

**“Love in a hot climate – Quality care in a regulated environment”
FDC Kingston, Victoria, Australia**

Family Day Care in Australia has experienced significant change in the last decade – Quality Assurance, National Standards, licensing, increased number of employed women seeking child care, higher expectations by families and the community, the introduction of scheme policies and procedures – food and safety, sun smart, sleep... competition from private providers, to name but a few. In Victoria, further changes will be implemented in 2009 bringing Family Day Care under the Children’s Services Regulations as are other Child Care Services (Long Day Care). In this environment of change there are many implications for Family Day Care and quality of its care.

A significant issue for Family Day Care is the increase in the need for formal care and the subsequent shortage of care places. Where once, Family Day Care was seen as a good employment opportunity for mainly women, this is no longer the case. People considering a career in this field are confronted by the initial high cost of becoming a care provider – compliance costs related to their home and training requirements. Other barriers include the need to adhere to health and safety policies and procedures; the understanding and implementation of ethical financial systems and the awareness of care and education practices. Families expect high quality care which is demonstrated by strong policies and procedures and evident in care providers who are knowledgeable about current theories and practices in early childhood.

High quality Family Day Care is vital, but with so many constraints placed on careproviders and the difficulty in recruiting suitable careproviders, one wonders if those attributes that make Family Day Care stand out as a preferred care option for parents - small groups of children in a loving, warm home environment – are being diminished.. The challenge for Australian schemes is to provide high quality care while maintaining the characteristics of a home environment that is quite distinct from centre based care (Long Day Care/After School Care/Occasional Care.)

“Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skilful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.” William A. Foster

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