboolture, including Central Lakes Estate (in the east), Pumicestone (north), Bellmere (west) and Morayfield (south). We also interviewed one family who lived in a caravan park. Almost everyone said they had moved to the area because housing was more affordable than closer to Brisbane.

Here is some information about the people who talked to us:

- there were 27 women and 4 men
- 11 people were under 26 years old, one person was over 40, and the others were in-between
- 11 people were born overseas, mainly in the UK and New Zealand
- 4 people spoke a language other than English: 3 Dinka, 1 Visaya and Tagalog
- 1 was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- 6 were single parents
- 22 people had either one or two children, the others had more, up to 5
- 14 had a TAFE or vocational qualification, 1 had a uni degree
- 14 were at home, 9 were in a paid job and 3 were studying
- 7 families lived on under \$600 a week, another 7 on \$600 to \$800 a week
- 15 families got most of their income from Centrelink, the others from a job
- 23 lived in private rental, 1 in public housing, and 7 had a mortgage

What the families told us

Each family is different. They have different stories, different lives, different opinions, different experiences with the child care and education they use, and different ideas about what they would like. We don't have the space here to report everything the 31 families in Caboolture told us. Therefore we briefly describe some of the topics relating to child care and early education that they talked about, important concerns they mentioned and where they felt things were going well. Each topic is explained with a quote from one of the people we talked about. We have left the quotes anonymous so that people can't be identified.

Many families use child care and education services

Many families who spoke to us have their children enrolled in a child care or early education service, like long day care, family day care, or kindy. Kids rarely go full-time, but most go for one or two days a week. On the other days, many parents attend playgroups or mothers' groups together with their kids.

"He goes to day care one day a week. I'm thinking of maybe putting him in an extra day. ... And I come to this playgroup with him."

Early education is important

Many parents want their kids to go to child care or kindy so they start learning early. This includes social skills like playing with other children, sharing, having a routine and being polite. It also means learning academically so they will have a good start in school. This is especially important to new migrants, who want their children to learn English and to adapt to Australian culture.

"She does need to learn different things that she wouldn't learn at home as well."

Parents like spending time with their kids at home

Often, mothers stay at home with their babies because they find it important to bond and spend time together, and for the child's development. As babies become toddlers, they often start going to child care part-time. Most mothers enjoy the mix of spending some days with their children and going to work part-time or having time off to rest and do their household chores.

"I'd rather spend time with her. I'd rather teach her how to walk and talk and stuff than other people doing it."

Families in new estates need cars to get around

People who live in the new suburbs around Caboolture say that there are few buses. They need a car to take their kids to child care, playgroup or kindy. But many families don't have a car or their partner uses the car to drive to work. The new migrant women from non-English speaking countries who spoke to us don't have a driver's licence. Many families can't use child care or education service because they don't have transport.

"When I've got my licence then it's better so I'll take her to child care then."

Parents share the family car

Sometimes, when there is only one car in the family, people arrange it so that the father drops off the kids at child care and maybe the mother at work before driving to work himself. But this depends on the opening hours of the child care centre. One family told us the father works from 6 am to 6 pm, and child care is not open at those times.

"I had my partner most of the time, he'd drive me to work and take [our daughter] to day care ... Otherwise I pretty much wouldn't have been able to work."

Public transport helps

There are several bus routes in the Caboolture area, and people who don't have a car during the day like using them to go to the shops or to take their children to parks, to the swimming pool, or to playgroup and child care. They find catching the bus works well. Another family without a car uses a free bus from a child care centre that picks up the kids and drops them back home.

"I'd get a bus to the train station and then I'd walk from the train station to the [child care centre]. In total it'd take me probably 45 minutes."

People are worried about safety

Several people told us they feel unsafe in their neighbourhood. They are worried about crime, people fighting on the street and police cars driving by. Some said they don't think it's a good place to bring up children. Others felt that they live in a safe suburb but other places in the area are frightening.

"My area is pretty good. Some areas around here – I don't even walk through with my kids. It's too unsafe. I'm in a good area so I'm happy."

Affordable housing draws families to the area

Most of the families who spoke to us moved to Caboolture within the last few years. They have come, for example, from Brisbane or Sydney, or they are migrants from other countries. Many came when they started a family and needed a bigger place to live. Caboolture was attractive to them because there is affordable housing. Some families were able to buy a house in one of the new estates, others found rental accommodation that was cheap enough or subsidised by government.

"We were pretty excited to move up here. It was a lot more affordable for us because we were only just newly married. We couldn't afford to buy a house in Sydney."

Early years services help people to make friends

Many of the families who talked to us moved to Caboolture in the last couple of years and want to make friends. Even people who have lived in Caboolture for long find that once they have children they don't have much in common with old friends. They all find that playgroups and other children's services help them to meet families in the area who also have small children. There are groups specifically for fathers to meet each other and spend some time with their children. Families find that the people who run the early years services are friendly and accepting.

"I've only been in Caboolture two years now. I have a great network of friends that I've met through playgroup ... we keep in contact on a weekly basis."

Families help each other with looking after the kids

With many families being new to the area, they don't have their parents or siblings close by to help with the children. Families in Caboolture help each other in various ways. Several people told us that they have friends with cars who take their kids along to child care or playgroup. Others have friends who look after each other's children while the parents go out. Parents like these arrangements because they feel their children are safe. One family told us they are close to their neighbours, and older couple who are very involved with the kids. Others who live in the same street have formed their own mothers' group so they can chat and the kids can play together.

"I have had her boys here while her and her husband went out on special occasions. So, yes to have that support ... it's much easier than a babysitter because you know who's looking after your children."

Child care and work decisions are related

Many mothers want to work, but they need to find flexible employment that fits around the hours of child care they can get and any emergencies. Also, child care can be expensive, so they weigh up whether increased work income might lower government support for the family and for child care costs. Mothers told us they go back to work later, only work part-time, or share parenting with their partners.

"I don't want to get too old and not have any kind of a career ... I was looking at night shift work, because then my husband can be at home with the babies."

Child care can be expensive

Even with government payments, some families struggle to afford child care and education, especially those on a very low income. Some mothers who work say that most of their income goes in child care fees. To deal with the cost, some reduce their child care days, and others look for cheaper child care centres or preschools in the area. Families find it very difficult when they have to pay the full child care fees up front and can only claim the government rebate at the end of term.

"I get child care benefit. It's still a struggle when you're on a low wage because it's quite expensive."

Disability funding helps

Eight parents who talked to us have a child with additional needs, such as Asperger syndrome, autism, anxiety or speech delay. For some it has been difficult to get a diagnosis and to access the government funding they are eligible for. Child and family services have helped by referring parents to specialists. Many families get therapy services like speech, occupational and physiotherapy. They find them very helpful, however there are often long waiting lists for Medicare-funded services. Some children attend supported playgroups for children with disability or mainstream child care centres. Most families have not been able to find suitable child care places; specialist early intervention programs are available, but much too expensive. Supported playgroups help the children as well as the parents, who understand each other's worries. Parents are very concerned about their kids' future, as disability support funding stops when the children are in primary school.

"I channel all my funding into OT [occupational therapy] and psychology. I get the OT and psych to teach me what they're doing so that when all the funding runs out and when we can't be doing it on a fortnightly basis like we are, at least I can do some things at home and I know what I'm doing."

References

The information in this booklet came from the families and service providers who talked to us and:

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