

**INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND  
CARE SECTOR IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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I was a Children's Services Adviser for the Department of Community Services from 1982 to approximately 1996 in Newcastle. When I first started most childcare centres were community based run by a parent committee and under local government. Some were privately owned usually by people with qualifications in Early Childhood Education. The centres we had trouble with were the private ones. Breaches such as inadequate staff, children underage for licence, unclean, sexual abuse allegations, programme inadequate, broken equipment and inappropriate care. For example a centre had a tip truck come and take the children for a ride and then tip them out. Totally inappropriate and dangerous. Centres were given warnings and many follow up visits to gain compliance. Visits were unannounced. We only closed one centre in all that time after years of problems, including taking children from the centre without permission from parents, inadequate programme, inappropriate activities for children, dodgy fundraising activities. This centre had deep relationships with local politicians. Delicensing took many years. ABC was the first big commercial operator and look at how that turned out. For profits were the first to note the Regulations covering their licence were a minimum standard and that is all they would provide. Visiting unannounced ceased. I worked in a team of Advisers and we had many fears about what was happening and how powerless we were against the for profits. They could lawyer up and the Department had limited resources to take people to court. We warned what was about to happen as one provider was boasting around town that he was going to make 20 million dollars out of childcare. He still owns three centres of minimum quality. The Quality Standards brought in by the Commonwealth government were a good start but again visits announced no real penalties and many centres operating without any rating. We have as a society abandoned our young children to care that is detrimental to their long term health and well being. If big profits are being made then corners are being cut. Parents are often desperate for care and have limited knowledge on what to look for and often limited choice. My first grandchild went to Community based centre with only 28 children high quality any profit put back into the centre for extra staff. Second grandchild went to Community based preschool again high quality and now granddaughter goes to school based preschool high quality. We were told at one of our state based conferences that children would have to die before any action would be taken against centres offering low quality care. And here we are. Opposition leader Peter Dutton has just sold two childcare centres which would have been in receipt of government money. Isn't this a conflict of interest? There should be no profits in childcare. It costs a lot of money to provide best practice care and I have no faith the care of small children is a higher priority than nuclear submarines. Shame on all the politicians who stood by knowingly for years and allowed this disaster to happen.