



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



Social Policy Research Centre

SPRC

Social Policy Research Centre

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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 Elizabeth Grove with young children aged up to 5 years. We were interested what kind of education and care services these families want for their children, and how they like the services they are getting. 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 Elizabeth Grove. 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 Elizabeth Grove.

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 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: Elizabeth Grove in South Australia, Marrickville in NSW, Orange in NSW, Caboolture in Queensland, Fitzroy in Victoria and Dandenong in Victoria. 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 of the 6 neighbourhoods we talked to 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 12 families in Elizabeth Grove in March 2013.

What does this booklet say?

This booklet says what we found out in Elizabeth Grove. It starts with some information about the suburb, the kinds of people who live there, and the care and education services available in Elizabeth Grove. It then describes what kinds of families we spoke to in Elizabeth Grove 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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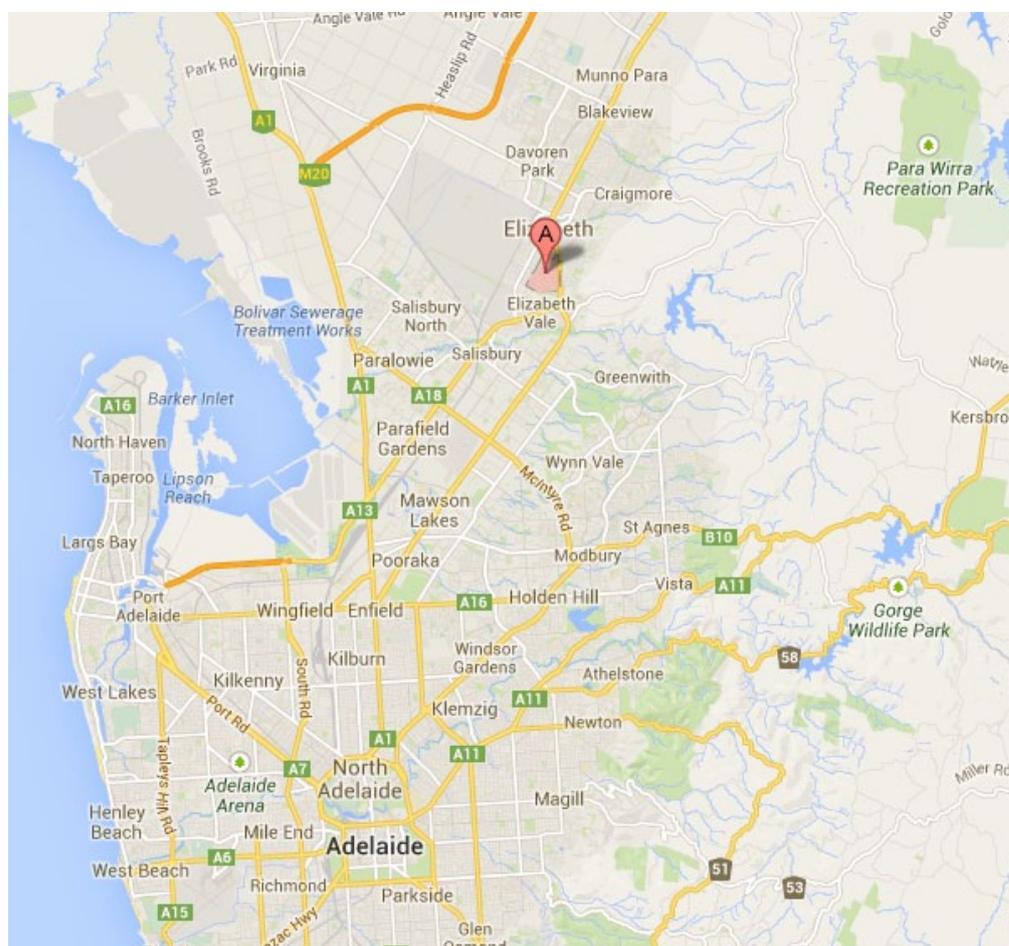
You are welcome to distribute this brochure to other people.
An electronic copy is available at: www.sprc.unsw.edu.au.

About Elizabeth Grove

Where it is and how it developed

Elizabeth Grove is a suburb in Adelaide's north, about 25 kilometres north of Adelaide's CBD. The suburb is in the Salisbury Council area.

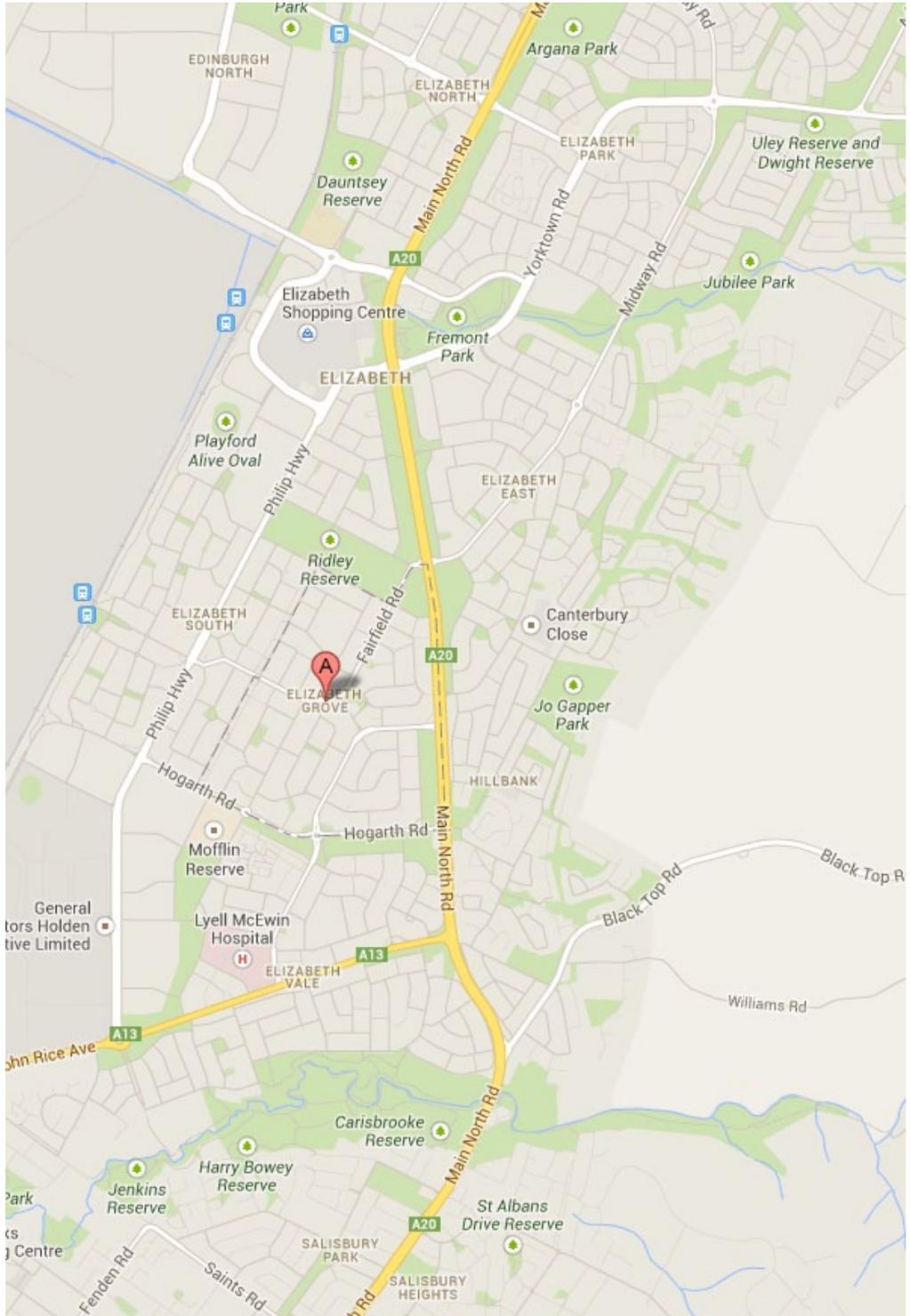
MAP 1: ELIZABETH GROVE'S LOCATION IN ADELAIDE



Prior to European settlement in the mid-1850s the area was inhabited by the Kaurna people. Munno Para, now part of the City of Playford, was established in 1853. Elizabeth was established in 1955, and in 1997 amalgamated with Munno Para to form the City of Playford. The City of Playford was named after the state premier between 1938 – 1965 who was involved in the development of the area. A housing development program was introduced in the 1950s to assist with the State's economic development. Elizabeth was a carefully planned development, and it was the first suburban area within the City of Playford.

Most residences are single family homes, and in recent times housing estates have been developed.

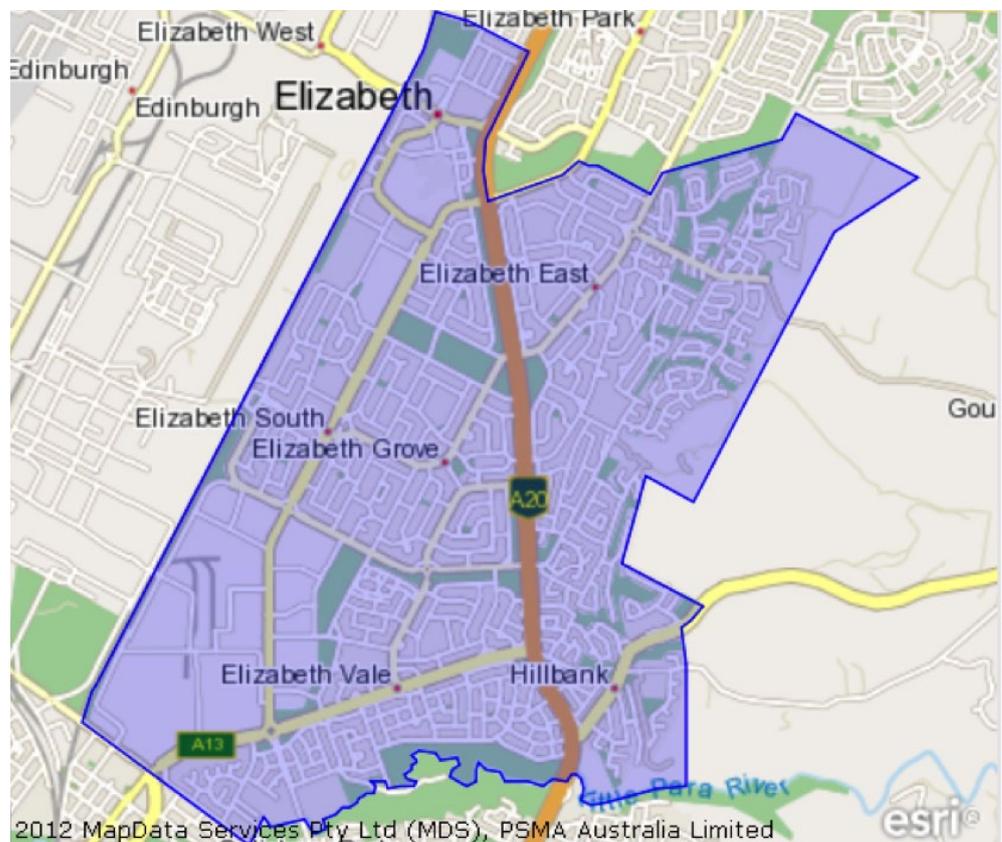
MAP 2: THE SUBURB OF ELIZABETH GROVE



The people of Elizabeth Grove and neighbouring suburbs

Elizabeth Grove is a suburb within the Statistical Local Area (SLA) of Elizabeth, which includes the eight suburbs of Elizabeth Grove, Elizabeth Downs, Elizabeth South, Elizabeth East, Elizabeth North, Elizabeth West, Elizabeth Park and Elizabeth Vale.

MAP 3: BOUNDARIES OF ELIZABETH (STATISTICAL LOCAL AREA) INCLUDING ELIZABETH GROVE



Elizabeth is part of the City of Playford, which extends to the north and west of Adelaide, includes 35 suburbs and covers an area of approximately 350 square kilometres. In 2011, over 25,000 people lived in Elizabeth, which was an increase since 2006. Almost 70 per cent of the people living in Elizabeth were born in Australia. The next highest country of birth is England, at 10.4 per cent and Scotland, at 1.5 per cent.

There is a high level of housing mobility in Elizabeth. More than 35 per cent of residents moved between 2006 and 2011, mostly from nearby suburbs or elsewhere in South Australia. This may be a feature of the high proportion of public housing in Elizabeth, with over 40 per cent in 2011 reporting their rent was paid to a state or territory housing authority.

There were 2,782 families with at least one child under 15 years in 2011 and, of these families, over 50 per cent were sole parent families. This is higher than surrounding suburbs, where approximately 37 per cent of all families with children under 15 years are sole parent families. It is also much higher than the neighbouring Salisbury Council, where less than 30 per cent are sole parent families.

Employment rates in Elizabeth are relatively low compared to surrounding suburbs and state and national figures. Less than 50 per cent worked full-time, 28 per cent part-time. The unemployment rate in Elizabeth is 15.5 per cent, which is higher than the neighbouring LGA of Salisbury at 7.3 per cent and significantly higher than the state average of 5.7 per cent.

Housing, public infrastructure and amenities in Elizabeth and surrounding suburbs are quite dispersed, and as a result cars are the preferred means of transport, with the large majority of people using a car to get to work. Buses to the north, to Gawler, and to Adelaide in the south are also an option. Most people working in Elizabeth live within the City of Playford boundaries. Over 20 per cent of residents in Elizabeth also work in Elizabeth, and another 25 per cent elsewhere in the City of Playford or in neighbouring Salisbury. Approximately 7 per cent reported commuting to Adelaide for work.

Child care and early education in Elizabeth Grove

There is a different mix of child care and early education services in each state. South Australia has a high proportion of school-based provision preschools, and a strong focus on integrated services through Children's Centres. Over 95 per cent of preschool services are government managed, with the remainder community managed. Among long day care, over half are community managed, over 40 per cent are privately managed and the remaining 4 per cent are government managed. Family Day Care used to be fully government managed, however since 2012 some private schemes have been established.

In 2012, approximately 40 per cent of children aged 0 to 5 years in South Australia were attending Australian government approved and/or State and territory funded or provided child care (including long day care and family day care).

The South Australian government has a number of initiatives to support children with additional needs, especially children and families in communities that need extra support. The Department for Education and Child Development delivers the Learning Together program and the Learning Together @ Home program to support families with parenting and advise families about other early childhood services.

There are approximately 10 to 15 early childhood education and care services in Elizabeth, and 25 to 30 within a 5km radius of Elizabeth Grove (mostly to the south west in Salisbury). These are in addition to school-based preschools provided to children in the year before school. There are also playgroups offered by different community based organisations. The Elizabeth Grove Primary School campus offers a range of education and health services (some through SA Health). Services for children and families include playgroups and the Good Beginnings early intervention program. CentaCare also provides mobile services at different locations around the City of Playford.

About families with young children in Elizabeth

Among the 25,243 people living in Elizabeth, there are 1,984 children aged 0-4, or 7.8 per cent. Here are some of the things the Census tells us about the 0-4 year old children in Elizabeth:

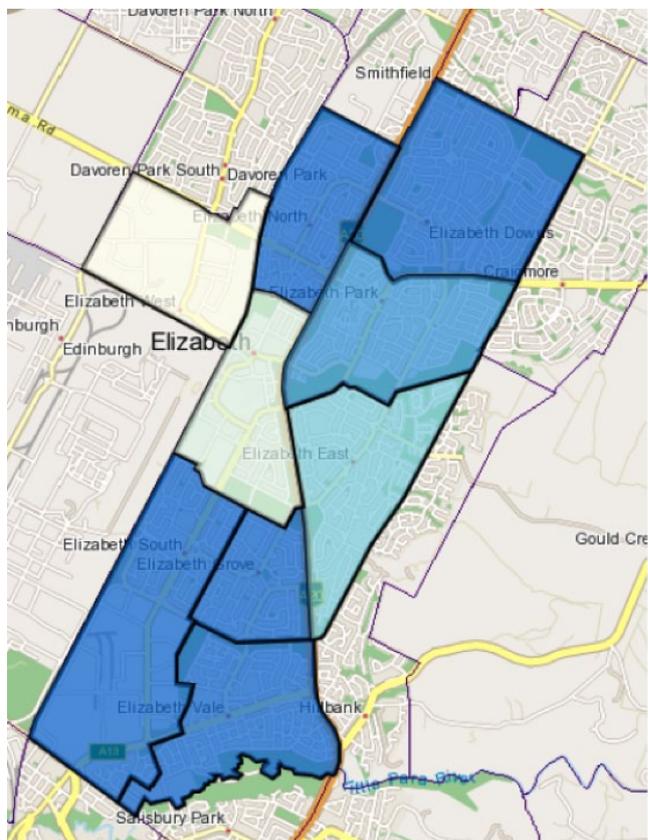
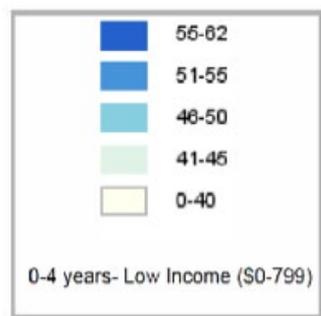
- 378 have one or both parents born overseas
- 1,630 speak English as their first language at home
- 924 live in low income families, which earn under \$800 a week
- 802 live with a single parent
- 1,774 live in one-family households
- 90 live in multi-family households
- 655 live in houses that their family owns (either fully or with a mortgage)
- 1171 live in families who are renting
- 1910 live in a house
- 842 live in a sole parent or couple family where neither parents were in the labour force

We also know that, of the total population of Elizabeth:

- 1,070 are of Indigenous, Torres Strait Islander, or Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander descent. Of these, 178 are children aged 0-4 years.

MAP 5: LOW INCOME FAMILIES IN ELIZABETH

Proportion of children aged 0–4 years living in low income families (under \$800 per week) in Elizabeth



We can find out about the child care and education services used by families in Elizabeth by looking at the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) 2011, which surveys children in their first year of school. Because the number of children surveyed was so small (26 for Elizabeth Grove) it is more sensible to include surrounding suburbs, by looking at the City of Playford. This tells us that more than 92 per cent of children in the City of Playford attended a preschool, or a preschool in a day care centre, in the year before they went to school. Almost 97 per cent reported having a non-parental child care or early education experience before they went to school: 5.5 per cent went to long day care, 92.7 per cent to preschool, 1.5 per cent to family day care, and 8.9 per cent were looked after by a grandparent.

About the families who talked to us

In Elizabeth Grove 12 people talked to us about child care and early education for their children. Most of the people we met were through a family and children’s service.

Here is some information about the people who talked to us. The numbers don’t always add up to 12, because people did not have to answer all the questions and sometimes chose not to.

Table 1: The people who talked to us

Their gender	11 women, 1 man	
Their age	41-46:	2 people
	36-40:	2 people
	31-35:	2 people
	26-30:	1 person
	21-25:	4 people
	Unkown:	1 person
Where they were born	Australia:	9 people
	Sudan:	1 person
	Congo:	1 person
	Cambodia:	1 person
Whether they live with a partner	4 do, 8 don't	
How many children they have	1 child:	6 people
	2 children:	1 person
	3 children:	2 people
	4 children:	1 person
	8 children:	1 person
	9 children:	1 person
How old the children are	Ages range from 0 to 17	
Their highest level of education	Uni:	2 people
	TAFE/vocational:	0 people
	High school:	2 people
	Not completed high school:	8 people
The languages they speak at home	9 people speak only English	
	3 people speak other languages	
Whether they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders	No one was of ATSI background	
What their current work is	At home:	10 people
	In paid employment:	0 people
	Self employed:	1 person
	Student:	1 person
	On maternity leave:	1 person
What their net income is	\$200-\$399 per week:	1 person
	\$400-\$599 per week:	5 people
	\$600-\$799 per week:	4 people
	\$800-\$999 per week:	1 person
	\$1200-\$1399 per week:	1 person
Their type of housing	Has a mortgage:	1 person
	Private rental:	6 people
	Public housing:	5 people

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 12 families in Elizabeth Grove 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. Topics are 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.

Most families use part-time child care and early education arrangements

Children in Elizabeth use a mix of formal and informal arrangements, including centre-based care, family day care, in-home child care, occasional care, playgroups and care from friends and relatives. Almost all families we spoke with used formal services one or two days a week, and children were with their primary caregiver the other days.

Many families said they had trouble finding available places in their area

Families told us that they knew of services in their area, but they often visited them and were told there was a long waitlist, or heard from friends and family that they were difficult to get into.

"So it's pretty frustrating at the moment. I think they need more early learning programs, like for the younger ones that can't quite go to Kindy. Because I've - there's an occasional care around the corner from me that are really good. But I'm on the waiting list, because they're booked out. So who - God knows how long that's going to take, before I actually get in there!"

Trust was one of the most important features of quality child care

Almost all families talked about trust being one of the most important factors when considering care and education services. Some people thought smaller group care, such as Family Day Care, was better because there was a closer one-to-one relationship with the carer. Others thought that bigger centres, but still with small groups, were safer and more trustworthy.

"I'm a little bit worried ... about putting him in child care, because I don't know the people. I'm worried about how he's going to go in, and how he's going to react without me being there."

Many families access services because of complex personal or family circumstances

Some parents were eligible for help with the full costs of care due to personal issues and family complexities, including 'risk status' from their own histories in the child protection system, mental health issues, domestic violence and custody issues; or they were eligible based on refugee status. Families accessed a range of services, including centre-based and in-home child care. These families were not able to send their children without the financial help.

"Then they just finished having two days a week free day care, but it just seems it's kind of set me back again."

Families felt parenting programs were beneficial for them and their children

Many families went to parenting groups, which also provided free child care to the children during the program. Families talked very highly about these programs – both as a benefit for them to learn new skills, as respite from taking care of their children and other daily struggles, and as beneficial for the children.

"Also the children - when I come to the group the children go into the children's room and then I feel a little bit relaxed, because usually when I'm at home I don't - I'm just busy all the time and often when I go to sleep my whole body's just aching from tiredness."

Experiences with domestic violence and the child protection system influence child care decisions

A number of families talked about how current experiences and their own experiences as children in out of home care influenced their decisions about whether to put their children in ECEC. The factors that were important for them were trust, safety and confidentiality.

"I'm always on alert, always have to know where they are, who's with them, keep them safe, out of certain areas. Like I can't use [service name] because I presume he's out that way somewhere, yeah. I have to always check privacy policies of everything like in and out, yeah, all other stuff."

Free and low-cost child care enabled families to use services

Most families talked about the cost of care and education services as a barrier to sending their children there. Families using services were receiving subsidies to cover all of, or most of, the cost of the service. They were only eligible to receive subsidies for one or two days per week because they were not working or studying.

"For instance like that one is \$72 a day but because I get the Centrelink rebate and all of that I only pay \$12 a day. Otherwise I wouldn't even be - I wouldn't be able to put him in there for \$72."

Many families would like more flexible child care options

Most families were not working and did not require full-time child care, however they were often looking for more flexible, part-time and 'emergency' care. Families said that there were no spaces in occasional care centres, or they would have to pay for a full day when they only wanted two or three hours of care. The most common reasons for wanting flexible care was to go to doctors' appointments, go grocery shopping, do other household tasks, and have some respite from caring.

"Like it's so structured I couldn't just go alright, today I want to do it. You have to do a set amount of days, you have to do - you're set on Monday, so Monday you have to get everything done and out of the way..."

Families found it difficult to understand their eligibility for subsidies

Some people we talked to wanted to look for work or study, however they said they were getting mixed information about what subsidies they would be eligible for if they were working and studying and using full-time child care. This constrained their decisions, and in some cases they used informal care from a friend instead.

“Because I’ve had people tell me that they’re not eligible for JET, but they don’t even know why, but Centrelink won’t let them have JET and stuff like that, so they have to pay for sending the kids to day care. Even like with working, apparently you’re eligible for JET, but certain people aren’t.”

Relationships were very important to families’ sense of wellbeing and stability

Many families we talked to had moved to Elizabeth because of previous relationship and complex family and household living arrangements. Most people living there did not have family close by. For those who did have family nearby, many were experiencing relationship breakdowns and talked about complexities of relationships with their family and household. Some people we talked to were very close with their families, and this was talked about as a very positive influence on their parenting. For families without family and friends as support, important relationships were often made with case workers at health and community services.

“I’m not very close with my family, my actual - yeah, my mum and I tried to get along ... I’m only just restarting with my relationship with my sister, so she can’t help me that much and she’s also pregnant [...] But my best friend and her parents and her family are very helpful. The services here are good. My social worker [is] fantastic. I did get a lot of help through like NDVS, so Northern Domestic Violence Service.”

Experiences of Centrelink were mixed

Some families were quite knowledgeable about the amount of money they were receiving every week, fortnight or month. Experiences with dealing with Centrelink were mixed – some families found the process quite easy, most often when they had a case worker who had helped them. Many had taken out small loans from Centrelink against their payments, which made it difficult to know exactly how much they were receiving and often meant they were living on income below the benefits they were entitled to. A number of families also had debts to cash converters and other loan agents who charged significant interest against loans.

“I think [I would be eligible for JET]. I think it would depend on how many hours I was working and how much I was earning. It’s silly. They want you to go back. They’re pushing for parents to go back to work, but yet they’re not making it easy with the child care side of things. It’s getting really annoying.”

Neighbourhood

Families’ experiences of their neighbourhood were very mixed. Some families had grown up there and ‘didn’t mind it’, while others talked about moving there for other reasons, such as a partner or for public housing. Some families also had concerns about drugs and violence in the area, and worried about the negative influence it might have on their children.

“Yeah, I don’t mind where I am now. I’ve grown up in Elizabeth my whole entire life, so I don’t mind the area. You get a lot of people that say it’s not a good area. But I’ve never had trouble.”

Many families had experienced unstable housing

Families talked about the challenges of housing in the neighbourhood, including a couple families having lived in their cars or couch surfing for periods of time with young children. Most families were receiving housing subsidies or were on wait lists to receive public housing through the Housing Trust. In some cases, people moved a reasonable distance because they were provided public housing in Elizabeth. Families who had a history of insecure housing were often living in overpriced private rental properties because that was the only option without a rental track record.

"..because I was homeless, I was living in I think I just went into the youth shelter, like I was living in their youth shelter, and I reckon they might have referred me."

References

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

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