



Queensland University of Technology

**Commissioned by the Queensland Office for Early Childhood Education and Care,
Department of Education and Training**

Accessing Kindergarten in Queensland

**A Report to the Queensland
Office for Early Childhood Education and Care**

Report Authors

Professor Karen Thorpe

Dr Lyn Vromans

Ms Rachel Bell-Booth

**Queensland University of Technology
School of Psychology and Counselling**

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to give thanks to the people whose kindness and interest helped to progress this research. These are:

Mrs Julie Hill, from Centacare, Mt Isa

Mrs Maryann Devine, from Centacare, Mt Isa

Dohky Ayoubi, from Playgroups in the Park, Mt Isa

Mrs Dixie Samardin from the Piccaninny playgroup, Mt Isa

Mrs Elaine Hardwick, from Family Day Care, Mt Isa

Karen Melange, from Play groups Australia

Gina Crowe, from Playgroups Queensland

Esther Friedlander, from Playgroups Queensland

Gail Ker, Daniel Zingifuaboro and Sarblair Twayjaw from ACCES Services Inc

Ms Hser Paw, from the Karen Women's Organization

Ms Nagla Ibrahim from the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland

Ms Juba Yuol from the Sudanese Women's Association

Ms Day Win who worked so conscientiously and generously as an interpreter and bicultural worker with participants from the Karen community

We give special gratitude to the women who participated in this research and who graciously shared their stories and their time.

Contents

	Page
Acknowledgments	3
Contents	4
List of Figures and Tables	5
Glossary of Terms	6
Executive Summary	8
1. Introduction: Access to Kindergarten in Queensland	13
2. Method	17
2.1 Design	17
2.2 Sample	17
2.3 Materials	18
2.4 Consultation processes and procedure	20
2.5 Interviews	22
2.6 Analyses	22
2.7 Presentation of the results	22
3. Results: Specified Themes	23
3.1 What do parents believe is important for their child’s development and education and what is their knowledge about early education services?	23
3.2 What are the barriers to access of kindergarten programs?	24
3.2.1 Structural barriers	25
3.2.2 Cultural-attitudinal barriers	28
3.3 What factors would enable families to take up kindergarten programs for their children?	30
4. Results: Emergent Themes	33
4.1 “Being other”- feeling different, feeling excluded and fearful	33
4.2 Parental mental health as a barrier to access of early education programs	33
4.3 Children’s additional needs as a barriers to access of early education programs	34
4.4 Models of transition to school	34
5. Conclusion	35
6. References	36
7. Appendices	38
Appendix 1 Kindergarten Access Interview	38
Appendices 2-5 Interview data: Parenting intervention, Playgroups, Working mothers, non-working mothers	39
Appendices 6-9 Sudanese, Karen and Islamic interview data	50

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Percentage of children using different forms of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services in Queensland (Source: Queensland Government, 2010)	15
Figure 2: Percentage of children accessing Kindergarten in Australia and Queensland (Source: Queensland Government, 2010)	15

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Summary of participants	19
Table 2: Summary of barriers to accessing kindergarten across all groups	27
Table 3: Summary of enablers for kindergarten attendance	32

Glossary of Terms

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Services: The types of service activity that a children's service is licensed and/or funded to provide (Australian Institute of Health and Well-being, retrieved February 2011).

The three such services discussed in this report are centre based long day care, family day care and kindergarten/pre-prep programs. In the current study the focus is on children in the year prior to the preparatory year of school. Since 2007 when universal preparatory education was provided in Queensland the official age of commencement at preparatory programs in Queensland is between 4 years 6 months and 5 years 6 months and, accordingly, for pre-preparatory /kindergartens programs between 3 years 6 months and 4 years 6 months with the birth date of 30 June defining the last day of intake. Some variations resulting from accelerations and retentions in progression can result in a wider age range within these programs.

Long Day-care: comprises services aimed primarily at 0-5 year olds that are provided in a centre usually by a mix of qualified and other staff. Educational, care and recreational programs are provided based on the developmental needs, interests and experience of each child (Australian Institute of Health and Well-being, retrieved February 2011) .

Kindergarten or preschool: comprises a structured educational programme usually provided by a qualified teacher on a sessional basis in dedicated preschools. Similar educational programs or curricula may be provided in long day care and other settings. These are primarily aimed at children in the year or two before they commence full-time schooling.

The terms most commonly used to describe preschool services in various states and territories are:

- Kindergarten—Tasmania, Western Australia and Queensland (In Queensland since the introduction of the preparatory year in 2007 the term pre-preparatory is increasingly used.)

- Kindergarten or Preschool—Victoria
- Preschool (including Child Parent Centres)—South Australia
- Preschool— New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory

(Australian Institute of Health and Well-being, retrieved February 2011)

Family day-care: comprises services provided in the carer's own home. The care is largely aimed at 0–5 year olds, but primary school children may also receive care before and after school, and care during school vacations. Central co-ordination units in all States and Territories organise and support a network of carers, often with the help of local governments (Australian Institute of Health and Well-being, retrieved February 2011).

Playgroup: provides an informal session where parent and nonparent caregivers, children and babies meet together in a relaxed environment. Playgroups are most commonly set up and run by parents and caregivers though some have a trained facilitator. At playgroup, children choosing from a range of activities set up to meet their varying needs. Activities at playgroup are either free or low cost, and may include: music and singing, imaginative play, outdoor and free play, art and craft activities and outings. In a playgroup, parents and caregivers stay to interact with the other adults; and to play with the children.(Playgroups Australia, retrieved February 2011). There is a range of models for playgroups: Community, weekend, father-run, grandparent, family day care, supported, intensive support, special needs, culturally specific, Indigenous, teenage mothers and school-based (for definition of each type see Playgroups Victoria, retrieved February 2011). In the current study the research team visited and recruited parents to the study from facilitated playgroups with a trained facilitator including a school-based and Indigenous-specific playgroup facilitated by an Indigenous education worker, a community playgroup held in a park, and a facilitated playgroup in metropolitan Brisbane.

Executive Summary

1. National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education

On 29 November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed a major National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. The Australian Government has now entered into Bilateral Agreements under this National Partnership with all State and Territory governments. These Agreements specify the actions and strategies to be undertaken by each jurisdiction to achieve, by 2013, Universal Access for all 4 year olds to a quality early education program delivered by a 4 year trained early childhood teacher for 15 hours per week, 40 days per year. The Bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and the State of Queensland commits to

- Increasing enrolments of children at Kindergarten in a variety of settings especially long day care
- Increasing delivery from 12.8 to 15 hours per week
- Improving attendance for disadvantaged and Indigenous children
- Increasing the number of early childhood trained teachers
- Engaging with the childcare sector to ensure that delivery of kindergarten services meets the needs of parents.

Central to meeting these commitments is understanding the needs of families and any barriers to access of kindergarten services.

2. Access to kindergarten programs in Queensland

In Queensland, only 32 percent of children aged three and a half to four and a half currently access educational programs delivered by a qualified teacher. Most utilise long day care services, of which 90 percent do not have a qualified teacher. Some access no licensed ECEC services at all. The Queensland Government through the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care is acting to improve this situation through increased provision of kindergarten services

and funding models that enable provision of qualified teachers within long day care. However, the issue is not one of availability alone. Some families who have access to kindergarten programs chose not to enrol in these services. This study was undertaken to hear the voices of families who are not accessing kindergarten programs. The study addressed three key questions:

- i) What do parents believe are important for their child's development and education and what is their knowledge about early education services?
- ii) What are the barriers to access of early education programs for families who are not currently accessing early education programs for their children?
- iii) What factors would enable families to take up early education programs for their children?

3. Study of access to kindergarten in Queensland

Method: Families representing a diverse range of community groups currently under-represented in the access of kindergarten programs were interviewed. Interviews were transcribed and two levels of analysis of the qualitative data were undertaken:

- i) Content analyses of the responses to the three guiding questions was undertaken and examined for key themes. Analyses identified group differences and unifying themes.
- ii) Thematic analyses examining emergent themes and deeper understandings of the value of early education services were undertaken. This utilised an Individual phenomenological approach.

Results: Content analysis

Content analyses addressed the three research questions:

1. What is parent's knowledge about and valuing of early education programs?

All families acknowledged the value of early education programs and placed particular emphasis on the socialisation and social-emotional development experiences provided by a group setting. There was considerable diversity across the range of groups interviewed regarding the value of

kindergarten programs. Majority culture, non-working mothers relied upon the reputation of the kindergarten program but had limited knowledge of the content of the program. Working families did not distinguish between kindergarten programs and those provided in long day care settings. Indigenous and Islamic families were highly knowledgeable and articulate about their needs and some did not see having a qualified teacher as the most important defining feature of quality in an early education program. Some of these families were actively choosing alternatives to Kindergarten that better met their needs for social inclusion. Newly arrived refugees sought inclusion but required assistance with understanding access to kindergarten services.

2. What are the barriers to access of kindergarten?

Structural barriers were availability of programs, understanding the procedural complications of enrolment and getting onto waiting lists, costs, hours of operation and site location. It was clear that increased availability alone would not be a sufficient condition for parents to attend kindergarten programs. Most parents interviewed, even the advantaged, felt excluded from the kindergarten system by the current structures.

Cultural and attitudinal barriers were also evident. Many of the families interviewed felt not only financially excluded but also socially excluded from kindergarten attendance. For Islamic families the lack of privacy in toileting facilities and provision for respectful cultural practices relating to food were a difficulty. For most families the opportunity to learn alongside and be with their children was important. The cultural identity of the staff and relationships of trust were very significant. Parents sought more active teaching and efficient use of teacher resources for their investment of money, time and effort in getting a child to kindergarten.

3. What factors enable access to kindergarten programs?

Parents sought universally available and free kindergarten places that did not require the completion of complicated and stigmatising paperwork. Provision of transport and location of

kindergartens on school sites would assist the logistical difficulties experienced by many families without personal transport.

Parents wanted change to the current model of kindergarten because the structure was seen as rigid and failing to cater for the needs of families across the diverse range interviewed. The need to embed kindergarten within long day care or family day care provision was the clear message from working parents and those seeking employment.

For parents from both culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and middle-class non-working mother families, a model in which parents participated and learned alongside their children was important. Parents sought greater structure in the learning program so that they understood its value. They wanted to see and understand their children's learning and learn how to support their children's learning and development when at home.

Results: Emergent thematic analyses

Four key emergent themes were identified:

1. *"Being other"* – In different ways all families described the feeling of being excluded from the mainstream of Kindergarten education. Exclusion was expressed both as an internalised feeling of "being lower" (Karen refugee term) or "shamed" (Indigenous term) and as an externalised experience of being excluded or discriminated against by the system.
2. *Parent mental health* – Depression was named as a reason that mothers were "unable to get out of bed in the morning" to get their children to kindergarten or other early education programs.
3. *Children's additional needs as a barrier to access of early education programs* – Parents of children with social-emotional problems, particularly Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) found that it was difficult to access kindergartens that were able to provide additional supports.

4. *Models of transition to school* – All parents expressed concern that the model of transition to school provided by a single year of kindergarten education in the year prior to the Preparatory school year was too simplistic and not adequate to optimise the learning, development and well-being of Queensland's children. They were extremely articulate about the need for a graduated process of parent support and a minimum of two years of kindergarten provision.

1. Introduction: Access to Kindergarten in Queensland

Queensland's children enter school with widely different preparation for their ongoing learning and social participation (Thorpe et al., 2004). Already their life prospects are not equal (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). While family background and early experiences within the family are one significant explanation for these differences, early education programs also play an important role. High quality educational programs have been shown to increase children's life chances, with greatest effects for those who are disadvantaged (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Thorpe, et al., 2004). In contrast, the absence of a program has been found to predict poor progress (Effective Provision of Preschool & Primary Education [EPPE], 2007; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Thorpe, et al., 2004).

Preparing for School (Thorpe, et al., 2004), a study of 1860 children across 39 Queensland communities examined the effects of all prior ECEC program experiences on children's attainment at school entry. The study found that, controlling for family background, programs experienced at age 3-4 years most consistently and powerfully predicted both social and academic attainment at school entry and progress throughout the first school year. In contrast, the absence of a group-based experience at this time most consistently predicted poor performance and poor progress. The mechanisms underlying these large scale findings are suggested in the rich descriptions of children's prior-to-school experiences in the Australian study *100 children go to school* (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland, & Reid, 1998). This study identified the value of early education programs not only in supporting development of early literacy and numeracy but also in facilitating the learning of institutional routines that are prerequisite for successful school participation and attainment. Such learning cannot be provided in the home context but requires group experience.

In recognition of the importance of access to early childhood education programs, the Council of Australian Governments has endorsed a major National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education with the aim of achieving universal access for all 4 year olds to a quality early education program by 2013. Such programs will be delivered by a 4 year trained early childhood teacher for a

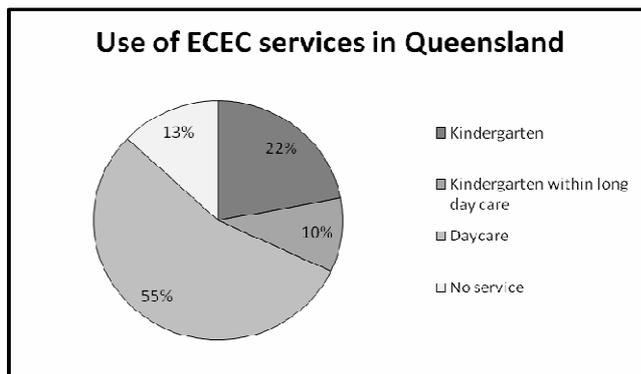
minimum of 15 hours per week, 40 days per year. The Australian Government has now entered into Bilateral Agreements with all State and Territory governments that specify the actions and strategies to be undertaken by each jurisdiction to achieve these goals. The Bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and the State of Queensland commits to

- Increasing enrolments of children at Kindergarten in a variety of settings especially long day care
- Increasing delivery from 12.8 to 15 hours per week
- Improving attendance for disadvantaged and Indigenous children
- Increasing number of early childhood trained teachers
- Engaging with the childcare sector to ensure that delivery of kindergarten services meets the needs of parents

Central to meeting these commitments is the understanding needs of families and any barriers to access of kindergarten services.

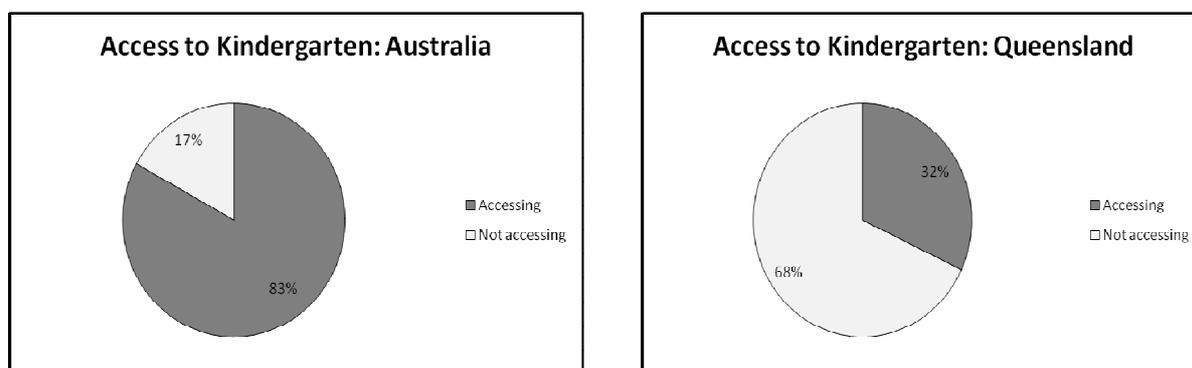
Currently the vast majority of children in Queensland are not accessing kindergarten programs. Only 32 percent of children access educational programs delivered by a qualified teacher in the year prior to school (aged 3.5-4.5 in Queensland) (Queensland Government, 2010). These programs are primarily provided by the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland with support from the State Government. These kindergarten programs offer part-time and part-day places and incur a fee to parents. The majority (55 percent) of Queensland's children attend long day care and only 10 percent of long day care centres have an educational program delivered by a qualified teacher. The remaining children do not receive any group-based education or care program. The kindergarten participation rate compares to the national rate, averaged over states and territories, of 83 percent. Further, there is evidence of under-representation of enrolment among those from socially and culturally diverse groups (Thorpe, et al., 2004).

Figure 1: Percentage of children using different forms of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services in Queensland (Source: Queensland Government, 2010)



As part of its *Toward Q2, Tomorrow's Queensland* (Queensland Government, 2008) agenda for a smarter and fairer Queensland, the Queensland Government has the target to provide universal access to early education delivered by a qualified teacher by 2013. This process commenced with the introduction of the preparatory year in 2007 that provided an extra full-time year of education for children aged four and a half to five and a half. This provision is free of charge to parents. The focus is now on increasing provision of education in the pre-preparatory year. To this end, up to 240 new kindergartens will be established and funding is being provided to engage qualified teachers to deliver an approved kindergarten program within long day care settings. The aim is that all Queensland children will access 15 hours of kindergarten education delivered by a qualified teacher and adhering to the Early Years Learning Framework curriculum.

Figure 2: Percentage of children accessing Kindergarten in Australia and Queensland (Source: Queensland Government, 2010)



While moves to increase kindergarten provision will increase availability of quality early education programs, there remains concern that some families will not take the places provided. The failure to access early education is not simply an issue of availability. Some families who have access to kindergarten programs do not choose to enrol in these services. These groups include children of working parents who comprise the large number of children in long day care programs, cultural sub-groups and a range of disadvantaged groups. While these demographic characteristics are known to be over-represented among non-attendees, the reasons for their choices, the barriers to their uptake and the factors that would enable participation in teacher-led early education programs are not well understood. Additionally, there are families that might be considered “mainstream” who do not access kindergarten places. While the reasons for failing to access are currently unknown key hypothesised explanations are:

- Attitudes that early education may not be beneficial, or even harmful, to the child and that care in the home is preferable.
- That their child has additional needs that exclude them from participation in programs – in particular children with socio-emotional difficulties such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

There is a need to understand the structural, attitudinal-cultural and various other barriers to engaging in early education programs, to effect changes that will increase the uptake of kindergarten programs. The current study aimed to investigate this problem by addressing the following three research questions:

- 1 What do parents believe are important for their child’s development and education and what is their knowledge about early education services?
- 2 What are the barriers for families who do not currently access early education programs?
- 3 What factors would enable families to take up early education programs for their children?

2. Method

2.1 Design: The study aimed to collect rich data concerning the reasons for decisions regarding access to early education programs. A qualitative interview study that sampled a range of parents who were not currently accessing kindergarten for their pre-prep children was undertaken. The study was guided by the key research questions but allowed for non-standardised questioning that elicited emergent themes. Families provided detailed accounts of their prior experiences, barriers to engaging with early education and possible solutions to bringing about engagement with early education. The participating families were sampled from a range of community groups in two locations: Mt Isa and Brisbane.

Mt Isa provided a remote location characterised by a very high level of families with young children and a large Indigenous population. The town has four kindergartens with one specifically funded for Indigenous education. Alternative provisions include four long day care centres, family day care and playgroups, including one facilitated by an Indigenous education worker. No public transport is available in the town which can restrict access to education programs for those without their own car.

Brisbane provided the metropolitan setting. There are a number of key groups who do not access kindergarten, both from the cultural majority and culturally and linguistically diverse families. A range of provisions including playgroups, long day care and family day care are alternatives available to parents.

2.2 Sample: Participants comprised a purposive sample of women from a range of community groups who were mothers of young children within the appropriate age for kindergarten attendance or approaching this age within the next 12 months. Because some participants came from small communities, to avoid breaching research confidentiality and anonymity, detailed descriptions of participants are not provided. Rather we describe the groups from which they were recruited. Additionally it should be noted that the researchers aimed to recruit a sample of Indigenous Australian women who lived in metropolitan Brisbane. Three different groups were approached to this end. The research team had considerable discussion with these

groups but after careful consideration two groups declined participation in the study and the other has yet to confirm whether they will be able to provide data. Families who had opted to “home school” their children were not included in this study because they had made the decision not to access Kindergarten on philosophical grounds and could not contribute to the focus on enabling participation. The final sample comprised eight groups; four from each of the study sites. These are documented in Table 1 (see p 19).

2.3 Materials: This research developed and utilised a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix 1, p 38). The interviews were all audio-recorded with permission of participants and later transcribed verbatim. Each participant received a book appropriate to the age of the pre-school ECEC child and a retail chain gift voucher for participating in the study. Where required, transport and catering was provided in keeping with recommendation from the facilitating community organisation through which the women were recruited.

Table 1: Summary of participants

Source of recruitment	Description of group
Remote: Mt Isa (n= 18)	
Parenting intervention group n=7	This group included a highly disadvantaged group of Indigenous mothers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and very disadvantaged non-Indigenous mothers including, single mothers and those living with the child's father.
Indigenous facilitated playgroup n=5	Parents included mothers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds who had made a decision to take their children to an alternative service, a school-based playgroup. Some parents participating in this group had accessed Kindergarten for their older children in the past and were able to provide comparison.
Community Playgroups in the Park n=4	Parents were from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. This group included part-time working mothers and stay at home mothers. Ages ranged from mid to late twenties to late thirties.
Working parents using family day care n=2	In Mt Isa a high number of parents work full-time. The context of Mt Isa places a particular challenge for child care and kindergarten attendance as the mine has 4 rotating shifts across a month based on a 12-hours work day. The mine operates 24 hours a day and 365 days per year. Additionally there is a shortage of child care and for those working outside the mine finding care to cover work hours is also difficult. The selection of parents through family day care aimed to capture these challenges. Family day care in Mt Isa provides childcare services that are adapted to the unique needs of employment in Mt Isa providing care 7 days a week and 24 hours per day throughout the year. There is a broad diversity of families utilising this service.
Metropolitan: Brisbane (n=12)	
Karen Women's Organisation n=3	These were women from Burmese refugee backgrounds, recently arrived in Australia, who provided information with the assistance of an interpreter. Demographic information is not provided to protect the identity of those participating.
Sudanese Women's Association n=2	Mothers were women from Sudanese refugee backgrounds. Demographic information is not provided to protect the identity of those participating.
Islamic Women's Association n=2	Mothers were members of the Islamic Women's Association. Demographic information is not provided to protect the identity of those participating.
Facilitated playgroup n=5	Parents included mothers who for financial reasons and choice have decided to stay home and care for children during the early years leading up to school entry. These mothers lived in a middle class suburb and had high levels of education, mostly university degrees. The age of these mothers ranged from early thirties to mid forties.

2.4 Consultation processes and procedure: In the engagement of all groups, an initial consultation process with the identified community organisation preceded the approach and recruitment of participants. Recruitment procedures adhered to appropriate protocols for each group and were guided by community organisation employees.

In Mt Isa the research team has long-term relationships with community groups through its ongoing work with the *Communities for Children* program administered through the Catholic social services agency, Centacare. Existing positive relationships with Piccaninny Playgroup, Playgroups in the Park and the Parent Intervention Program facilitated access to key parent groups. Centacare provided facilities for researchers to conduct the focus groups as required. Working parents were approached through the family day care scheme. Again an existing relationship with the director facilitated parent participation. The family day care scheme is a participant in the E4 Kids study within which the Kindergarten Access study is nested.

In Brisbane, for recruitment of culturally diverse groups a range of procedures were implemented:

Initial consultation - To ensure that consultation was with relevant communities, initial contact was with A.C.C.E.S Services Inc., a non-government organisation that was funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to be responsible for the initial settlement of newly-arrived people from refugee backgrounds. As part of their service provision role, A.C.C.E.S Services Inc. have direct knowledge on the most recent and significant local populations of people from refugee backgrounds. A.C.C.E.S Services Inc. staff advised on the relevance of contacting people from Karen, Sudanese and Islamic communities as these would represent large Burmese, African and Islamic groups.

Introduction to community members - A.C.C.E.S Services Inc. provided introduction to a Karen community leader, a pastor, who was also employed as a bilingual bicultural worker with the service agency. Following verbal and written communication about the nature of the research and the informed consent process, the pastor contacted a leader of the local Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) to introduce the researcher and forward research information and consent

sheets. In due course, the leader of the KWO contacted a researcher indicating that three women would like to participate in the research as a group. A staff member of A.C.C.E.S Services Inc. was a leader in the Sudanese community and offered to provide information about the research at an upcoming meeting of leaders from different areas of Brisbane so that the research could gain their support. Following this approval, the staff member forwarded contact details of a leader in the Sudanese Women's Association, who in turn gave contact details of two women who were interested in participating in the research for individual interviews. A staff member of A.C.C.E.S Services Inc. gave the researcher contact details of a member of the Islamic Women's Association. Following telephone conversation, the researcher forwarded the research information and consent forms, which were forwarded to community members. Two women, interested in research participation, contacted the researcher.

Language Interpretation - The Islamic and Sudanese mothers spoke English well, without need of interpreters. The researcher offered the leader of the KWO the opportunity to nominate a preferred interpreter for the Karen participants, but also nominated a potential interpreter, known to her through previous research in the locality. The researcher was aware that the interpreter was a trusted member of the community, who had previously worked as an interpreter within the community. The leader agreed to the interpreter, confirming that they would be comfortable speaking in front of her as she was known to them. This young unmarried woman from a Karen refugee background worked with the interviewer to interpret conversations in the Karen focus group.

Informed consent - Following verbal explanation of the research to potential participants by the community leaders, research information and consent forms were sent to participants for perusal. Directly prior to the interview, the interviewer read the research information and consent forms verbally, clarifying important points (such as the nature of voluntary consent and confidentiality) and invited questions.

The recruitment of non-working mothers was made through Playgroups Queensland who identified relevant playgroups. Negotiations through the playgroup facilitator provided a focus group sample.

2.5 Interviews: Qualitative interviews were conducted either on a one-to-one basis or as a group to explore participants' experiences and perceptions related to early childhood education and childcare. For all interviews, specific attention and time was given to developing rapport and conducting the interview in a sensitive way. Participants determined the interview type and location. The duration of the interviews varied but ranged from 15 minutes to one and a half hours duration.

2.6 Analyses: Two levels of analyses were undertaken

1. **Deductive** – Content analyses of the responses to the three research questions were undertaken and placed into predetermined categories: structural and cultural/attitudinal.
2. **Inductive** – An inductive approach, without hypotheses or prior assumptions, which conceptualizes participants as experts in their personal experience of the phenomenon being explored, was used. In particular this approach was valuable for analyses of data with refugee and culturally diverse populations.

2.7 Presentation of the results: The data on which results are based are the transcripts of interviews. For purposes of succinct reporting these data are not embedded within the report but rather cross referenced to appendices where qualitative data are presented by theme. Appendices 2-5 presents data from the Parenting Intervention Group, Playgroups in the Park, Indigenous Playgroup, Working mothers and voluntary non-working mothers. Qualitative data from Islamic, Sudanese and Karen mothers is presented separately (Appendices 6-9), providing additional explanation to account for unique contextual factors and early English acquisition.

3. Results: Specified Themes

3.1 What do parents believe is important for their child's development and education and what is their knowledge about early education services?

Across the diverse sample of parents there was universal support for the provision of ECEC services and belief in their value for their children's development and social inclusion. In a range of different ways they indicated their belief that early education provided important opportunity for children's development and socialisation. Three key themes emerged:

1. ECEC settings as a place to learn to be with peers
2. ECEC settings as a place to learn to be with other adults
3. ECEC settings as a place to learn and prepare for school

Parents emphasised that there is a need for children to be in a group of peers so that they can learn to get along together. They named the learning of sharing, of emotional regulation, emotional control and the development of friendships as key functions provided by group ECEC settings (see Appendix 2.1, p 39). They also saw the provision of opportunity to be with adults other than parents or 'known' adults as an important part of their child's learning (see Appendix 2.2, p 39). In this respect learning to be confident and learning to respect the authority of other adults was described as an important task that would prepare children for entry to school and for their relationship with teachers. Finally, parents emphasised the need for their children to learn about the routines of school and saw that the structures provided by early education programs such as kindergarten were critical (see Appendix 2.3, p 39). A smaller subset of parents also saw the role of early childhood education programs in preparing for children's early numeracy and literacy skills. Overwhelmingly, however, the focus was on learning to be social and learning to be acceptable in a group. They wanted their children to fit in and be confident as they entered school.

There was some diversity in parent's understanding of the range of ECEC provision, and their specific knowledge about kindergarten (see Appendix 6.1, pp 50-52). While some families did not understand the difference between long day care provision and kindergarten services,

others had deep knowledge of different forms of provision. The mainstream middle-class, non working mothers we interviewed were less questioning of kindergarten and relied on reputation derived from communications with other mothers about the value of the provision. They viewed kindergartens as the highest quality provision and had deep distrust of long day care. Though some used limited amounts of long day care while attempting to find work they felt guilty about so doing because they believed it was not providing quality education. They did not, however, seem to have knowledge of what happened in kindergartens. Working parents did not see kindergarten as an option for them, but felt that family day care and long day care provided for their child's socialisation and social emotional development needs as well as a kindergarten. In contrast, some of the more marginalised groups had sought knowledge about different forms of ECEC provision and had made active choices. The Indigenous mothers and those from the Islamic Women's association in particular stood out as having deep knowledge about ECEC provisions and kindergarten programs (see Appendix 3.2.1, pp 43-44). This possibly related to their feelings of being excluded from the mainstream of society (see Appendix 8.1.1, pp 56-57). Some actually utilised these services in the past and had opted for alternatives because they felt they did not serve their needs. The focus of these parents was not simply on the provision of a qualified teacher but rather on a broad range of features that defined 'a quality program' for them (see Appendix 3.2.3, p 45). They emphasised the role of relationships with the service provider and the ability of the service to include them (see Appendix 3.2.2, p 44). Some of these marginalised parents saw the current form of provision of kindergartens as too rigid to meet their needs and those of their children.

3.2 What are the barriers to access of kindergarten programs?

Parents were asked to describe any barriers to their attendance at Kindergarten programs or equivalent ECEC services. Responses were categorised according to structural and cultural-attitudinal barriers and are summarised in Table 2 (see p 27).

3.2.1 Structural barriers: A large number of structural barriers were identified by the parents interviewed, some common across groups and others specific to particular sub-groups. Some differences across the remote and metropolitan location were also evident.

Availability of a kindergarten was a concern raised by many parents but more commonly those in Mt Isa. In Mt Isa there are four kindergartens, one of these an Indigenous kindergarten. In comparison across the state of Queensland the level of provision is high. However, the population of Mt Isa has a greater than average number of families with young children, relative to the general population of Queensland, and high demand on all ECEC services. Families reported that there was a need to put their name down early and those who had recently arrived in a new location, whether in Mt Isa or Brisbane found they were too far down the waiting list to obtain a place. Some families, notably the disadvantaged, believed they were discriminated against in terms of their position on the waiting list. For families who were new immigrants and some of the highly disadvantaged groups the procedures for getting onto a waiting list or understanding costs were barriers that prevented any attempt to enrol. For disadvantaged groups the cost of registering for the waitlist was prohibitive (see Appendices 3.1.1, p 40; 7.1.1, pp 53-54; 8.1.3 pp 58-59).

Cost was a common barrier named across many of the parent groups interviewed. For immigrant groups it was not only a barrier but a source of great fear. They were unsure if they could afford to utilise ECEC services, whether kindergarten or other services, while they attended English language classes. Cost was named as a key factor preventing attendance for all disadvantaged groups with some parents expressing the view that they were denied their child's right to early education because they had to choose between eating and fees. A number of parents made comparison with the situation in other Australian States where kindergarten is available free of charge (see Appendices 3.1.2, p 41).

Transport was also an issue for disadvantaged groups. In Mt Isa there is no public transport and those without private cars found it difficult to access kindergarten

particularly in the summer months when temperatures are high. The Indigenous kindergarten formerly provided a bus, but for a range of reasons this has not been operational for some time. In metropolitan Brisbane, the culturally diverse groups interviewed were dependent on public transport and the time demands on them with getting older children to school and themselves to English language classes made access logistically difficult and prohibitive. Many parents indicated that location on school sites was preferable to relieve constraints on time but also to facilitate familiarity with the physical environment of school as part of the school transition (see Appendices 3.1.3, p 42; 7.1.2, p 55).

The hours and timing of kindergarten programs were viewed as significant barriers for working parents. Part-time attendance and half days did not align with parent working patterns and, as a consequence, most opted for long day care or family day care. In Mt Isa this was a particular problem where demands on all forms of care were high and services such as family day care did not have the capacity to take children to kindergarten programs. Hours of operation also compounded logistical problems for those with multiple children and no private transport (see Appendix 3.1.4, p 42).

Table 2: Summary of barriers to accessing kindergarten across all groups

Barriers	Remote: Mt Isa				Metropolitan Brisbane			
	Working	Non-working	High Disadvantage	Indigenous	Sudanese	Islamic	Karen	Non-working middle class
Structural barriers								
Availability	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Procedural			✓		✓		✓	
Transport		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Cost		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Time constraints	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Hours of operation	✓				✓		✓	
Timing-age of entry		✓	✓	✓				✓
Location of program	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Cultural –Attitudinal barriers								
Accommodation of cultural need			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dual generational learning		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Content of program		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓

3.2.2 Cultural-attitudinal barriers: Disadvantaged families and those from culturally diverse backgrounds are under-represented among those enrolled for kindergarten. Many parents from the culturally and linguistically diverse groups interviewed expressed the view that kindergarten programs were culturally excluding. Of these, many parents found alternative provisions that better matched their cultural needs. Some had prior experience of kindergarten but found alternatives more inclusive and supportive of their own and their children's learning needs.

Some barriers related to cultural practices. In particular, the Islamic women found the toileting arrangements at kindergarten sites, which did not allow for privacy, as unacceptable (see Appendices 8.1.4, p 60; 9.1.5, pp 64-65). Routines with food and hygiene were similarly seen as inconsistent with cultural needs. It is important to note however that the Islamic women interviewed were keen to participate in mainstream kindergarten education as a means of promoting their humanity to non-Islamic people through social connectedness, social familiarity and advocacy (see Appendices 8.1.1. pp 56-57; 9.1.3, p 63). Parents from culturally and linguistically diverse groups all sought social connectedness and envisaged early childhood settings as a place for social inclusion. Across these groups there was a call for involvement and engagement of parents. Many did not want to be separated from their children but rather preferred to learn alongside. This was true of the refugee groups and also the Indigenous families, both advantaged and disadvantaged. Many felt that the current form of kindergarten did not provide opportunities for dual-generational learning and sought alternatives that did. Interestingly, the middle-class, non-working mothers interviewed also sought opportunities for dual-generational learning (see Appendix 4.4, p 47). They spoke of the loneliness of being a non-working mother with "walls coming in on them". As older mothers, some were without experience of young children, and did not feel empowered as parents. Their limited access to facilitated playgroups gave them ideas for what to do

at home and friendships with other parents but this was not sufficient. They sought a two-year kindergarten program that could support them as parents and their children's transition to education.

Another key theme was the absence of trust and relationships between kindergarten providers and parents from diverse backgrounds. In particular Indigenous parents sought Indigenous education workers because they were "people like us" and who understood their lives. In Mt Isa many parents chose the Piccaninny Playgroup in preference to the Indigenous Kindergarten because the playgroup facilitator was an Indigenous woman in whom they had trust and with whom they could share details of their lives. In the Indigenous kindergarten, although staff were very sensitive to families' needs, the teacher was not Indigenous. Parents wanted to feel included in the group and the facilitating teacher had a key role to play because she was a known and trusted member of the Indigenous community (see Appendices 3.2.1, pp 43-44; 8.1.1, pp 56-57).

Social disadvantage is of itself socially excluding and for some families, even if issues of cost could be overcome, their social disadvantage was a source of shame and exclusion. The facilitator of Piccaninny Playgroup talked of women's unwillingness to attend programs, where children were dressed in "Pumpkin Patch", because their own children were marked out as different by their poverty.

The content of kindergarten programs was also raised by a number of parents, often as an assessment of the benefit of the program against the costs of money, time and effort (see Appendix 3.2.3, p 45). Parents who had prior experience of kindergarten programs with older children believed there was much time wasted. For example a number indicated they did not want to pay for their child to sleep when they could be learning and sleep on return home. Some disputed the need for sleep at age 4. A few related accounts of children being uninspired and some felt there was a philosophy against "teaching" the child. These parents did not seek formal education but did believe that a

more proactive role for the kindergarten teacher was needed. For disadvantaged families, the need to see value for their money, time and effort in getting children there was more intense than it was for those who were more highly resourced. Those who used alternatives, such as parenting programs and Piccaninny Playgroup, were participants in the program, saw active learning and had personal learning outcomes. These parents clearly articulated the view that quality was not about the qualification of the teacher but the quality of the relationships and the quality of pedagogical practice (see Appendix 3.2.2, p 44).

3.3 What factors would enable families to take up early education programs for their children?

Parent's discussions about the barriers to accessing kindergarten provided two forms of commentary on the factors that would enable their children to attend. First, they offered information on the range of additional support they required to access kindergarten as it is currently provided. Second, through their discussion of alternative services chosen, they provided information on different models that might be considered.

To enable access to kindergarten in the existing model the need to address the issue of cost is an overwhelmingly dominant theme for non-working parents. Parents voiced the view that early education was their child's right and that being economically disadvantaged through poverty or opting to stay at home as a carer denied them this right. Disadvantaged groups sought universally available free kindergarten places without the need to complete complicated or stigmatising paperwork (see Appendix 4.1, p 46). Provision of transport and location of kindergartens on school sites would assist the logistical difficulties experienced by many families without personal transport (see Appendix 9.1.9, p 67). More importantly there was a call for a move away from the current model of kindergarten, the structure of which was seen as rigid and failing to cater for the needs of all the families interviewed in one way or another. Kindergarten programs as currently offered were viewed as the preserve of privileged non-working parents. The need to embed kindergarten within long day care or family day care

provision was the clear message from working parents. The current hours and timing of kindergarten did not serve the needs of working families (see Appendix 4.2, p 40). Logistically the placement of kindergartens on school sites also was viewed as enabling for parents. In addition, this strategy was seen as part of the process of providing children with a seamless transition to school (see Appendix 4.3, p 46).

For those parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and indeed from families with a middle-class non-working mother, a model in which parents participated and learned alongside their children was important (see Appendix 4.4, p 47). The model of the Piccaninny Playgroup in Mt Isa was used by many parents we interviewed as a model of excellence. This program was located on three school sites in Mt Isa, had an Indigenous facilitator and Indigenous staff. The program provided a highly energetic and proactive teaching program. The parents attended and had opportunities to participate and learn. Connections were even made across the three school sites in which the program operated. Children could order from the school tuckshop at the end of the program and were taught about good food choices. A bus provided transport for those who could not walk or who did not have their own transport. Attendances at this program by very disadvantaged Indigenous families were consistently high.

Parents sought greater structure in the learning program so that they understood its value. They wanted to see and understand their children's learning and, alongside, learn how to support their children's learning and development when at home.

Table 3: Summary of enablers for kindergarten attendance

	Remote: Mt Isa				Metropolitan :Brisbane			
Enablers	Working	Non-working	Multiple Disadvantage	Indigenous	Sudanese	Islamic	Karen	Non-working middle class
Supports								
Fee free	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Universal access-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transport		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Location of site		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Models								
School location	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Embedding in day care	✓							
Dual generation learning		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Program	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓

4 Results: Emergent themes

Four key super-ordinates emergent themes were identified across the body of interviews conducted with the eight diverse groups:

- “Being other” – feeling different, feeling excluded and fearful
- Parent mental health as a barrier to access of early education programs
- Children’s additional needs as a barrier to access of early education programs
- Models of transition to school

4.1 “Being other”- feeling different, feeling excluded and fearful

Across the culturally and linguistically diverse groups, including Islamic, refugee and Indigenous women, a common theme was the feeling of being excluded from the mainstream of Kindergarten education. This was expressed both as an internalised feeling of “being lower” (Karen term) or “shamed” (Indigenous term) and as an externalised experience of being excluded, discriminated against and, in the case of Islamic parents, feared. Parents expressed concern that their children’s safety might be compromised in an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) setting and talked about withdrawing from such settings. However, the feeling of social exclusion was set alongside parent’s recognition that ECEC settings provide opportunity to mix with the mainstream population, and for their children to acquire the appropriate language, accents and behaviours that would allow them to fit in as they transitioned to school. Parents wanted to be able to participate in the society of the ECEC setting and come to belong too (see Appendices 9.1.1-9.1.9, pp 61-67).

4.2 Parent mental health as a barrier to access of early education programs

Among disadvantaged families, including disadvantaged Indigenous families, the issue of mental health problems preventing access to early education programs emerged as a theme. Depression, in particular, was named as a reason that mothers were “unable to get out of bed in the morning” to get their children to kindergarten or other early education programs. These issues compounded the issue of “feeling lower” and feeling excluded and becoming isolated.

The children of depressed mothers were likely to have the compounding disadvantage of a less responsive mother and no exposure to early education programs. The parenting intervention group and Piccaninny Playgroup worked to monitor the well-being of mothers in Mt Isa and support participation, but such work is intensive (see Appendix 5.1, p 48).

4.3 Children's additional needs as a barrier to access of early education programs

Another group identified as excluded from kindergarten access were those families who had a child with additional needs. In particular, children with social-emotional difficulties such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were hard to place in kindergarten settings. Parents reported that even with additional financial support finding a place was difficult. Others also avoided the placement of their children with such difficulties in a group setting. Parents felt there was not adequate provision for inclusion of children with social-emotional difficulties in kindergarten settings (see Appendix 5.2, p 48).

4.4 Models of transition to school

All parents across the eight groups sampled expressed concern that the model of transition to school provided by a single year of kindergarten education from 3.5 to 4.5 years was too simplistic and not adequate to optimise the learning, development and well-being of Queensland's children. They were extremely articulate about the need for a graduated process of parent support and a minimum of two years of kindergarten provision. Some were aware of the Early Years Learning Framework and while some expressed concern that it was pushing schooling down, others were happy with a goal orientation that worked towards gradual acquisition of social, emotional and cognitive skills. Parents wanted the best start for their children and felt that this was not provided and that Queensland currently did not compare with other Australian states. Parents were aware of the importance of the early years of life and desperate for change and a more complex conceptualisation of transition to school (see Appendix 5.3, p 49).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to provide a voice for families who are currently not accessing kindergarten programs. The families were recruited to capture a range of populations known to be under-represented among those enrolled in kindergarten programs in Queensland. The data here present rich descriptions from representatives of these groups, but may not represent all groups who are currently not accessing kindergarten in Queensland. One notable omitted voice is that of urban Indigenous families. At the time of completion of this study the research team had approached a number of Indigenous community groups in Brisbane but had not succeeded in securing participation. A further quantitative study utilising a randomly selected sample of 130 Queensland families who do not use licensed ECEC services will be undertaken in 2011, as part of the Effective Early Education for Children (E4KIDS) study. This will be guided by and complement the current qualitative study.

The commentary the families provided on barriers to accessing kindergarten and of the ways they might be enabled to access quality programs is strongly valued. Many of the families included in this study are from extremely socially and economically marginalised groups. Their willingness to participate and give voice to their experiences has facilitated understanding of structural difficulties and broader cultural and attitudinal factors that impede access to kindergarten. The findings offer a challenge to Government and providers of ECEC programs to find solutions. These solutions include real structural adjustments to accommodate diverse families, provision of greater information and knowledge about early education programs where there are misperceptions, and the building of trust and partnership with marginalised families.

The emergent themes identify bigger challenges. Broader issues around the mental health of parents and provisions for children with additional needs are raised. These are families at high risk of early educational failure. The opportunity for kindergarten services to provide a place to build social harmony and inclusion is also highlighted. This aspiration, articulated by parents in the current

study, is consistent with that of the OECD report Starting Strong II (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006). Finally the challenge to see transition to school and preparation for life success as focussed across the whole of the first 5 years of life, and not just the year prior to school, is paramount and provides a longer term vision.

Addressing the challenges presented by the families in this study is critical. There is strong evidence that provision of quality early education programs make a difference to all children but that this effect is greatest for those who are who are the focus of this study – the most disadvantaged (Reynolds & Temple, 2008; Schweinhart, et al., 2005). These are also the families of greatest risk of not succeeding in the education system if we do not include them in quality early education experiences (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005).

6. References

- Brooks-Gunn, J., & Markman, L. M. (2005). The contribution of parenting to ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness. *Future of Children*, 15(1), 139-168.
- Effective Provision of Preschool & Primary Education (EPPE). (2007). *Influences on children's attainment and progress in Key Stage 2*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Hill, S., Comber, B., Loudon, W., Rivalland, J., & Reid, J. (1998). *100 children go to school: Connections and disconnections in literacy development in the year prior to school and the first year of school*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris.
- Queensland Government. (2008). *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland* Retrieved from http://www.towardq2.qld.gov.au/library/pdf/tomorrow/Towards_Q2_Tomorrows_Queensland.pdf.

Queensland Government. (2010). *Department of Education and Training Annual report 2009-10*.

Retrieved from <http://deta.qld.gov.au/publications/annual-reports/resources/09-10/det-annual-report-09-10-section-4.pdf>.

Reynolds, A., & Temple, J. (2008). Cost-effective early childhood development programs from preschool to year 3. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 4*, 109-139.

Schweinhart, L., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W., Belfield, C., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age 40*. Michigan: High/Scope Press.

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC US: National Academy Press.

Thorpe, K., Tayler, C., Grieshaber, S., Bridgstock, R., Skoien, P., Danby, S., et al. (2004). *Preparing for school: Report of the Queensland Preparing for School Trials 2003/4*. Brisbane: Go Press.

Appendix 1

Kindergarten Access Interview

Interview/focus group protocol

Researcher introduces self and project: Hello I am '*name*' a researcher from the E4Kids study. E4Kid stands for Effective Early Educational Experiences (E4) for children (Kids). We are doing this study to find out what are the most important experiences children need to give them the best chances to be healthy, get on with others and do well in school. You have all been asked to come here because you have a child who is 3-4 years old and this is the age of children we are particularly interested in. Today I want to ask you about what is important for children of this age and to ask specific questions about taking your child to a kindy program at a centre with a teacher.

Focus group setting: there are a few of you here today and we hope you will all join in and help us understand parent's views. You may not all agree and that is fine. Please remember that what we want is to hear everyone's view. We will not be judging someone's view as more important than another's. It is important to respect everyone's right to have a view even if it is different from yours. Sometimes being in a group is a good way to help you think about your view – whether you agree or not with others. Please do not be afraid to speak up –We value what you have to say

1. What are the most important experiences that you feel children need to do well in life?
PROMPTS
 - a. What is most important for them now?
 - b. What do you think children need to do prior to school?
 - c. What things do you feel you need to do to prepare them for going to school?
2. What do you know about kindergarten and other services?
 - a. Does your 3-4 year go to any groups- playgroup, childcare
 - b. What happens in kindy – is this different? What goes on there
 - c. What might be different about a kindergarten with a teacher
3. What advantages would there be of your child going to a kindergarten?
 - a. What things would they learn?
 - b. What things might they learn there that they would not learn elsewhere
 - c. Would there be things you might gain
4. What disadvantages would there be of your child going to a kindergarten?
5. What prevents you using kindergarten for your child?
 - a. Are there problems with things like availability, access (eg transport)?
 - b. Are there problems with things like not knowing what to do – being unsure or finding the place or people strange? (eg shame)
 - c. Are there things that worry you about leaving your child at a kindy?
6. What would make you feel comfortable /help you to use kindergarten for your child?
 - a. Are there particular things that would make you happy to use a kindergarten
 - b. What would help you to get to a kindergarten?
 - c. What time or place would be the best to allow your child to participate in kindy?
 - d. Are there different sort of education you would preference?

Appendix 2

Parents values of ECEC Programs

2.1 ECEC settings as a place for children to learn to be with peers

“And they get a lot of friendships that they'll end up like making and then they move on to that school with those - some of those kids. So that when they go to school, it's not big and scary because they've got a couple of friends from last year that they went to kindy with.” (Playgroups in the Park)

“Learning to share and take turns. I know if you put a child in a kindergarten or a prep environment, where they have started to learn that they need to give things over to other people and that they need to wait.” (Stay at home mothers)

“I think, as we were saying with the socialisation, it helps [unclear] solving too... because they can use their own skills to do it rather than running for mummy or the teacher or someone to fix it.” (Parent Intervention group)

2.2 ECEC settings as a place for children to learn to be with other adults

“I think kindy is really important in that it is another adult who is guiding them and who is there to I guess discipline them as such that it's not just mum. You know a lot of kids just don't have the respect for other adults and they get to school and they're like, you're not my mum, you can't tell me what to do. But that early interaction with somebody else guiding them, I think is really...” (Playgroups in park)

“And being able to interact, like when [Name of another mother] and [Name of another mother] said socialisations but just learning how to interact with other children as well as adults is really important because you can't have your child going to prep and, you've done something wrong so I'll punch you. That doesn't work. But you get a lot of kids who that's how they deal with it because they don't know how to do it and which...” (Parent Intervention group)

2.3 ECEC settings as a place for children to learn and prepare for school

“...just the routine my kids at similar environment structured like school. So it's not as scary when they get there.” (Playgroups in the Park)

“Basically a standard, like the kids have - around the same standard that they can learn they can achieve to keep on going further with the development. If they're at one level that is easier to keep on going. Like so it's all people. It's not that some kids are down here - they don't know the difference between their fingers and their toes or how to speak but they've still got the same level. So it's equal ground for them to keep on learning.” (Parent Intervention group)

Appendix 3

Barriers to accessing kindergarten

3.1 Structural Barriers

3.1.1. Availability and age of entry

“But you have to put your name down for the kindergarten...and I did it last year...and um [first child’s name] is on the, on the list to start next year and she is the last on the list so they are saying she is not going to get in but [second child] is first on the list for 2012 and she is still saying he probably won’t get in so I don’t understand that...” (Parent Intervention group)

“Yeah I was doing a bit of research before we came here 'cause I was a bit worried - I was worried that there'd be long waiting lists and on a couple of the websites that I looked at said that you know, there are non-refundable deposits and that kind of puts you off doesn't it?” (Playgroups in the park)

“I understand it's a really long waiting list to get into kindy here.” [Mt Isa] (Playgroups in the park)

“So the answer to me at the moment on the phone conversations with talking to the kindergartens is, if we do have any places left we must wait because the government is telling us to wait. We’re focussing on that. [Unclear]. We must wait. Then at the beginning of next year if there is some spots available we then go to the waiting list for the following year and we start allocating from there to people who want it. Unless you’ve got your name on five lists and that costs money. It’s \$20 every time you put your name down at kindergarten. We just happen to be in an area where a lot of people want to send their kids to kindergarten. All the kindergartens are full at the moment out here.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“We’ve love to send them somewhere but, we’ll have to send them to a day care centre. Nobody has any space. Now that they’ve changed the government funding model, no one wants to take them unless they’re of age which is the year before prep. We’ve actually been in the situation at the moment where we we’ve been ringing multiple kindys. All the ones around here are completely jammed with all aged children. You can go a bit further afield and maybe find something. Maybe in the New Year, but nobody’s got any answers.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“There’s not enough um kindy’s around anyway to support how many kids there are.” (Parent Intervention group)

“I would be happy to pay if I wasn’t getting benefits but there’s nothing there to pay for.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“I put her down at C&K’s and she can’t be accepted until 2012 because she’s a July baby.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

Conversation between two mothers on getting into Kindergarten:

“So is it oh who lives closer or whose got the brownie points this week or who annoys them enough to get...” (Parent Intervention group)

“Who looks the richest is what I reckon it is.” (Parent Intervention group)

3.1.2. Cost

“Well, I find that kindergarten, although it’s a good experience for children, mothers in my financial situation cannot afford it. It’s like \$550 per term. Whereas coming to J’s office and doing this kind of stuff is more productive for my son because he’s learning. Also, I can afford to do it and still be able to afford to put food on my table (Parent Intervention group)

“There is not enough um kindy’s around anyway....” (Parent Intervention group)

Yes, to get a rebate. But I tried. Centrelink - no, Centrelink told me they were. Then when I went there, they said that they’re not and they emailed - got all these emails and told me they weren’t. It cost me I think \$900. (Indigenous playgroup)

“If I could get him in one that didn’t cost a lot - because most kindies do cost a lot of money - would just be getting him to go and getting him settled in and all that. Because he did try day-care and he didn’t like it”. (Indigenous playgroup)

I understand it’s a really long waiting list to get into kindy here and that it costs...Yeah like thousands of dollars just to get into kindy. I guess something we do take for granted.” (Playgroups in Park)

“Actually I know someone that didn’t send her child to kindy this year (a) because of costs and yeah, costs was the main thing and you couldn’t get into one when you know the cheaper ones weren’t available. But cost was a huge issue.” (Playgroups in the park)

“Yeah, I can’t get over the pricing of kindy up here either - 'cause in South Australia the child - it’s just...it’s standard the same as it would be going to your local public primary school or high school. Up here it’s just - it’s crazy. It’s like sending your kid to a private school for what - so they can learn an education and skills that I think all children should have the right to. So I think again at kindy in different states up here, kindy doesn’t really work as a free education in the lucky country does it?” (Playgroups in the park)

“Whereas if you go to somewhere like Victoria or South Australia where kindy is standard, it’s free. And if it’s not completely free, you’re paying the same as you might to go to a public school where you might pay one or \$200 for the entire year..” (Playgroups in the park)

“Apart from cost, the other issue that comes up is and the government needs to know about it. I’ve actually been trying and had no success is [if] we choose to spend the money. There’s no benefit which I understand, but then if everybody else is getting paid parental leave and whatever. You may get day care rebates. We’re getting nothing to stay at home and getting nothing to send them anywhere. There’s no service for us.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane)

3.1.3. Transport

"But yeah, that is a big major factor with some parents, is transport." (Indigenous playgroup)

"Well there is no transport here." (Playgroups in the park)

"My big thing is I don't drive so transport [prevents parent from accessing kindergarten]."

(Parent Intervention group)

"... going to [name of kindergarten] I would have to catch a cab there drop her off, catch a cab home or on cool days when I could walk, I'd walk, but it cost me nearly \$200 a week in taxis."

(Parent Intervention group)

3.1.4. Hours

"I think possibly the problem lies in with when you do work full time, kindergarten finishes at 2:15 in the afternoon and nobody finishes work then, they either finish at 4:00 or 5:00. So it's that time when kindergarten finishes where you need care for your kids. Some people have family that can do it, but I've got no family in Mt Isa. So I have to either rely on Family Day Care or work out something else. I think with the rules, [child's name] might be five so when he's at kindergarten he's not [unclear] with the Family Day Care rules, they are only allowed four kids under the age of five. So taking him in an afternoon slot takes up a whole space within Family Day Care." (Working mothers FDC)

"Mine is my working circumstances. I think if I didn't work five days a week, it should certainly be in the kindergarten situation. But I just physically can't do both - time restraint. If I could leave work to her pick her up and drop her off and do all that I would, but it's not possible." (Working mothers FDC)

3.2 Cultural-attitudinal barriers

3.2.1. Exclusion/Inclusion

"Because when you are a stay at home mum sometimes the walls come in."(Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

"It's all very lonely."(Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

"So is it oh who lives closer or whose got the brownie points this week or who annoys them enough to get..." (Parent Intervention group)

"I think it comes down to it if you go down there and annoy the hell out of them enough your kid might get in...." (Parent Intervention group)

"See with kindergarten like my daughter is a year ahead of all other children. Her brain activity is like mine and basically, if she is not kept busy, ah like [mothers name][her] son, she's misbehaves and everything else...'cause I had ADHD as a child and I've had the same problem." (Parenting Intervention group)

"Like I like coming as well, for him to play, for me to socialise with the mums and that." (Indigenous playgroup)

"I think it's a bit of support as well. If it was provided earlier because we don't have that old fashioned community where you've got your grandparents and parents. I'm in the same situation. You've got no one to leave them. Even sometimes you just need to have two hours a week without a two year old. It would be a god send." (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

"That's what happened with [child's name] he got diagnosed with ADHD and they said we can't handle it." (Parent Intervention group)

"(Indigenous mother) Some people are nasty too. I took my eldest one there [Kindergarten] when she was younger and like they were picking on her and everything like some kids were biting her." (Parent Intervention group)

"My experience is, with darker kids, indigenous kids, they're shy, like and then I was saying is mild.....That's what I like about playgroup. So they can mix and be out there and let people know that they can do it and yes." (Indigenous playgroup)

"My daughter was in kindy for two terms last year and all she did was painting, drawing, they [staff at kindergarten] wrote their names for them. They um, they had this book where to show their progress and basically was I do this with my child at home. It's gluing, its painting, its drawing, that's it basically." (Parent Intervention group)

3.2.1. Exclusion/Inclusion cont.....

"...with kindergarten if your child is ahead they pull them back." (Parent Intervention program)

"So how does it work in Western Australia then? They actually have a kindergarten program. My nephew, he goes five days a week, like he was going to prep and they don't do that here? I've often wondered, because I've had a couple of nephews that have gone through their kindergarten program and I thought oh well why did we miss out." (Working mothers)

"One problem I find with the kindy's is you have to drop them off at an exact time, you can't drop them off 10 minutes early if you have a doctor's appointment and if you are too late you get in big trouble and have to pay slightly extra."(Parent Intervention group)

"I think national procurement has pushed everything down into kindy which is sad. The outcomes that prep has to show is disgusting. It should be play based. That's what I'm scared of. If we're saying all this and I just think that the government is going to push expectations down to the two and a half to three and a half year olds. Rather than it just being purely socialisation playing which it should be." (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

3.2.2. Relationships- security, trust and quality of care

[Importance of a qualified teacher] "Well not really. Because for that age, I just think that, if there's a - if you personally like that lady or the teacher. You think everything's working out... Instead of wasting four years going to all the school and all that, you can become that, doing that while you're...Yes. If they're already a mother, it makes you feel better because they know, you know?" (Indigenous playgroup)

"..the standard is not good enough anymore for that. It's gotta [be] reach a better standard in the way education is run now these days it's just not good enough. I, when i went to kindy it was better..." (Parent Intervention group)

"Well I - it depends which one you send them to. My boys were at [unclear] and the place wasn't as well equipped and it was old, but the people were lovely. Like the quality of the carers as in they took the time. It didn't matter if everything was falling apart, they took the time. And at [Name of centre] too, I liked that there's that spiritual presence, like you know, whether they become atheists, Christians whatever at least it's there if they want it. So I like..." (Playgroups in park)

3.2.3. Content

“There are certain restrictions they have [Kindergartens] which they gotta have. A routine, which they have to have the nap, they have to have this time and that time but there are a lot more restrictions in kindy even with the if you had a qualified teacher there are still restrictions you cannot do which is really odd, because it should be like NSW, where their kindies are actually basically learning what they are doing in prep, and prep is like year 1.” (Parenting Intervention group)

“My daughter was in kindy for two terms last year and all she did was painting, drawing, they [staff at kindergarten] wrote their names for them. They um, they had this book where to show their progress and basically was I do this with my child at home. It’s gluing, its painting, its drawing, that’s it basically.” (Parent Intervention group)

“...it’s ...yes they [Kindergarten] identify shapes but they only identify ah basic stuff they don’t go more into more in depth like what an actual triangle why [it] has shapes and stuff on it. They just go into ‘well this is blue and[this] we’re gonna paint, we’re gonna paint with blue.’ They’re not actually describing different things of blue...” (Parent Intervention group)

“Like at home my daughter learn’t what colours made different colours. At kindergarten, it was ‘no we use basics, we’ll make the other colours up you are not allowed to know how it is done.’” (Parent Intervention group)

“They’re not ...[another mother speaks ‘Encouraged’] encouraged to teach them more than what they are learning at home, more than what the other children their age know.” (Parent Intervention group)

“..the standard is not good enough anymore for that. It’s gotta [be] reach a better standard in the way education is run now these days it’s just not good enough. I, when i went to kindy it was better...” (Parent Intervention group)

“Yeah, they’re (playgroup and Kindergarten) basically the same. It’s just like I said, the only difference with playgroup is that you have to go along with your child.” (Indigenous playgroup)

Appendix 4

Enablers to accessing kindergarten

4.1 Cost

"If I could get him in one that didn't cost a lot - because most kindies do cost a lot of money - would just be getting him to go and getting him settled in and all that. Because he did try day-care and he didn't like it". (Indigenous playgroup)

4.2 Hours

"But I notice at [Name of Long day care] it's a pity they couldn't have the funding there to have a proper kindergarten 'cause they get kids right up to four and sometimes four to five. I was going to sort of look at helping them try to find funding to get someone there to start that kindergarten part up. Because it is really a day care from seven to five, 5:30, but it would be good if those kids could have the kindergarten style. It would help yeah." (Playgroups in the park)

"School times would be good, yes. School times. If there was more jobs. Like you can find the jobs for school hours but then there's not a lot." (Indigenous playgroup)

4.3 Connection to schools

"...but it is important that it [playgroup] is at school. The children are not as nervous not as shy when they start school, helps their confidence." (Indigenous playgroup)

"I think the school should have kindy's running in the [them]". (Playgroups in the park)

"Yeah I think that that would make it a lot more friendly [school associated Kindergartens] because - and again coming from Victoria you might know about this, but in South Australia all the kindy's or most of the kindy's run directly in line with the school. So when they're coming into that last term of kindy at the end of the year, they actually start doing school visits. And they get to learn the teacher - they get to meet the teachers that they're going to have for the following year when they start school. And they get to see what the school is like and you know, it's not such a big scary first day, oh my goodness, look how massive the school is and where are the toilets because they've done a few weeks and they - yeah they have recess now and they learn the big long days, whereas up here they just don't." (Playgroups in the park)

"Like with play group, they come to school and they do activities and they have their lunch break, just the same as school." (Indigenous playgroup)

4.4 Dual-generational learning

"I like that I can come and see what is happening. I learn things at playschool [playgroup] like to teach to write in small and capitals." (Indigenous playgroup)

"If I had to choose kindergarten and playgroup- playgroup because I can be a part of it and learn as it is more beneficial." (Indigenous playgroup)

"I have fun with the kids too; I help them do their little activities. It's a good day for the child and the parent." (Indigenous playgroup)

"I like to see the kids like grow up as well. By the time they're all in high school, we'll be like, oh yeah, I went to playgroup with him and they did this and did that. They were so clever. That's what I like about it. So if I see the kids uptown shopping with their mum, I'll say, hello. They're like hello. Yes. Socialising and..." (Indigenous playgroup)

Appendix 5

Emergent Themes

5.1 Mental health of mothers

“And because that [kindergarten/day care] isn’t available you will find alot of mums hitting depression, hitting everything, you know that goes with it, stressors which means the kids are not getting the full amount of attention...”(Parent Intervention group)

“Some mums are flat out leaving their house like if...I you know ‘cause I had depression after having child pretty badly and yeah if your not coping you can’t leave the house.” (Parent Intervention group)

“I suffered really bad from OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder] and if I’m stressed out and something is wrong it can be tenfold.” (Parent Intervention group)

“That’s what happened with [child’s name] he got diagnosed with ADHD and they said we can’t handle it.” (Parent Intervention group)

“Like I like coming as well, for him to play, for me to socialise with the mums and that.” (Indigenous playgroup)

“Because when you are a stay at home mum sometimes the walls come in.”(Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“It’s all very lonely.”(Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“I think it’s a bit of support as well. If it was provided earlier because we don’t have that old fashioned community where you’ve got your grandparents and parents. I’m in the same situation. You’ve got no one to leave them. Even sometimes you just need to have two hours a week without a two year old. It would be a god send.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“I know that I’ve asked a few indigenous ones but I think they’re just too lazy to get up if you ask me.” (Indigenous playgroup)

5.2 Children with additional needs

“Well for instance the children with autism, the kindies don’t provide what they need...” (Parenting Intervention group)

“I had [child’s name], I had him in day care and I had him in kindy and they couldn’t handle him.” (Parent Intervention group)

“That’s what happened with [child’s name] he got diagnosed with ADHD and they said we can’t handle it.” (Parent Intervention group)

5.3 A model for transition

“Is there a way of educating us to help the kids learn in that gap year?” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“They seem to have these programs in other states, when I was growing up in Melbourne I went to kindy every morning for just a few hours. It was a bit more when I was [unclear]. There was a gradual stepping whereas here it’s just you’ve got to wait until...”(Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“They are only really six months behind and they can’t wait. It’s now in that financial year rather than a school year. Instead of the onus being on parents to say they’re not quite ready yet, the onus is now on parents to go where can I send my children? It seems that the only option at this point is a day care situation. [Name of Kindergarten] which is all services had a [unclear] program. They are offering their places at the moment, but obviously they offer to their people first. The chances of getting in there, I just don’t know.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“Day care is too busy. There is too many kids, but I feel they need something. I can’t get them into anything.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“In this environment [Playgroup], we come with them which is great for when they’re a bit younger. Two or three in my mind, but I think when they get to three I think they’re ready to start letting go, but not for an extended period of time. Can do that. If you can go we’re going to playgroup. The next step is a couple of hours twice a week somewhere with a teacher.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“The other thing they could do is in that information that they give you either at the doctors or when you have your baby. Maybe it’s something they could give there, these are the things that you need to think about for your child. Because it’s all stuff about day care and going back to work and all that sort of stuff, but then you reach this age there’s a gap in what you need to know to make sure that your children are in the right places.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

“There should be a website that you put in my child is this, the birth date and then it gives you a list.” (Stay at home mothers Brisbane).

Appendix 6

6.1 Parents knowledge about early education service

Islamic mothers appeared to have vague knowledge of ECEC:

“... is it kindy is part of school or is it part of child-care? I'm not sure. My only experience is just prep is part of the school...and they have got the teachers... I'm not sure what the kindy is...the teachers they have got a more tertiary qualification, where the child-care workers would probably have more...a certificate level or diploma... [Do you think one is better than the other?] No, I think... any education is good because you might have a teacher who has got a degree who doesn't know how to deal with kids. You might have a child-care worker...who knows how to deal with children and how to...interact with them.”

“I'm not sure what is the difference between preschool and kindy, I'm not sure. I thought they were the same but different (laughs).”

6.1 Parents knowledge about early education service continued.....

Mothers' conversations revealed that they had little understanding on the different types of ECEC, "How old can they go to child-care? Which age can the child go to primary school? Not all of us know about it, no." On asking specific questions about ECEC that the interviewer could not answer, one Karen mother observed,

"...if it's difficult for you, for us it's even more difficult!" The mothers expressed a desire for more information about ECEC, especially for new arrivals:

...they should know more before they come...for us, how we can access - like, we want to know more information about the child-care, yeah, and no-one talk about that, so they don't know how to get it."

When asked how they might prepare their children for school, it seemed that it was even hard for the Karen mothers to conceptualise what could be needed, "Please explain?" They appeared to have little idea of what ECEC expected from them or their children, "She doesn't have any idea about how to prepare for her kids to go to prep". However, one mother expressed worry about what her child should take to ECEC, "She always worry ...what's underneath for the child...what we need to do."

One Karen mother signified the importance of preparing her child interpersonally, offering "Usually...in our culture we talk to our children, like, "Don't say other things and don't fight with others, don't bully others". Although academic skills, such as reading and writing were perceived as important, these were trusted to be the responsibility of the teachers:

"...for education, the children will get it - that it is very responsible for the teacher, to give them education."

Perhaps reflecting her limited English or lack of confidence in her own abilities, one mother wanted to communicate that she could not take responsibility for homework:

The teacher give homework...can't take that responsibility for the homework, because she can't.

6.1 Parents knowledge about early education service continued.....

Having accessed ECEC for their children, the Sudanese mothers had some level of ECEC knowledge:

Probably I don't really know about daycare but I know about childcare and kindy, pre-school and prep because all of my kids, some of them – like my daughter was in prep last year. And now my son is now in kindy, so he's 4-years-old; he's about to go to pre-school next year.

...for childcare...they are divided in a couple of groups, maybe four; there is like a nursery for babies; and there's toddler and then there's – so it's all different stage. But for kindy, like they teach them all about education, counting, knowing the shapes, colour – that's in kindy. And when they start pre-school, that is 4 turning to 5, they let them come and know the alphabet and numbers. Because my daughter when she went to a kindy she knows ABC from A to Z and from 1 to 20 and she was like 4 and a half. And I said "Wow." And when she was in prep she already knows how to write her name and the whole family, she can write them all.

One mother advised on the need to provide new arrivals with information on what to expect at ECEC, and suggested the use of an interpreter, since some will have little English:

...it will be good for the director or who will show her the centre to explain how they want the kids in the centre, so she might have a little bit of information...How things are and how do they talk with the kids.... but it's good to see somebody who can understand it.

The need for information about food was emphasized:

...there is a lot of things they don't even know, different between healthy food and there is some that is not good for the kid in the centre and there's rules in centres; sometimes they don't like sweets. But everything that child like at home then just put it in lunchbox, and give it to childcare. So it's good to tell them what kind of food they like to bring in the centre and so they get to know.

Appendix 7

Barriers to accessing kindergarten

7.1 Structural Barriers

7.1.1 Cost Concerns

Fees not affordable.

One obstacle to accessing ECEC cited by the Islamic mothers was the cost, *"If I take her to a child-care centre, financially I would not be able to afford it..."*

Cost concerns.

Limited English has caused significant anxiety about ECEC as Karen mother soften have difficulties reading letters and applications forms. One Karen mother told a story of confusion and anxiety as she attempted to enroll her children in ECEC so that she could attend TAFE. Confronted with a hefty ECEC bill that she was not expecting, she withdrew her children from ECEC *"Yeah. In 600, went down to two and 80, 280, yeah... I didn't send any of my children to child-care.* The situation was later sorted out, with the assistance of ECEC staff, but the mother expressed the shock that she experienced. Another mother also related the shock of receiving a letter about ECEC payment, given her limited English. After receiving the letter, she decided to bring her child to TAFE classes rather than continue her child at ECEC:

One day, when she got a letter from the centre... and she has to pay over 800...she thought that she need to pay because she got the letter...she can't read at all... so she just bring her child with her to TAFE...

Worry about ECEC debt results in parents leaving English classes. Karen mothers expressed that they have been so worried about ECEC debt that they have left English classes so that the child does not have to go to ECEC:

"...then I felt it is better to switch to stop. So I went to TAFE for two terms and then I stopped. I suppose I have to pay about 600, so I tried to stop.

Another Karen mother told how she had decided to wait until all her children were in primary school before she would go to English classes:

...for me I think - I really wanted to have that certificate, to finish...I stopped it and I will wait until all my children can go to school and I will start again...I think it's better for my children right now to be home...

7.1.1 Cost Concerns continued.....

Fees not affordable.

One of the Sudanese mothers we spoke to noted that she would like to send her child to ECEC more often because of the benefits to her child, but the fees meant that they could only go on days she worked:

Like, today, for two days not in the child-care. Want to be there but I'm not working...if no reason, no Centrelink, how do you pay? I pay the full day. It's hard for me because my payment is very low. If I have got two days to pay child-care, no Centrelink to help me with that, it's very difficult for me. I can't afford it.

The Sudanese women reported that ECEC fees were a problem for other members of their community who worried about being excluded or it caused unpleasant interaction with ECEC staff:

... they're complaining about the fees...because maybe they are going to exclude and they have to pay a certain amount to the centre and when you don't pay it, some director of centre get rude... maybe they are going through a sort of problem...thing is, they put a certain amount of time you have to pay but in this time...

7.1.2 Transport

Transport difficulties.

According to the Karen mothers, transportation problems severely impact their lives, particularly during the early arrival period:

... for the new arrival, traveling transportation is a bit difficult for us. Unless they don't know how to cash bus/train, it's a big problem; even know the bus/train, to recognise ..the number. [Because of language problems?] Yes, very hard. [Do you think they just don't...take the child to early child-care, because of the bus and having to catch the bus/train?] Some of them, yes...even though we know how to catch the bus, sometimes it's very difficult for us with the pram and with the rain, especially in the rainy season.

Transport problems impact attendance at special ECEC activities.

One Karen mother reported that transport difficulties prevented her from attending special ECEC activities that were not at the normal ECEC location:

... sometimes we have parent meeting at school...Sometimes she can't make it because of the transportation... she doesn't know where to go, how to access...how to get there...at the park...not in the centre.

Transport Difficulties.

One mother reported that without a car travelling with her young children to ECEC is difficult:

...It's a very difficult. When I start my TAFE...at that time I live in...I have got two children...one is going to preschool and one is a baby. At that time I have not got a car... I catch the train...from my home to TAFE, it take me half an hour from train. If I miss the train, I will be waiting another half an hour. When I came back to pick the children up from child-care, sometimes it's raining time. Push them by pram, I have got a double pram; it's difficult.

Appendix 8

8.1 Attitudinal/Cultural barriers

8.1.1 Experience of exclusion and wish for inclusion

Need for culture to be acknowledged.

The need for their own culture to be acknowledged and accepted by the mainstream population was specific to the Islamic mothers. One Islamic mother expressed a sense of exclusion, perceiving that while other cultures were celebrated at ECEC, no invitation had been extended for her to let others know about Egypt, her country of origin:

....very time I go, I found they have multi-culture...talk about our culture. Italy, for example, the food, the flag, the pizza...for two and a half years in the same child-care, nobody ask me to come - not to just talk...about Egypt. There's lots of things that I can say about Egypt. Nobody cares.

Wish for inclusion to come from mainstream.

Despite the desire to show their humanity through informal interaction, the Islamic mother revealed a reluctance to approach ECEC staff in order to progress her own inclusion, as well as disappointment that she is still waiting for invitation to talk about her own culture in the ECEC program:

I want it to come from them...but it's too long for...and I am waiting and...[For two and a half years] ... while I am seeing other cultures and other countries... I have courage to go to them, 'Come on, where's my ...', other people do not have that courage

ECEC as a forum for increasing acceptance and reducing conflict. One of the Islamic mothers envisioned ECEC as a forum for increasing cultural acceptance and thus reducing potential conflict:

That's why I want the culture to be involved with him more, so the culture awareness, so when the kids invite the family, maybe the family doesn't like their kids to be with Muslim or with Christian or whatever, so if we invite the families and put people together, when the kids go to school, they have been with those people before, everybody else. So they grow up in harmony and then we avoid that when they get older and go to high school.

8.1.1 Experience of exclusion and wish for inclusion continued.....

Preference to send child to mainstream school.

Despite the Muslim mothers' worries about the lack of acknowledgement of essential religious practices in the context of ECEC, they expressed a preference to send their children to mainstream learning environments, seeing these being more affordable than alternative Islamic schools and as promoting equity and normality:

...everybody there, rich, poor, black and white, they are all the same.....to put the kids in the [Islamic] school, school fees...you know extra for each family.....where he go to school...I want him to just live a normal life with other kids.

ECEC as a means for involvement with mainstream families.

Consistent with the views of Islamic and Karen mothers, Sudanese mothers saw ECEC as an avenue for involvement with mainstream families that could help cultural divides and assist acculturation and assimilation:

And something we like to be together Australian community...especially, show you through the system...and that way it would be... easy to you because we got a lot of children. When you learn the system here, it's easy to keep, to tell them at home, "Do this. In Australia way we do that..."

8.1.2 Time constraints

Time constraints

The Karen mothers wanted to stress the time constraints that came with refugee arrival in a new country (such as English classes and multiple Welfare and Health related appointments), mentioning ECEC as one of the events that they needed to fit in with numerous other commitments. According to one Karen mother, *"In three months' time, appointments - everything is appointments, like Centrelink, access job network."* Having to meet these obligations, especially in the first three months, appeared stressful, *"As a new arrival. It is a lot. But we help each other."*

8.1.2 Time constraints continued.....

Time constraints

The Sudanese mothers also experienced time constraints that came with refugee arrival in a new country. One Sudanese mother told of how these obligations compounded transport difficulties related to ECEC:

When I get the children to child-care, it may be half a day when I go; maybe I left at 11 o'clock and...at the train, drop them first. Between train and leaving, maybe miss a train. I am rushing out to get the children to the child-care on time. Sometime I find it a lot of difficult...I want to learn the English but have difficulty. I need to put the children if the right time and my time is running...

Having to meet these obligations appeared be unfamiliar and stressful:

It can be my time always to go to home, child-care, go to the class. I find myself I am between those things; home, going to the class, going to child-care, pick the child-care, go to home. Not they get me tired, something wrong going on. It worry me but it doesn't worry me too much because it never...other that. All the time it feel different

8.1.3 Limited English

Limited English impacts parent/ ECEC interaction. The Karen mothers told how limited English had a great impact on their capacity to interact with ECEC, and one Karen mother pointed out the need to communicate about where ECEC meetings will be held, with clear directions:

...as Karen woman, don't know how to access where the meeting is, so she wants the centre for them to understand that...because they don't know how to go, like how to get there.

8.1.3 Limited English Continued

Limited English impacts capacity to work.

Conversations with a Sudanese mothers revealed the necessity she felt of overcoming problems associated with limited English, particularly in terms of being able to gain employment. The capacity to work requires that children attend ECEC, which is seen as unaffordable. According to one Sudanese mother:

I want to work...and I want to improve my English... never learn English, I can't find a job...very important.

Limited English impacts parent/ ECEC interaction. The Sudanese mothers told how limited English had a great impact on their capacity to interact with ECEC and to respond to ECEC requirements:

... because a lot of them, they don't read any papers that come from the centre or school... Everything will be in the parent's handbook, so if you didn't go through that you will not know anything that's allowed to go in the centre. And some of them, there is a lot of kids they have allergic to some kind of different food.

The difficulty of reading written ECEC communication and the need for information to be verbal, as well as the utility of interpreters or bicultural workers to assist understandings were revealed:

...some of them, they will not like understand English, but it's good to see somebody who can understand it...or an interpreter to explain everything that's in the paper.

But it's good if they had somebody that had experience in all sorts of things to explain to them what exactly childcare look like and what kinds of things they do; how do they look after the babies and their children and everything. That would be good.

8.1.4 Prior experiences with ECEC settings

Previous negative experiences with ECEC

One Islamic mother told of how previous negative experience of ECEC (in relation to a lack of understanding about Islamic food and toileting practices) with now older children informed her decision not to send her child to ECEC:

I would have liked to have sent her to a child-care centre, but I didn't have very positive experiences of child-care centres with my two older ones...both of them didn't really like it...so I didn't want to traumatize the rest of them. [You felt they were a bit traumatised?] Yes, definitely...the one who is here, the second one, she - every time we pass by - because the child-care centre is quite close to me. Every time we pass by, she goes, "That's the child-care centre I had to go to".

The obstacles around observing toileting practices that her children faced caused the children distress:

...they didn't really want to go. They were very - I don't know, they were stressed, I think. There are certain things that we do...so, even though I made it clear to the child-care centre there's something that we have to do, just to keep clean, you know, it was hard for them - I don't know, it was hard for them to do it or - because they needed someone to supervise them... to be somewhere more private than instead of sitting with the whole - openly...they are so used to washing themselves, it was a bit strange not to be able to wash...so they didn't really want to go to the toilet and they were always stressed and didn't want to go...So I decided for my third child, that I would not send them to a child-care centre.

It was also difficult for the mothers to trust that the requirement for halal will be understood, interpreted or implemented correctly by ECEC staff:

...child-care...you have to have the food that they have. It's very hard for us because we have to have things that are halal for us and there's no guarantee that the food they have there is halal for us... With the meat that's there, it's probably not halal; it's not according to our religious customs...so it makes it difficult for us to send a kid there... because you have to make food that halal allows; that it's not contaminated by other things...[You might have been a little bit concerned that they haven't taken the proper precautions?] Yeah, exactly...for example, if they are cutting the meat on a chopping board...already contaminated.

Appendix 9

9.1 Factors that would enable families to take up early education programs for their children

9.1.1 Experience of Equity

Islamic mothers reported a perception that their children were treated differently from other children. One mother thought that discrimination against the children from Islamic backgrounds may result “unfairly” from a Muslim “image”:

...left the kindy long ago and after that he told me that...To be able to say it. So it was unfortunate thing and I thought really, you know, that my child was discriminated just because of his image. So I believe other people might be the same because when I go ...maybe because they treat my children unfairly or something.

Mothers also wanted their children to be treated the same as other children so that they would not feel inequity, “...so I need my children to be treated like others, to be, you know, like - not to feel that they are...different than others.”

The importance of justice and equity was clearly significant to the Karen mothers:

The important thing for us is, like, the teacher should treat equally and if her daughter is not doing the wrong things, give her the wrong things. If she do the right thing, give he the right things. Something like that. Not bias.

9.1.2 Promoting Inclusion and desire to be in relationship

Promoting inclusion through greater education of ECEC children about diversity and manners

Perhaps even more upsetting for the mothers was that their children experienced themselves as being different from others:

Sometimes when you go to pick your children up, they find them upset. They are crying. Nothing happened but they are feeling different. If you find that - I find it, my child, sometimes worry...a lot of kids in my class touch my hair and they told me "why your hair is short and why your colour is dark?"

Viewing this as resulting from the comments of other children, one Sudanese appeared to think there was little that could be done, “A lot coming up from the children ‘Oh, why are you different?’ But the teacher, we can’t blame it, because he can’t stop the children to ask the question because they are the same class and same age”.

9.1.2 Promoting Inclusion continued.....

Desire for acceptance and inclusion.

Wish to demonstrate humanity. The wish to be accepted and included was underpinned by a sense of exclusion inferred from the words of one of the Islamic mothers, “...we have to be...get out and show people that we are normal like everybody else.” A desire to demonstrate their humanity was specific to the Islamic mothers. This desire was often framed within the context of the negative image of Muslims evoked by media and the need to show themselves as “normal”, and potentially through ECEC informal family interactions:

Maybe it's good to invite them during the year for different things, Mother's Day, Father's Day...something that happening at kindy and then involve the families... you know, there's lots of open-minded ...in Australia.. but the people who have never dealt with Muslim, I am not blaming them because they don't know. They always read ...from media and the media show up - like, they are badly imaged. So I think the involvement of people, it will show them that, "Come on, we are normal like other people," and then something might change, you know.

Wish to be perceived in a positive light. The wish to be accepted was also in the wish to be perceived in a positive light, highlighted by a Muslim mother's concern child's swearing (learned in ECEC) might give others the impression that the swearing reflects parent conversations:

Especially...embarrass me because I might be in the shopping centre or something and my son repeat what he hears...so they will think that I am using that word, that's why the child is saying what his family/parents is saying...while it's not fair because I never use those words.

Islamic school as familiar and safe. For the Islamic mothers, one means of withdrawal and a way to gain a sense of belonging has been to send their children to Islamic schools, including Islamic ECEC:

And lots of people told me ...put him in Islamic school because we don't know if the other parents will look at us and accept us or no.

For one Muslim mother, Islamic school was seen as an interim measure until her child had grown confident enough to enter mainstream learning environments.

And then he finished primary and he grow up and he had more confidence to be in the...community and then public school...no problem

Wish for interpersonal connection. Like Karen mothers, Sudanese mothers expressed a wish to be accepted into the mainstream population. One Sudanese mother expressed the relevance of such interpersonal connection to acculturation and assimilation:

...we like to be together Australian community...we know the different ...if you go to friends in ...Australian community especially...show you through the system...and that way it would be easy to you...because we got a lot of children. When you learn the system here, it's easy to keep...to tell them at home, 'Do this. In Australia way, we do that.'

9.1.3 ECEC as a means for involvement with mainstream families towards acculturation and assimilation.

ECEC as a means for involvement with mainstream families.

ECEC was seen as an avenue for involvement with mainstream families that could help cultural divides and assist assimilation. One Islamic mother observed:

So I think the involvement of people, it will show them that, 'Come on, we are normal like other people,' and then something might change, you know.

Consistent with the views of Islamic and Karen mothers, Sudanese mothers saw ECEC as an avenue for involvement with mainstream families that could help cultural divides and assist acculturation and assimilation:

And something we like to be together Australian community...especially, show you through the system...and that way it would be... easy to you because we got a lot of children. When you learn the system here, it's easy to keep, to tell them at home, "Do this. In Australia way we do that..."

Reflecting a desire for greater engagement with ECEC and connection with mainstream families, one Karen mother talked about her difficulties in accessing parent meetings, but her wish to attend:

Yes, would like to go...Yes, that's important because she should go. She hasn't got that opportunity. If she has got that opportunity, she would know about other things as well.

It would be important that ECEC staff recognise cultural nuances, such as Karen mothers' experience of feeling fearful and "lower" than others. Given this way of being in the world, it would be important that staff clearly made the Karen mothers welcome and comfortable at ECEC. Karen mothers expressed a sense of fearfulness that was manifest in physical gestures of submission and connected to feeling that they were "lower" than others:

When she meet the first time, like, maybe she can't approach that person; maybe she will look down or feel a little bit low."

9.1.4 Experience of culture being acknowledged and accepted

The need for their own culture to be acknowledged and accepted by the mainstream population was specific to the Islamic mothers. One Islamic mother expressed a sense of exclusion, perceiving that while other cultures were celebrated at ECEC, no invitation had been extended for her to let others know about Egypt, her country of origin:

....very time I go, I found they have multi-culture...talk about our culture. Italy, for example, the food, the flag, the pizza...for two and a half years in the same child-care, nobody ask me to come - not to just talk...about Egypt. There's lots of things that I can say about Egypt. Nobody cares.

Wish for inclusion to come from ECEC staff. Despite the desire to show their humanity through informal interaction, the Islamic mother revealed a reluctance to approach ECEC staff in order to progress her own inclusion, as well as disappointment that she is still waiting for invitation to talk about her own culture in the ECEC program:

I want it to come from them...but it's too long for...and I am waiting and...[For two and a half years] ... while I am seeing other cultures and other countries... I have courage to go to them, 'Come on, where's my ..', other people do not have that courage.

9.1.5 Greater demonstrated understanding about religious and cultural practices

Need for understanding about the importance of religion.

The Islamic mothers were keen to convey the centrality of religion in their lives and the need for this to be recognized in the ECEC context:

I would feel very happy...child-care centre that would be accommodating towards...probably some of the religious practices...you cannot separate out religion from our daily life. It's just enmeshed.

Need for understanding about toileting requirements.

Exemplifying the role of religious practice, one mother raised the need for understanding and accommodation of the children's toileting requirements:

... when they go to the toilet, we have to wash ourselves with water...while they try to initially but I don't think they were able to sustain it, to take them...

Need for understanding about food requirements.

The importance of religious practice was also exemplified by the Muslim mothers' worries that the child might eat food at ECEC that was not halal:

And sometimes they are worried about what the kids eat at kindy. Whatever you put in their...what's happening is something else...one day...I found my son eating crackers and chicken ...he's not allowed to these eat things...there's no guarantee that the food they have there is halal...so it makes it difficult for us to send a kid there...that it's not contaminated by other things...for example, if they are cutting the meat on a chopping board...already contaminated...

9.1.5 Greater demonstrated understanding about religious and cultural practices continued.....

Wish for understanding about different ways with food. For Sudanese mothers, the preparation and presentation of food appears to intimately linked with notions of caring.

Issues around food in ECEC contexts emerged as important to the mothers, particularly serving the same dish twice or more in a row, with the potential that left-over food may have been used. *“It’s not really maybe leftover...maybe they cook it fresh but the same kind of the food for yesterday...each day should be different...”* Another issue around food was the recognition that many Sudanese children eschewed bringing African food, wishing to bring or eat food similar to their Australian peers, *“Maybe the child would like it at home but when you take it to childcare, it would be “oh, it’s yucky.”*

9.1.6 Utilizing bicultural workers to act as conduits and knowledge brokers between the community and ECEC

According to mothers we spoke to, without previous experience of ECEC in their countries of origin, Sudanese mothers continue their traditional ways by caring for their children themselves. A lack of knowledge about ECEC together with concerns that their children were cared for appropriately meant that some mothers preferred to look after their young children themselves at home:

...they say “Oh, I’d rather stay at home with my child until they grow up and then I will put them in kindy.”

The difficulty of reading written ECEC communication and the need for information to be verbal, as well as the utility of interpreters or bicultural workers to assist understandings were revealed by participants:

...some of them, they will not like understand English, but it’s good to see somebody who can understand it...or an interpreter to explain everything that’s in the paper.

But it’s good if they had somebody that had experience in all sorts of things to explain to them what exactly childcare look like and what kinds of things they do; how do they look after the babies and their children and everything. That would be good.

9.1.7 Perceived capacity to speak to ECEC staff about needs or problems in relation to ECEC

Mothers' fears around expressing needs.

The Islamic mothers appeared hesitant to request changes, cognizant of how mainstream people might react:

...I have to be mindful of other parents, probably don't want those changes; are not comfortable, you know. They think, "Why do we have to change just for one person?", or whatever. Am sensitive to their - you know, they might not want those changes.

There seemed to be a difficulty in expressing the needs of their children in relation to toileting or halal precautions to ECEC staff, appearing to fear that they will be told to leave:

It's a bit difficult, but if somebody is not going to accept what you think because - I suppose the mentality was, "Well, since you are in this country, you have got to..." The director was very good but it's just the other workers were - you know, sometimes you find the odd one who is like, "Oh, if you don't like it, just go".

Although one educated mother thought, as an experienced mother, she might say something now, she did not expect the ECEC to make changes. Nevertheless, she thought small changes might help her and other mothers to attend.

Although mothers from all three participant groups described having difficulty in expressing their needs or the needs of their children to ECEC staff, limited English, cultural reticence and pre-migration made the prospect of approaching staff particularly problematic for Karen mothers:

The reason why, because - one is the language; another one is, like, they do not welcome her, so she dare not approach - yeah. We are Karen people. We are not there to talk, like, openly. If something wrong that we know, but we just keep it to ourself. We are not open. [That is the cultural way?] Yes.

9.1.8 Clear demonstration that child will be cared-for, nurtured and comforted

Clear demonstration that child will be cared-for, nurtured and comforted

One Karen mother believed that the discrimination had a direct consequence on the care of her child and removed her child from ECEC after one term, as relayed by the interpreter:

Whenever she went to the child-care centre, like her child cries. She wants the carer to take care of the child and calm down the child, but they didn't do that.

9.1.8 Clear demonstration that child will be cared-for, nurtured and comforted continued.....

Concerns that ECEC staff do not care for child.

The Sudanese mothers noted that a lack of ECEC knowledge meant that mothers had concerns about their children attending ECEC:

...some of them don't understand childcare; like they think it's not really a safe place for children and they think it's like they don't look after your children good. Maybe it's not clean...

9.1.9 The utility of dedicated ECEC buses or settlement housing located near to ECEC

Utility of special ECEC buses.

When asked how transport problems could be overcome, the Karen mothers spoke of the utility of dedicated ECEC buses. One mother saw this as particularly useful for new arrivals in Australia for less than three months:

Maybe in three months you will know about little things, about how to catch the bus, how to access....

Other than dedicated buses, because of their language difficulties, direct guidance on bus times or different buses they could catch would be helpful:

If the mother can walk outside for the bus like that, for example she can know "the bus will come at 5.15," and they just wait for the 5.15 bus. If the 5.15 bus already went and don't know the other bus they can catch, so they just know the specific bus that they need to catch. They don't know - they are not sure about the bus, they can catch the other bus as well. It's just the one bus.

Utility of special ECEC buses and settlement housing near schools.

The Sudanese mothers commented on the utility of having special buses that picked up children for ECEC or otherwise having housing located close to ECEC. According to one Sudanese mother:

... they used to have a bus, so they could come and pick the child up from home... that was good, easy transport... they bring her home...you pay...

One Sudanese mother commented on the ease of living near the ECEC:

...so it's not that bad and they are, like, side by side with the school where my children go.