

MEDIA RELEASE

The ACT Children First Alliance Urge the ACT Government to Strengthen Support for Community-Based Early Childhood Services

DATE: Thursday 27 March 2025

The ACT Children First Alliance is deeply distressed by the serious child safety concerns raised in the ABC Four Corners report broadcast on 17 March 2025. The Alliance stands firm in upholding the high-quality education and care expected of the early childhood education profession and its critical role in children's development and support for families.

The safety and wellbeing of all children in early childhood education and care is the highest priority. As leaders advocating for children's wellbeing, the trust bestowed on us by families and the community is our professional responsibility and we remain committed to ensuring that every child in the ACT has access to safe, high-quality care.

We acknowledge the response from ACT Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Yvette Berry, and welcome the commitment to strengthening child safety measures. Minister Berry has previously expressed concerns regarding the marketisation of early childhood education, stating, "Unfortunately, what we are seeing is the consequence of that, with a provider who is treating the service as a for-profit education service rather than putting the children front and centre."

The ACT Children First Alliance is a network of longstanding for-purpose providers of children's service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including early learning centres (ELCs), family daycare, preschool and outside school hours care. The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT and to ensure that all children have access to ECEC. The Alliance has ten members: Anglicare NSW South NSW West & ACT, Capital Region Community Services, Communities at Work, Community Services #1, Goodstart Early Learning ACT, Baringa Early Learning Centre, Northside Community Service, Woden Community Service, The Y Canberra Region and YMCA Canberra. For more information about the Alliance visit: www.childrenfirstalliance.org

Not-for-profit early childhood education and care providers have long been a vital community asset, delivering quality programs, employing qualified educators at higher wages, and maintaining transparency through our ACNC regulatory requirements and annual reporting. Unlike for-profit providers, all retained earnings are reinvested into improving our services, strengthening workforce conditions, and enhancing the quality of care for children—ensuring these funds remain in the ACT and directly benefit local families.

The distressing issues highlighted in the Four Corners report reinforce the importance of a vibrant and valued not-for-profit provider network. Community-based early childhood education services, whether directly operated or licensed to us by the ACT Government at peppercorn or reduced rates, must be protected and actively supported. Without the not-for-profit network, many

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essential ACT Government initiatives would simply not be viable due to the significant administrative and implementation costs required to meet best practice standards.

Now, more than ever, we call on the ACT Government to reaffirm its commitment to maintaining and expanding community-based early childhood services in Canberra. By strengthening support for not-for-profit providers, the ACT Government can ensure that all children, particularly the most vulnerable, receive the safe, high-quality care they deserve.

Co-Chair Michelle Colefax, CEO of Communities at Work is available for interviews.

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