



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



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 Marrickville 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 Marrickville. 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 Marrickville.

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: Marrickville in NSW, Orange in NSW, Caboolture in Queensland, 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 18 families in Marrickville between October and December 2011.

What does this booklet say?

This booklet says what we found out in Marrickville. It starts with some information about the suburb, the kinds of people who live there, and the care and education services available in Marrickville. It then describes what kinds of families we spoke to in Marrickville 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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E-mail: c.purcal@unsw.edu.au

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

About Marrickville

Where it is and how it developed

Marrickville is a suburb in Sydney's Inner West, about 7 kilometres southwest of Sydney's CBD. The suburb is in the Marrickville Council area.

Indigenous people, the Cadigal, are the traditional owners of the land in this area. White settlement began in 1794, and land was used mainly for farms, market gardens and quarries. In 1855 a village was established. More people and businesses moved into the area from the late 1800s, helped by the opening of the railway line to Bankstown.

Most houses are terraces and single family homes. Many apartments and units were built from the 1950s, while some industries moved out. In recent years housing prices have gone up as young professionals are attracted by Marrickville's location close to Sydney and by its lively and diverse restaurants and art scene. Good public transport, including the railway line and bus lines along all main roads, make it easy to travel to and from Marrickville. However, most people use their car to get to work.

The people of Marrickville

Marrickville has a diverse and multicultural community. About 24,600 people lived here in 2011, and more than half of them (53 per cent) were born overseas. In the mid-20th century, Marrickville was a major centre of Sydney's Greek community. Today, the Vietnamese community is the biggest immigrant population: 9 per cent of Marrickville's residents were born in Vietnam and 6 per cent in Greece. Smaller groups (around 2 per cent each) come from Nepal, China, Portugal, Lebanon, the Philippines and India.

Marrickville appears to attract families. Compared with the larger Marrickville Council area, which includes the surrounding suburbs, there are more couples with children and single parent families.

Also compared with the Marrickville Council area, fewer people have an educational degree from university or TAFE, and more have no qualification.

Rents are relatively high in Marrickville: about 35 per cent of renters pay more than \$400 per week in rent.

Child care and early education in Marrickville

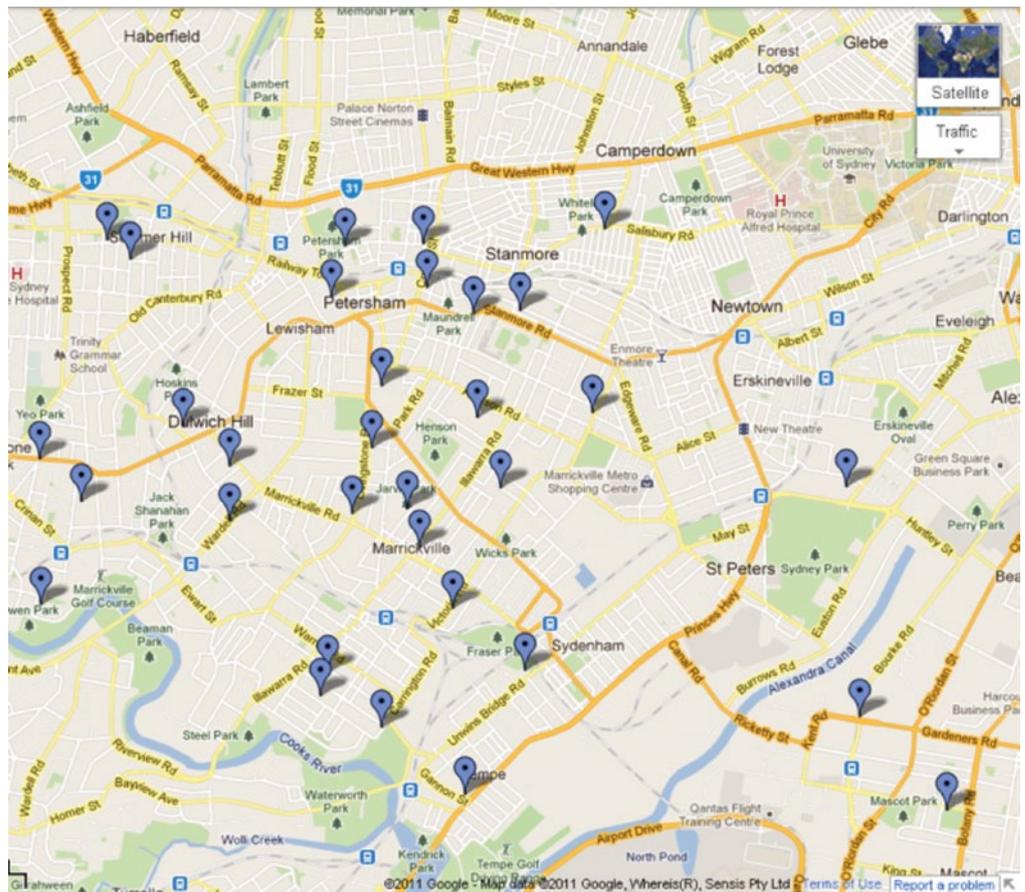
There is a different mix of child care and early education services in each state. In NSW many long day care centres provide educational preschool programs. Over 80 per cent of long day care centres in NSW are privately managed, while many preschools and all family day care services are community managed. Almost 58 per cent of children aged 0-5 in NSW attend child care (excluding preschool).

The NSW government has a number of initiatives to support children with additional needs, and specific services have been established for children and families in communities that need extra support. These projects are called Schools as Community Centres, and of the 99 Centres in NSW, three are in Marrickville.

Marrickville also has a relatively large number of other child care and education services: 10 long day care centres, some with preschool programs, 2 preschools, 1 occasional care service and 4 out of school hours care services. There are many playgroups, including multicultural groups and some that are run for people from specific cultural or language backgrounds.

Other child and family services include: the early childhood health centre, the Casual Ethnic Workers Pool (which integrates children from non-English speaking backgrounds into early care and education services), Pathways Early Childhood Intervention (for children with additional needs), and the Marrickville public library, which organises Storytime. There are 5 primary schools in Marrickville.

MAP I: MARRICKVILLE CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION SERVICES



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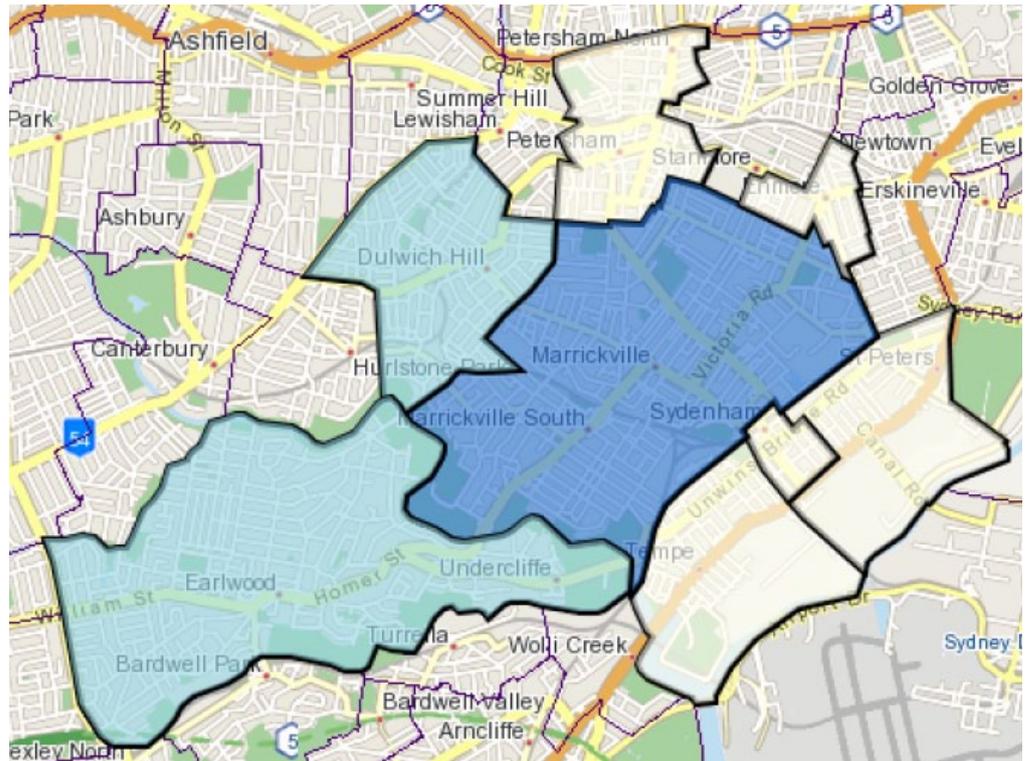
About families with young children in Marrickville

Among the 24,600 people living in Marrickville, there are 1,614 children aged 0-4, or 7 per cent. Here are some of the things the Census tells us about the 0-4 year old children in Marrickville:

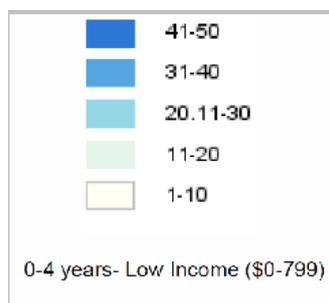
- 852 have one or both parents born overseas
- 41 are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders
- 166 live in families on under \$600 a week
- 137 live with a single parent
- 560 live in one-child families
- 105 live in households with extended families
- 1299 have one or both parents employed
- 990 live in houses that their family owns (either fully or with a mortgage)
- 537 live in families who are renting
- 241 live in families who pay more than \$400 per week in rent
- 1174 live in a house
- 427 live in an apartment

Map 2 shows that there are more low income families with young children in Marrickville than in the neighbouring suburbs

MAP 2: LOW INCOME FAMILIES IN MARRICKVILLE



Per cent of children aged 0-4 years in families with a weekly income of under \$799



We can find out about the child care and education services that families in Marrickville 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: 21 per cent went to long day care, 64 per cent to preschool, 2 per cent to family day care. About 6 per cent were looked after by a grandparent.

About the families who talked to us

In Marrickville 18 people talked to us about child care and early education for their children. Of these conversations, 15 were with one person, and three people talked to us as a group. We met people through different early childhood and family support services in Marrickville: Connect Marrickville, Pathways, and the Marrickville public library.

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

- there were 17 women and one man
- 8 people were between 36 and 40 years old, the others were younger or older
- 6 people were born overseas: 1 each in Indonesia, Vietnam, Brazil and Sri Lanka, and 2 in the Philippines
- 6 were single parents
- 14 people had either one or two children, the others had more
- 11 had a uni, TAFE or vocational qualification
- 4 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders
- 10 were at home and 5 were in a paid job (others were studying or on maternity leave)
- 5 families lived on under \$600 a week
- 8 lived in private rental, 6 in public housing, 2 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 18 families in Marrickville 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.

Most families use child care and education services

Most families who spoke to us have their children enrolled in a child care or education service, and sometimes a child visits different services on different days. Part-time child care is very common, and full-time is rare. There are services for specific ethnic groups and Indigenous children, which are well used and highly valued by the families.

"He goes to preschool Monday, Friday and then he goes to family day care Tuesday and Wednesday."

Many babies stay at home

Often, mothers stay at home with their children while they are very young because they find it important to bond and spend time together, and for the child's development. Most mothers return to part-time work when they feel they and the baby are ready.

"It's such a precious time."

Grandparents and friends help with child care

Several families in Marrickville have grandparents living nearby. Some look after the grandchildren regularly, for example one day a week, and others are a backup, for example when the mother is called into work. Other people have good friends in the neighbourhood who look after their children for a few hours when something unexpected comes up. Families appreciate this help.

"Actually, it was good for my mum, my mum being on her own, and also ... it was a safe environment."

Some families are quite isolated

Having no grandparents or other extended family around, or having few friends, is difficult for some people. They miss companionship and practical help with child care. It may make parents sad, lonely or stressed, or it may mean that they have to wait longer before going back to work. This can cause financial problems. Especially migrant parents can feel lonely, as their relatives are back home and here in Australia they need to adjust to a new language and culture.

"I've been here more than 10 years and ... in the first few years, because my language is not really good I hardly made friends with others. "

Parents make friends in Marrickville

People told us they felt lonely in the past, but that they have made friends in the neighbourhood, often by going to the local parks, the library, the baby health clinic, or by visiting playgroups, the Magic Yellow Bus or mothers' groups. An Indonesian family described how they met other Indonesian families in the shopping centre and became close friends.

"Because I haven't lived near my own family for such a long time, my close friends are my family."

People find Marrickville family friendly

People like living in Marrickville because they find it safe and easy to go outside and walk around with their young children. There are many services for families and many opportunities to meet other people.

"Lots of parks, lots of great services for children, ... the restaurants and cafes are very family friendly, even footpaths have got little indents for prams."

Marrickville's multicultural nature appeals to families

The fact that Marrickville is home to people from many different cultures is attractive for many families – Australian-born and immigrants. They like that their children get to know kids from different countries, that they get to try different foods and enjoy different cultural festivals. Parents find that their children grow up more open-minded.

"A lot of Vietnamese, Greek, a lot of Island people moving into the community, which I find is great. It exposes the kids to different cultures."

Good public transport helps

Several families who spoke to us don't have a car. Other families have one car but both parents work. Living in Marrickville is good for these families because everything is close by. They can walk their kids to child care or preschool and then catch a train or bus to work. Some moved to Marrickville specifically because of the good transport links.

"I work in Leichhardt and her preschool is just up the road here in Marrickville, so I basically come and drop her off here in the morning and then walk back up to the main road and catch a bus through."

Families need child care that fits around work

Working days and working hours are different for each family, and they can be irregular. Some people have trouble finding child care that suits the hours they work or that is flexible enough for sudden changes in their shifts. Casual staff may be called in unexpectedly, or people work rotating shifts, for example in restaurants, hospitals or on the railway. People use friends, relatives or occasional care services to help, but they are not always available and it can be stressful.

“The day care centres would have been good if it was ... earlier starts, because a lot of my jobs are earlier starts and if I didn’t have my mum, it would have been a massive problem.”

Early education is important

Many parents want their kids to go to child care or preschool 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 parents on low income, as well as to migrants, who want their children to learn English and to adapt to Australian culture.

“We put him in childcare to make him comfortable with an Australian environment ... It’s about how he can socialise with small kids and also learn English.”

Child care payments can be confusing

Most parents can get money from government towards their child care fees, like child care benefit and child care rebate. They don’t always know about this, or they might not understand how it works. Some government offices, child care centres or preschools tell parents about the payments and staff help them fill in the forms, but others don’t help or make mistakes. This can be confusing or financially difficult for families.

“On the day I put enrolment form - I think I didn’t fill out the child care benefit number so ... I had to pay the whole fee for months, so I was so worried ... the problem is they didn’t tell me.”

Child care can be expensive

Even with government payments, some families struggle to afford child care and education. Their income may be low, or they have other children or family members to look after. To deal with the cost, some reduce their child care days and others find cheaper child care centres or preschools in the area. Some services let people owe fees for a while and pay them off later; the families appreciate that.

"I have three children all together. There are so many expenses. Even my high school children have so many expenses. So, me not working, it's - I think the child care fees are expensive."

Child care costs influence work decisions

Many families have to weigh up between the cost of child care, income from work and government payments they might get. Any extra income might lower government payments and therefore make child care more expensive. Mothers told us they go back to work later or only work part-time.

"I thought about going back to work full-time but ... if I put her in for any more days ... I think I would be losing out, spending more money on childcare than what I would be making."

Disability services help

Six mothers who talked to us have a child with additional needs, such as autism, anxiety, language delay or vision impairment. For some it is difficult to get a diagnosis and find out about financial support and services that they might be eligible for. But once they find disability services, they are very happy with the help they get. Their children attend supported playgroups, preschools for children with additional needs and mainstream child care centres. Families told us the workers there treat their children well and help them to learn, they help the families to get government payments, and they tell them about other support they can get for their child.

"There was a lot of problems with his vision and everything like that, and he couldn't talk for a while ... over the last couple of months, he has come a long way. I think that helped - both preschools."

References

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

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