



*Before and After School Care
in Rockdale.*

*Prepared for Rockdale City Council
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Introduction

This Research study is based on Before and After School Care, also known as Out of School Hour Care (OOSH). Before and After School Care caters for school aged children between the ages of 5 -12. Some of these services provide Vacation Care, where children spend there holidays. Services are generally located close to schools or on the grounds of the school and offer recreational programs and activities. Most of these services are Community based, meaning that they serve a particular area of the community.

The aim of this study was to document the situation of the above services and to find out if Council has any role. The reason for this is to gather more information and to find out whether Council can assist and how.

In order to gather this information, phone contact was made with the above services. When the participants agreed, appointments were made to visit these Centres . Structured interviews were then conducted. These interviews took place during August-September 2000.

Methodology

In order to gather information a Questionnaire was developed. This was then used as a guide to conduct the structured interviews. Of the 7 OOSH services catering for Rockdale residents 7 were interviewed face to face, one did not reply by mail and one refused to participate.

This method was chosen because this allowed the respondent to answer questions in their way, it allowed flexibility as their thoughts could be probed for information, it gave the respondent the power to answer questions, it enabled the flow of information, it increases the response rate, the researcher obtains the opportunity to visit these services and observe, rapport is built and the participant can more clearly understand the purpose of the study.

However, this method has disadvantages as it is subjective, it relies on the respondent to provide honest answers, the participant may withhold certain information, flexibility can cause problems with the amount of information the respondent provides, consistency is required and because these services are busy it is possible that not all information is stated at that time.

Other limitations include the impossibility of interviewing Coordinators in certain circumstances, which created the need to interview other staff member(s). However this could be an advantage as other staff member(s) could provide relevant details to the study.

Findings

OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE

Services provided

From the 7 Centres, 6 provide both Before and After School Care. These services are Honey Bee Pre School Kindergarten at Sans Souci, Athelstane Public School at Arncliffe, Little Sails Pre School at Brighton, Bexley North Public School, Sans Souci Public School and Ramsgate Primary School. Kingsgrove / Bexley North Community Centre only provides After School Care.

Attendance Trends

Attendance patterns are shown below.

Centre	Attendance patterns	Trends
Ramsgate	Before 20 -25 Children After 35 -45 Children	Slight Increase in comparison to the 6 months last year.
Sans Souci	Before 25 After 25 -30 On Wednesdays 40 Children	Even Balance
Arncliffe	Before 10 -15 Children After 40 -45 Children	Increase since last term.
Bexley North	Before 25 Children After 45 Children	Balanced
Kingsgrove / Bexley North	After 27 -40 Children	Since Child Care Assistance numbers decreased, now increased.
Brighton	Before 15 Children After 25 Children	Increase
Sans Souci	Both Before & After 22 Children	Stable

(Honey Bee Pre School)

Geographic coverage

From the 7 Centres, 3 services cater for multiple Schools whilst 4 services cater for only one School. However, services catering for one School could possibly provide a place for a child from another School. Three services that cater for multiple Schools provide transport via bus or van. The attached map shows the location of services relative to the schools serviced.

Location

From the 7 services, 2 are based at Child Care Centres, 4 are at Schools and 1 is based at a Council Hall.

All 7 Centers stated that the location was suitable, although one (Arncliffe) had tried to find another venue with larger rooms.

Aspects of a suitable location were:

- *availability of parking*
- *not close to industry*
- *Out door area*

In terms of rent, all services except for one pay rent.

Issues Facing Services

The issues most mentioned by services related to the lack of Government funding and associated financial pressures. Other issues raised include:

- *There is no guarantee with numbers*
- *Lack of casual staff*
- *The need for additional transport / bus*
- *The impact of the GST*
- *Lack of maintenance at building*
- *Lack of recognition that OOSH provide a successful service*

Issues facing OOSH in the area.

Two services stated that there was a lack of After School Care/Vacation Care, at Ramsgate / Sans Souci and Kingsgrove/ Bexley North . Another issue raised was the lack of suitable venues.

Council's Role

Most services stated that they were not with the Council but one service in Ramsgate suggested that Council could develop more OOSH services to cater for the demand.

Ways that Council could assist services

When asked specifically how Council could assist services, there was a range of suggestions including:

- *Providing venues*
- *Assisting with rent payments*
- *Give us a Grant*
- *Assist with advertising*
- *Provide transport / bus*
- *Help set up another Centre*
- *Move Crossing*
- *Provide Resources*
- *Being aware of needs*
- *Being cooperative / assisting when requests are made.*

VACATION CARE

Characteristics of Vacation Care

5 of the 7 Centres have stated that they provide Vacation Care.

From the above 5 services, 4 of these are held at the same premises, whilst only one holds Vacation Care elsewhere.

Attendance Trends

Attendance patterns are shown below.

Centre	Attendance patterns
<i>Ramsgate</i>	<i>35 - 40 Children in Vacation Care. Numbers are steady.</i>
<i>Sans Souci</i>	<i>25 - 35 Children in Vacation Care. (Can take up to 40) Numbers have increased.</i>
<i>Arncliffe</i>	<i>50 - 60 Children from 2 Centres. Numbers have increased this year.</i>
<i>Brighton</i>	<i>15 Children Numbers have decreased.</i>
<i>Sans Souci (Honey Bee)</i>	<i>5 Children Numbers have been stable.</i>

How do services advertise?

From the 7 services, 5 stated by word of mouth, 4 stated through the school newsletter, 3 stated other ways of advertising through Schools, like having a sign in front of School, open days at Schools, pamphlets to Schools and 2 stated the newspaper. Other methods of advertising include Community Noticeboards, Neighborhood Centres, Church groups, Letter box pamphlets and Sydney Child Magazine.

Issues for services

The only issues raised were access to Community Bus / Driver during School holidays and the closure of Kogarah School of Performance Arts, where children watched / participated in productions.

Issues regarding Vacation Care in the area

A number of issues were raised these being:

- *Roslyn Hall has closed*

- *Lack of Vacation Care venues*
- *Lack of support at venues*
- *Costs of setting up and running programs*
- *Accessibility of location.*

Council's Role

Mostly all services did not know whether Council has any role in addressing the above issues. Some services stated that they didn't know what Council could provide whereas others stated that Council doesn't have a role.

Ways that Council could assist services

The main issue raised was Council supporting services by

- *Providing venues*
- *Assisting with the recruitment of staff*
- *Need for resources and equipment*
- *Need for transport*
- *Need to promote services*
- *Encourage private enterprise to do Vacation Care.*

DISCUSSION

From this research it has become evident that issues of financial viability and lack of suitable venues mitigate against further growth in outside school hours care, even though a lack of OOSH services has been identified by some service providers as an issue. The Commonwealth Government withdrew operational funding for OOSH in 1997 and the effects are still being felt, with financial viability and the loss of operational subsidies being the most common issues raised by services.

Another issue affecting services is the GST as this has created a burden on services with increased administration. Not only are services being affected by outside changes, services are being affected internally as attendance patterns fluctuate, there is a lack of staff and there is a shortage of resources.

Results from this study are consistent with the report on OOSH (1) that so many OOSH services have closed, that OOSH services are disadvantaged by the introduction of the Childcare Assistance only model funding, as a consequent loss of operational subsidies and that OOSH services should have greater access to school facilities.

Overall in regards to Council's role, most services didn't know whether Council has a role or what Council could provide. But when services were asked how could Council assist, a range of suggestions were made in terms of financial assistance, venues and resources.

Bibliography

(1)Senate Community Affairs References Committee Child Care Funding 1998, Conclusions and Recommendations Chapter 4 p5

