

## Families perceptions and experience of 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 surveyed (83%) indicated that they have seen positive outcomes in the social skills of their children, as a result of them attending an ELC.
- A majority of parents also identified greater independence (68%), communication skills (64%) and greater confidence (58%) as positive outcomes of attendance at an ELC.
- More than two thirds (69%) of parents surveyed considered being close to home as a factor in choosing their child or children's ELC, with more than half of all parents surveyed (56%) considering staff in their decision about an ELC.
- When asked what the most important factor is when choosing an ELC, 22% of parents identified the ELC being close to home, followed by culture centre (17%) and staff (16%).
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of parents surveyed indicating that they didn't find it difficult to find a place in an ELC in the ACT for their child or children.
- The majority of parents (80%) support the extension of free Government preschool to three-year-old children in the ACT.

### Survey approach

The survey was distributed to all families that have a child or children in an Early Learning Centre (ELC) by an Alliance member.

The survey was created in Survey Monkey and open for a three-week period from 11 October to 3 November 2019.

A total of 786 responses were received.

### Findings

#### Number of children in early childhood education and care service (ECEC)

The majority (73%) of parents surveyed have one child attending an ELC and a quarter (25%) of parents have two children attending.

In total, the parents surveyed have 1,012 children in an ELC in the ACT.

Number of children attending an Early Learning Centre	% (n)
One	73 (575)
Two	25 (193)
Three	2 (14)
Four	- (1)
Five	- (1)

## Positive outcomes seen in child/children as a result of them attending an ECEC

The majority of parents (83%) indicated that they have seen positive outcomes in social skills as a result of their child attending an ELC.

Parents also identified greater independence (68%), improved communication skills (64%) and greater confidence (58%) as positive outcomes of their child attending an ELC.

Positive outcomes as a result of child attending an early learning centre	% (n)
Improved social skills	83 (647)
Greater independence	68 (528)
Improved communication skills	64 (502)
Greater confidence	58 (452)
Greater emotional resilience	41 (317)
Other (please specify)	10 (77)

## Factors considered in choosing an Early Learning Centre for child and/or children

More than two thirds (69%) of parents considered that being close to home as a factor in choosing their child's early learning centre. More than half of all parents surveyed (56%) considered the staff in their decision.

Inclusions such as lunch (44%), centre culture (43%), quality rating (42%) and approach to learning (41%) were also considered by parents.

When asked what the most important factor is when choosing an ELC, 22% of parents indicated closeness to home, followed by culture centre (17%) and staff (16%).

Factors considered when choosing an early learning centre	All factors considered % (n)	Most important % (n)
Close to home	69 (541)	22 (169)
Staff	56 (440)	16 (123)
Inclusions (eg. Lunch etc)	44 (346)	1 (8)
Centre culture	43 (335)	17 (130)
Quality rating	42 (329)	10 (81)
Approach to learning	41 (325)	7 (51)
Close to work	38 (301)	11 (83)
Cost	35 (273)	5 (37)
Word of mouth	33 (262)	4 (35)
Other (please specify)	17 (130)	8 (62)
Centre being community operated	16 (128)	1 (6)

## Finding a place in an Early Learning Centre in the ACT for child and/or children

Almost three-quarters (74%) of parents reported that it was not difficult to find a place in an early learning centre in the ACT for their child/children.

Of these parents, more than one third (35%) of parents found it easy to find a place for their child or children in an ELC, 10% found it very easy and 29% were neutral. Just over one quarter (26%) found it difficult or very difficult to find a place.

Difficulty finding a place in an early learning centre	% (n)
Very difficult	4 (28)
Difficult	22 (176)
Neutral	29 (227)
Easy	35 (276)
Very easy	10 (79)

## Support for the extension of free Government preschool to three-year-old children in the ACT

The majority of parents (80%) support the extension of free Government preschool to three-year-old children in the ACT, 16% of families said they were unsure and 5% did not support this policy.

Support the extension of free Government preschool for three-year-old children	% (n)
Yes	80 (623)
Unsure	16 (122)
No	5 (37)

## 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
- Belconnen Community Service
- Communities@Work
- Community Services #1
- Goodstart Early Learning ACT
- MOCCA
- Woden Community Service
- YMCA Canberra
- YWCA Canberra