

Kate Ellis wants to tell you a few things about child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Kate Ellis MP writes about the children of child care that we must not forget.

If you bring the topic of child care up with any parent chances are you will be met with a knowing expression - quite often a grimace. Without a doubt, finding, choosing, understanding, and trusting our child care system can be one of the most daunting tasks a parent will face. Time and time again I hear from parents stories of dealing with the emotional dilemma which comes with returning to work, whilst struggling to find child care solutions.

The reality is, affordable, accessible child care is not only in the interests of families, but in Australia's economic interests. We want parents, especially women, to feel empowered to return to work and it is important that child care enables them to do this.

Hon. Kate Ellis MP: "If you bring the topic of child care up with any parent chances are you will be met with a knowing expression - quite often a grimace" (Image via Facebook)

In his State of the Nation address in January, President Obama recalled a powerful story of the value of child care. He said, "It's not a nice-to-have - it's a must-have. It's time we stop treating child care as a side issue, or a women's issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is for all of us." I couldn't agree more.

Treating early education and care as a national economic priority is not just about getting parents into the workforce - it is also about acknowledging the substantial benefits which come from investing in our children. I think this argument is often lost when we discuss the economic benefits of child care - I hear a lot of discussion about increased workforce participation from child care, but I don't hear as much about the future productivity benefits of our children who have received quality early childhood education and care.

Child care does not equal child minding - our child care educators are passionate, qualified professionals and need to be acknowledged as such. The power of quality child care to enrich a child's development should not be underestimated, in fact, with 90% of a child's brain development occurring in the first five years of life, making sure children are exposed to a quality early education and care system which nurtures their growth is essential.

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Here's some evidence. A Pricewaterhouse Coopers report late last year found that the long-term gains in productivity from children who participate in quality child care when they enter the workforce is even greater than the gains from increased workforce participation from their parents.

When looking at children in disadvantaged families who were receiving no formal early childhood education, engaging them in early childhood education and care would boost Australia's GDP by a further \$13.3 billion by 2050.

This is backed up by significant international research, which shows positive links between high quality early education and care and future cognitive abilities and school achievements, especially for children from disadvantaged families.

So while we want the benefits of child care to flow on to our workforce, equally we need to make sure that learning and development is at the centre of our system of early childhood education and care.

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I'm passionate about not only having a conversation in this area but seeing action. I don't want parents to fill out a child care form application alongside the birth certificate. I don't want a parent to have to choose whether to go back to work or care for their child. But I do want every child to have access to early childhood education and care. I do want to celebrate and recognise the professional educators who are so critical to the development of our children.

Getting the mix right won't be easy, but its importance should not be underestimated. And Labor's commitment to reform in this area should not be underestimated either. We will pursue improvements to the sector and those improvements will be based on what is in the best interests of Australian children, as well as what is best for their parents.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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