

My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia

by Dr Jennifer Cartmel

My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care (Framework) will contribute to the emerging profile of school age care services as significant to the wellbeing for school age children. The vision within the document is to extend and enrich children's experiences in school age care settings. It is based on the principles laid out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* which states that all children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. The *Convention* also recognises children's rights to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives and respects their familial, cultural and other identities and languages. Therefore, in school age care settings, educators encourage children's engagement in a range of play and leisure experiences that allow them to feel happy, safe and relaxed, interact with friends, practice social skills, solve problems, try new activities and learn life skills.

The *Framework* will be a foundation document for the National Quality Standard. It provides direction and guidance for each of the Quality Areas and in particular Outcome 1, about the educational program and practice that engages, stimulates and enhances children's learning and development.

The development of *My Time, Our Place* involved a steering committee with a wide range of representatives from state and territory governments and key stakeholders including

representatives from the National Outside School Hours Services Association. Historically, the state and Commonwealth governments have treated services for education and for care as separate entities. They have had separate policies, regulations, funding methodologies and are coordinated by different government agencies.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has introduced strategies to strengthen the links between care and education and the consistency of delivery of children's services between jurisdictions, emphasising high quality service delivery in the opportunities and experiences for children. Consequently, *My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care* builds upon and extends the themes and outcomes of *Belonging, Being and Becoming – the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. During the development of the document consultation forums were held throughout Australia. The forums included some sessions with groups of children to discuss their perspectives about school age care services. The document has been redrafted with feedback from the consultation process and it is anticipated it will be available later this year.

The title *My Time, Our Place* acknowledges the development of the individual child occurring in a community setting. It highlights the need for children to be able to make choices and become involved in problem solving and decision making while contributing to their school age care community. It emphasises that programs in school age care services complement rather than duplicate the school day. The *Framework* will be applicable to services offering recreation, play and leisure-based programs within schools or other venues, including services offered in long day care centres and by family day care providers.

The image of the child and changes in childhood, family structures and increased workforce participation contribute to the context in which the *Framework* was developed. Children are considered to be fully formed individuals with perspectives of their own. They are viewed



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as strong, competent, resourceful and to be developing in their social context. These images shape the community responses to policies and programs that strive to nurture children's wellbeing, development and learning. Children are now living in more diverse life circumstances where their activities are increasingly regulated. They are being reared in social circumstances that are different to previous generations of children. These circumstances shape expectations for programs for services.

The impact of outside school care provision on children's lives is dependent upon the quality of the outside school care programs. International research contributed to the evidence underpinning the *Framework*. Research from the United States suggested that children of working parents were physically, emotionally and socially at risk if the program is of poor quality. British researchers stated that as children were spending more time in school age care services the experience needs to be beneficial to their development and wellbeing. High quality programs allow children to construct knowledge and help develop their sense of identity, independence and ability to make decisions for themselves. Other European researchers found that children were happiest when they had some control over the way in which the service operated.

The Outcomes for Children described in the *Framework* acknowledge the development of the middle childhood period. Further, the roles and responsibilities of the educators in school



age care are described by the principles of school age care pedagogy which underpin practice. The educators draw on a rich repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children's learning by adopting holistic approaches, collaborating with children and acting with intentionality. They also create physical and social school age care environments that have a positive impact on children's development, wellbeing and community-building and that value the cultural and social contexts of children and their families.

My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care will provide support and status for school age care which is the fastest growing child care sector in Australia ■

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