

Notes on UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Report Card 8: The Child Care Transition. A League Table of early childhood education and care in economically advantaged countries.

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My thoughts on the key issues are:

1. To raise this as a crucial area to consider for NZ children for good long term outcomes - we cannot afford to get this wrong i.e. the child makes the adult and if we get it wrong long term our society will suffer the consequences
2. To recognise the significant changes occurring both internationally and locally with women returning to the workforce which has both positive and negative aspects for children?
3. Issues for kids - importance of consistent caregiver and giving the child enough time particularly for infants and young children (definitely < 1yr and still significantly for <3yrs), the risk of long hours in childcare for young infants can affect their outcomes, therefore families also need to be able to have time together with their young children. This issue needs to be discussed openly
4. The importance of supporting quality early childhood education, and particularly for kids over 3 yrs i.e. the advantage of good quality preschool education for positive outcomes
5. NZ has taken some really positive and useful steps - we have done well in and are doing better than many countries in subsidies, staff quality and training, staff to child ratios etc.
6. NZ is still got a long way to go and there are areas of significant concern
 - high child poverty rates - we have plenty of material on this from CPAG literature
 - child health services - lack of good universal access to outreach services, (use my survey of the cost of after-hours services for children and the huge range and what a considerable barrier this is - it is published in the health chapter of the CPAG (Child Poverty Action Group) Report Left Behind 2008)

Summary with recommendations - infants spending very long hours in child care may be detrimental, quality early childhood education very positive - NZ has some good initiatives and has made progress (although significant range of issues re delivery e.g. particularly the misdistribution of early childhood education with less services in poor areas) - areas we lag behind include parental support, reducing child poverty, universal access to health care services.

Paid child care must sit within the broader context of the child's needs - while NZ does well on some of the paid child care indices in this report, we do poorly on other vital issues particularly child poverty and many health indicators. To support healthy children requires NZ to focus on these issues all together and not child care in isolation

The role of the parent/s is vital, particularly in the first 3 years, and NZ once again is not doing well on supporting poorer parents to stay at home with their young children, particularly sole parents

This report admits its limitations well e.g. there is no clarity about how much child care there should be, although strong pointers that for the younger children, under 3 years, the focus needs to be on supporting parents to be with them and less on long hours in childcare. I believe this is important because NZ has a very strong focus that mothers must work at all cost as it is the only way out of poverty - yet in many cases this may not be to the child's advantage .

We need to encourage more debate on the rights of parents to stay home with younger children, rather than the drive to go back to work whatever the cost to the family.