

Early childhood educator edition: Parent and educators views on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT

Key findings

- 786 parents of children in an Early Learning Centre (ELCs) in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were surveyed about their perceptions and experience of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).
- The majority of parents (84%) said that they saw their child's educator as a trusted source of knowledge about their child's development and wellbeing.
- Staff was identified as the most common theme when asked what the best thing is about their child's early learning centre.
- The majority of parents (89%) support higher salaries for early childhood educators.
- The majority (82%) of educators said that they enjoy working with children as the reason that motivated them to work in the ECEC sector.

Survey approach

Two surveys were developed by the Children First Alliance to explore perceptions of early childhood education and care (ECEC). The first survey was distributed to all families that have a child or children in an Early Learning Centre (ELC) of an Alliance member. The second survey was distributed to educators that work in an ECEC service operated by an Alliance member.

Both surveys were created in Survey Monkey and open for a three-week period from 11 October to 3 November 2019. For questions that were open ended, a thematic analysis was undertaken.

A total of 786 responses were received from the survey sent to families.

A total of 117 responses were received from the survey sent to educators.

Findings

Educator a trusted source of knowledge about child's development and wellbeing

The majority of parents (84%) said that they saw their child's educator as a trusted source of knowledge about their child's development and wellbeing, 8% did not and 8% did not know.

Child's educators is a trusted source of knowledge	% (n)
Yes	84 (658)
No	8 (59)
Don't know	8 (67)

Best thing about child's early learning centre

Five key themes were identified when analysing what parents liked most about their child's early learning centre.

The theme of 'staff' was the most common among families, followed by 'culture of centre'.

Themes	Sub-themes
Staff	Trust of staff with children Caring nature of staff Stability of staff at centre Communication with staff
Culture of centre	Play-based learning Philosophy of centre Range of activities Cultural diversity of activities
Environment	Outdoor play area Open plan indoor and outdoor Quality of food Cleanliness of centre
Children experience	Child expressing eagerness to attend Child making friends
Location	Close to home Close to work Close to other child's school

Responses relating to the theme of 'staff'

"The friendliness and confidence I have in the Educators to care for my children"

"The staff and the culture, such an excellent team and the low turnover speaks volumes. The care they have for the children is genuine and really evident in how they do their jobs."

"I love how approachable and caring the educators are. They put 100% into the children and developing secure, safe and supported relationships. This is seen not only through relationships with children but also relationships with families."

Support for higher salaries for early childhood educators

The majority of parents (89%) support higher salaries for early childhood educators, 7% were unsure and 1% did not support higher salaries.

Support for higher salaries for early childhood educators	% (n)
Yes	89 (693)
Unsure	7 (54)
Other (please specify)	3 (26)
No	1 (9)

Of the 3% that indicated 'Other', the main theme from responses was that there is in-principle support for higher salaries for early childhood educators, as long as this increase is not associated with an increase in cost to families.

“Absolutely Yes - Provided that the Government increases subsidies to absorb the increases. Families cannot afford for the salary increases to be passed on to them”

“Yes, so long as the fees for parents don't increase, the money to increase the Educators wages needs to be from the Government.”

Motivations for working in the early childhood education and care sector

The majority (82%) of educators said that they enjoy working with children as the reason that motivated them to work in the ECEC sector, followed by 76% indicating they enjoy educating children and 60% saying they enjoyed working with families.

Motivations for working in ECEC	%(n)
I enjoy working with children	82 (96)
I enjoy educating children	76 (89)
I enjoy working with families	60 (70)
I like to give back to community	44 (52)
I enjoy working for a purpose driven organisation	39 (46)
Other (please specify)	9 (10)

Reason for becoming an early childhood educator

One primary theme was identified by educators as for the reason to becoming an early childhood educator, this was the theme of ‘children’.

The majority of educators identified their interest in working with children as the reason.

Themes	Sub-themes
Children	Interested in children’s development and education Enjoy working with children Rewarding working with children Shaping future generations

Responses relating to the theme of ‘children’

“Early Childhood education is such an important thing, I needed to ensure that I am doing everything I can to help future generations”

“To make a difference in children’s lives”

“I believe in the importance of giving children a proper education from the day that they are born”

“Passion to see children develop and grow and the feeling of how special it was to be apart of that process”

“Because Children are amazing and deserve to be educated by people who have a passion for them.”

About the Children First Alliance

The ACT Children First Alliance (the Alliance) is a network of longstanding for purpose providers of children's service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including early learning centres (ELCs), family day care, preschool and outside school hours care. There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on a child's social, emotional, educational and economic wellbeing across the lifespan. Despite this, more than one in five ACT children were developmentally vulnerable when entering school. The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECEC in the ACT and to ensure that all children have access to ECEC. The nine community ECEC providers that make up this Alliance operate 43 ELCs. Together these ELCs provide 3,491 places to children.

The Alliance has nine Founding Members:

- Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT
- Capital Region Community Services
- Communities@Work
- Community Services #1
- Goodstart Early Learning ACT
- MOCCA
- Woden Community Service
- YMCA Canberra
- YWCA Canberra