

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

Name: Ms Kathy Gelding

Date Received: 11 April 2025

This is my story:

In the 1990s, I was an educator in a community-based service located in the inner-west of Sydney [opposite housing commission] when the below happened:

In the 1996-97 [Hawke-Keating] Budget it was announced that operational subsidies for community-based long day care centres (excluding occasional care, family day care, multifunctional and multifunctional Aboriginal children's services) would cease from 1 July 1997... The removal of the operational subsidy was also aimed at encouraging community centres to be more efficient and cost competitive with private sector centres. See https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/1996-99/childcare2/report/c04

Ensuring quality meant employing high quality staff which resulted in fees escalating. I remember the impact of the above meant that the families who lived in housing commission could no longer afford the fees so stopped attending. Then came John Howard's [LNP] policy which was then critiqued as:

*likely to lead to fee increases, **bigger profits for private providers**, and cost blow-outs for the government, and fails to directly create places, or deal with a serious shortage of child-care workers. The easier access to affordable childcare for grandparents who are principal carers of children will be welcomed. See <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/howard-makes-his-pitch-for-the-believers-20040927-gdjt6w.html>*

[These policies] prompted dramatic changes in the childcare landscape, leading to a dominance of for-profit centres including Eddy Groves, *also ranked first on BRW's list of the richest Australians aged 40 and under with an estimated wealth of \$260 million. By 2008, the company held about 20 to 25 per cent of the long day care market in Australia, providing care to over 100,000 children and employing about 16,000 staff. But then the company went into voluntary liquidation, and the fallout was immense. See <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-22/childcare-aged-care-abuse-neglect-privatisation-australia/105067714>*

I feel like it's been a race to the bottom ever since. *Today, more than 70% of all long day-care centres are [operated by private providers](#). Between [2013 and 2023](#), the number of for-profit long daycare services jumped by 60%, while not-for-profits only grew by 4%. See <https://theconversation.com/amid-claims-of-abuse-neglect-and-poor-standards-what-is-going-wrong-with-childcare-in-australia-252493> And new analysis for the ABC by the Centre for International Corporate Tax Accountability and Research (CICTAR) and led by researcher*

Bronwyn Lee, **estimates that childcare landlords collect a staggering \$2.7 billion in rent every year.** <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-27/childcare-real-estate-boom-profits-four-corners/105098462>

I consider myself middle class and am a grandparent of three and have spent the last two years caring for two of them four days a week – my children's mortgages, cost-of-living coupled with long waiting lists for early childhood education [childcare], many I would assess as low quality, has not been an option. Since the 2000's, I have been a teacher with TAFE NSW [OTEN now Digital College] and am currently located at Randwick College. TAFE NSW lacks funding. See <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/196-million-tafe-shortfall-threatens-nsw-skills-sector> and competition has resulted in private RTOs issuing fake qualifications. See <https://thesector.com.au/2024/12/05/thousands-of-students-lose-their-qualifications-in-light-of-fake-diploma-crackdown/> and <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-12/private-college-sector-australia-fake-qualifications-education/104922124>

I teach students to be high quality educators – prioritising keeping children safe - only to see them leave the early childhood profession. See <https://theconversation.com/early-childhood-educators-are-leaving-in-droves-here-are-3-ways-to-keep-them-and-attract-more-153187#:~:text=The%20reasons%20included%20low%20pay,problem%20in%20early%20childhood%20services> and <https://theconversation.com/a-major-new-childcare-report-glosses-over-the-issues-educators-face-at-work-and-why-they-leave-218515>

I assess students twice a year in the workplace and witness educators: *abandoned, stressed and exhausted...* "It is a looming crisis in this sector that we are going to see less and less people wanting to work in this sector because they can see how devalued they were through this whole pandemic," <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-22/qld-early-childhood-education-short-staffed-coronavirus/12743900>

I observe many low quality, under resourced programs and practises. For example, limited or no play experiences for the children to learn. While there may be general supervision, there is limited or no interactions occurring between the staff and the children. In my role as assessor, I often remind staff to prioritise children's safety and emotional wellbeing over performing routine tasks.

What are the managers doing? What is their priority?

What is the regulator doing? What is their priority?

As already stated, as a grandmother, I would rather care for my grandchildren myself then send them to some of the early child education services I see.

Maybe NSW should look at the reformed Victorian model that attracts, upskills and retains quality early childhood teachers and educators. See <https://www.vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-reforms>

Kathy Gelding