

IN THE FAIR WORK COMMISSION

Matter No.: AM2018/18 and AM2018/20
Re Application by: Australian Childcare Alliance Inc. & Ors
4 Yearly Review of Modern Awards (commenced under s.156 - *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth))

STATEMENT OF JULIE ANN WHITE

I, Julie Anne White of [REDACTED] in the New South Wales affirm as follows:

Background

1. My husband Peter White and I are the joint directors of Aljuem Pty Ltd trading as Ready 2 Learn Early Educational Centres (Ready 2 Learn).
2. Together, operate 4 centres which are as follows:
 - (a) Ready 2 Learn Marsden Park;
 - (b) Ready 2 Learn Riverstone;
 - (c) Ready 2 Learn Schofields; and
 - (d) Ready to Learn Woodcroft (together, the Ready 2 Learn Centres)
3. I also have a new Ready 2 Learn Centre opening in Box Hill next year in 2020.
4. I hold a Diploma in Teaching and a Bachelor in Teaching and Special Education from the University of Western Sydney.
5. I also taught the Early Childhood Course at the Australian Academy of Childcare Education for 6 months in 2007. I also run other training courses such as Little Scientists Australia, a government funded and supported, not-for-profit professional development program for early childhood educators and teachers and train my own employees on many different subject areas.

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6. I have been in the early childhood education and care (**ECEC**) sector for almost 30 years and developed my first centre, the Croft Kindergarten, in 1995.
7. Previously, I have also owned and operated other centres such as the Gantry at Concord and the Grove at Hasselgrove.
8. I am also an Associated Member of the Australian Childcare Alliance in New South Wales.

My role

9. As the joint Director of Ready 2 Learn centres, I am responsible for overseeing the entire 4, soon to be 5 centres. This includes running a management team who is comprised of an HR Manager, Operations Manager, Marketing Executive and Accounts Manager. I run my office out of the Ready 2 Learn Schofields centre. I am the final decision maker for all staffing, payroll, recruitment and other employment matters for over 90 employees.
10. I regularly visit each of the Ready 2 Learn centres and run management meetings with the Centre Directors and employees where we discuss and seek solutions that the Ready 2 Learn Centres might be facing.

The Ready 2 Learn Centres

11. All four Ready 2 Learn centres were built, owned and operated by myself and my husband Peter White. Our mission statement of the Ready 2 Learn centres is to provide an innovative and inspiring approach to early childhood education empowering children to be strong, capable and resilient, rich in knowledge and potential with the vision to be a leading ECEC provider.
12. In 1995 I opened the Croft Kindergarten. In 2005 I opened Riverstone, in 2016 I opened Schofields and last year at the beginning of 2018 I opened Marsden Park.
13. Ready 2 Learn offers services to families with children between the ages of 6 weeks to 6 years of age. Ready 2 Learn long day-care centres are open 7.00am to 6.00pm (apart from Marsden Park which is open until 6.30pm), 50 weeks of the year and are closed on weekends and gazetted public holidays.
14. Ready 2 Learn provides peace of mind to families that their children are in a creative,

nurturing, secure environment with Early Childhood Educators who are passionate about supporting children to be active and empowered participants in their own learning.

15. Ready 2 Learn strives to meet the individual needs of each child and enable them to reach their full potential by providing an environment rich in opportunities and experiences. Ready 2 Learn centres develop a strong connection with parents and families and recognise communication as intrinsic to building connections for learning. We do this by providing a digital “Learning Journey” as a record of children’s learning and inclusion in the educational programme.
16. To fulfil these goals, Ready 2 Learn provides higher educator to child ratios than required and provide opportunities for small group work to maximise potential.
17. Currently there are the following enrolments at the Ready 2 Learn Centres:

	Centre	Number of Children the Centre is Licensed For
1.	Marsden Park	78
2.	Schofield	76
3.	Riverstone	90
4.	Woodcroft	29
5.	Box Hill (open 2020)	140

18. Before opening a Ready 2 Learn Centre, I undertake research to source the demand for the areas. Because of this, we are at approximately 90-100% capacity every day with wait lists.

Types of Employees

19. At the centres, I have following types of employees:

	Full Time	Part time	Casual Employees
Marsden Park	20	4	2
Schofield	17	5	2
Riverstone	17	14	2
Woodcroft	7	4	2

20. My workforce consists of approximately 103 employees. I employ mostly females however I

do have 4 males working for me. I would like to have more male staff members however I find it hard to find male employees in the ECEC sector.

21. I choose to employ the vast majority of my staff as permanent staff whether they are full-time employees or part-time employees. I do this because it is very important for Ready 2 Learn Centres that there is consistency and continuity of care for the children. I believe that employing permanent staff is better for the employees, the children and for the parents as they know who is looking after their children.
22. In relation to part-time employees, we have several mothers and younger people who choose to job share and do 3:2 days with another staff member.
23. We do have a few casual employees who have told me that it suits them to be casually employed. One of the employees is older and likes the flexibility to be able to take time off for weeks at a time and rejoin Ready 2 Learn Centres when it is most convenient to her. This arrangement is mutually beneficial as she knows our policies and procedures and can provide consistent but casual care for our children.

Cost for parents

24. We charge our parents per day rates as follows for our Ready 2 Learn Centres:

Age of Children	Cost for Parents
Birth to three years	\$115
3 -5 years	\$110

25. The reason that the older children are cheaper is because the ratios are lower and therefore they require less staff.
26. While NSW has different ratio requirements, it also has the lowest state preschool funding in the country. Annexed and marked **JAW - 1** which is an article written by the Australian Childcare Alliance on how little funding NSW receives per child.

Wages

27. I pay my staff initially according to the Awards that apply to them. However, we conduct performance reviews for our staff at 3 months, 6 months and 12 months following

commencement with Ready 2 Learn and there is a distinct possibility that the employees will receive a pay rise which will be above the modern awards which apply to them. These are either the *Children's Services Award 2010* (**Children's Services Award**) and the *Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2010* (**Teachers Awards**) (together, the **Awards**)

28. We do this because we use the Awards as the minimum rates of pay and reward our staff for their performance to work upwards from that.
29. All of our ECTs are above the Awards for retention purposes as it is incredibly difficult to find qualified and experienced ECTs.
30. I pay my staff overtime for all hours worked after 6.30pm.

Ordinary Hours

Hours of operation

31. The Centres are open at the following times:

	Centre	Open	Close
1.	Marsden Park	7.00am	6.30pm
2.	Schofield	7.00am	6.00pm
3.	Riverstone	7.00am	6.00pm
4.	Woodcroft	7.00am	6.00pm

32. I choose to open and close at these times because these times align with the ordinary hours under the Awards, parent demand and I would have to pay overtime if I would like my Ready 2 Learn Centres to be open any later.
33. Since opening the Ready 2 Learn Marsden Park service in 2018, due to parent demand, I have had to change the closing time to be half an hour later. We used to close at 6.00pm at the Marsden Park Centre however, parents are working later and so I had to re-evaluate my opening times.
34. We choose these hours as they are in-line with the Awards and parent demands.

Extending the ordinary hours

35. I have read the claim proposed by the ACA in relation to extending the ordinary hours and I believe that if the ordinary hours are extended to 7.30pm, I would strongly consider opening my Ready 2 Learn Centres for longer and therefore meet the needs of the community more readily.

Need for Longer Ordinary Hours

36. An example of a need for longer care is clearest in the Ready 2 Learn Centre in Marsden Park.
37. Marsden Park is located 49 kilometres north-west of the Sydney CBD and is part of the Greater Western Sydney region. The area is relatively newly developed with a new commercial precinct called Sydney Business Park which is adjacent to the Westlink M7 Motorway. This site includes:
- (a) Ikea store;
 - (b) Costco;
 - (c) Bunnings Warehouse;
 - (d) Lindt Factory;
 - (e) Dulux Paint Factory; and
 - (f) Woolworths and Aldi Supermarkets.
38. All of these stores have opened in the last few years and their operating hours are not 9.00am-5.00pm with Ikea staying open until 9.00pm and Costco staying open until 8.30pm every night.
39. As our Ready 2 Learn Centre in Marsden Park has many children whose parents either work in the factories or frequent the above stores, there is continually increasing demand for me to stay open later. There is a knock on effect from these stores to the demand that we must meet.
40. I know from speaking to parents that we are losing some people that we would like to enrol at the Marsden Park centres and parents have told me that they have to use family day care which is not their desired choice of education for their children.

Late Pick Up

41. As the Ready 2 Learn Centres are in the Western suburbs of Sydney, traffic is constantly an issue no matter the time. Most of our parents, from my understanding, work in the CBD and therefore their commute is constantly unpredictable.
42. I have read the substantive claim proposed by the ACA in relation to extending the ordinary hours and I believe that it will provide a buffer for late pick-ups as well as other unforeseen circumstances, because we close at 6.00pm.
43. Some of our parents at our Ready 2 Learn Centres have to drop off their children in the morning, catch the bus to the train station and train to the city and do the reverse journey at the end of the day, this can take one to two hours.
44. Circumstances such as a hot day, where the railway lines stop, has a knock on effect with trains running late or buses replacing trains. This means that we could have 30-40% of children who are being picked up after closing time.
45. We attempt to alleviate this stress by asking parents to nominate an emergency pick up person such as a grandparent but sometimes parents being late cannot be helped and there is no emergency person to pick up the children.

Staff Meetings

46. Because of the nature of the ECEC industry, we cannot hold staff meetings during the day as my employees attention is on the children. If the ordinary hours were extended, it would also mean if children have gone home that I could run staff meetings after 6.30pm.

Legislation is encouraging flexibility for ordinary hours

47. The latest government subsidy which changed was called the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and it came into play on 2 July 2018 last year is a single, means-tested subsidy. Last year we ran training sessions for parents to educate them on the new subsidy and how to utilise it for each of their individual family needs.

48. The Childcare Subsidy is provided on the basis of a different set of qualifying factors than it used to be. The new factors are based upon:
- (a) the total household income (that will determine the percentage of the subsidy families are eligible for); and
 - (b) the activity test (according to the workforce participation) (which will determine the number of hours of subsidised care).
49. The payments under the Childcare Subsidy are calculated on a sessional basis (subject to a maximum hourly cap) rather than a daily basis as it was under the previous method.
50. One of the reasons behind the childcare subsidy was encourage flexible work practices by having centres offer care on a sessional basis (e.g. 6 hours). However, while the legislation is supporting a more flexible work practice, the Awards are not. The Awards currently require long day-care centres who want to provide a service for parents later than 6.30pm to pay overtime rates for a time of day that many families at my centres expect me to be open.

Ratios

51. One of the big complexities in the ECEC surrounds the legislative requirement for ratios. The childcare industry is heavily regulated through the National Quality Framework which publishes the National Quality Standards (**NQS**). Quality Area 4 of the NQS relates to staffing arrangements including educator-to-child ratios and the qualification requirements of the educators. I calculate my ratios into rooms and have children of the same age together as this is the best way to ensure that I am always hitting my ratios.
52. I always attempt to roster well above the ratios however the ratios in NSW are as follows:

<u>Age of Children</u>	<u>Educator to child ratios in New South Wales</u>
Birth to 24 months	1:4
Over 24 months and less than 36 months	1:5

Over 36 months up to and including pre-school age	1:10
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53. As well as having ratios for educators, what causes further difficulties for rostering is the requirement for different categories of employees with different qualifications on the floor at any one time. These categories include Certificate III Level Educators, Diploma Level Educators, Early Childhood Teachers (**ECT**) who are university trained.
54. My Directors have to both comply with the number of staff in each room but also need to comply with the National Regulations which states that 50% of my educators in the Centres who must have, or be actively working towards, at least a Diploma Level Education. I try to have most of our staff as Diploma Level Educators to make my rosters as least complex as possible.
55. Regarding ECTs, I always try to have more staff than required which is dependent on the amount of children that the centre is licensed for. The number of ECTs at the Centres is as follows:

Ready 2 Learn Centre	Number of ECTs
Marsden Park	4
Schofield	3
Riverstone	4
Woodcroft	2

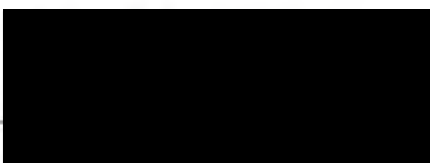
Rostering

56. I send out my final rosters a week ahead in conjunction with the Awards requirements.
57. I do try and create a permanent shift roster to try and create consistency for my permanent employees so they basically know their shifts well in advance.
58. The rosters change for either planned leave or unplanned leave. For planned leave like annual leave, I employ one Diploma employee who is a “floater” and fills in for when such employees take annual leave.

59. Unplanned leave is when I have a real issue with rostering even though I am well above the ratios required of me. I always try to do the right thing however it is not viable to plan for what you do not know is going to happen.
60. For example if an employees' grandfather has died, their child is sick or their car will not start, even though I have more staff employed to fulfil ratios, sometimes I am still caught having to ask people to change their rosters by consent less than a week ahead.
61. I do have a plan in place to attempt to avoid having to ask staff to start earlier/later or change their shifts. Firstly, I have the buffer of employing a lot more staff over ratios. Secondly, I can use the support staff (directors and management team who are early childcare qualified) come to the floor to fill the ratios. However, if none of these options are available we will thirdly, call our staff and ask if they would be willing to change their shifts.

7 days notice doesn't work for childcare

62. The ECEC industry is not similar to industries such as restaurants where you can survive with less people on the floor. We have young lives in our hands and legislative requirements to meet and it is not feasible to always give employees 7 days notice of their rosters if something comes up that we cannot plan for.
63. We need the Awards to be reformed for the ECEC sector in order to provide greater flexibility and support to be able to run the Centres with the particular legislative requirements and understanding of children's need to be a focus.



Julie White

4 March 2019



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Why the NSW Government must give 3 & 4-year-old preschoolers in long daycare a fairer go

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW, is calling for urgent reconsideration of proper government funding for four-year-old children in long daycare, especially when NSW has the lowest participation rate and arguably the lowest preschool funding arrangements in the country.



ACA NSW is also calling on the NSW Government for proper government funding of all three-year-old children regardless of early childhood education and care settings, in anticipation of probable future Federal-State funding after the upcoming Federal election.

"NSW, just like the rest of Australia, provides a world-class early childhood education and care service to children aged 0-5 years old. In NSW, four-year-old children in long daycare receive NSW Government assistance of up to \$450 per child per year. Yet for example a Victorian four-year-old child in the same setting can receive \$3,695 per year. So why do NSW four-year-old children in long daycare in NSW get less?" asked Chiang Lim, CEO of ACA NSW.


It is important to point out that Australia's childcare is more than a place for children to be cared for while their parents work. Early childhood education and care provides opportunities for children to learn and have lasting, positive impacts on their future educational, health, social and economic outcomes.


"We should be taking advantage of the existing preschool education infrastructure that already exists across all long daycare services where the majority of NSW families already enrol their children. Providing greater government support will make access easier for this cohort of children by assisting services with the cost of delivering their preschool programs. This will lift NSW up and may even exceed national preschool participation levels," said Mr Lim.

In the lead up to the NSW state election on 23 March, it is imperative that all MPs and political candidates make funding and access to quality early childhood education and care for all NSW children a priority. There are over 189,000 children in NSW who do not access any type of formal early learning, putting pressure on primary schools to support them instead.

“It is alarming that far too many NSW parents cannot afford to enrol their children in any type of early learning environment either at all or for additional day or days. We call on the NSW Government to help as many children in NSW as possible to get a better start in life,” he said.

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