

Shhhh. Wanna hear a secret? Gossip at work

We've all been told that gossip and rumour is an evil scourge of the workplace and must be stopped at all costs. There are numerous articles offering advice on how to kill the poisonous grapevine. We follow this advice and then wonder why it doesn't work and the grapevine continues to flourish. Well, the reason for this is that gossip is part of human nature. Yes, gossip does serve a real purpose in our lives and this article will help you understand what this is and then how we might go about containing and shaping the grapevine, rather than killing it outright.

Where does the word come from?

'Gossip' is a term that comes from the old English word 'God-sib' or godparent. In early modern England when a birth was about to occur, women would gather at the home of the family and share stories while waiting for the arrival of the newborn. Over time, our association with the word 'gossip' has become negative and we focus on the negative aspects of it.

Can it be a positive?

However, gossip in the workplace can serve a very real purpose. Research from different disciplines has demonstrated that gossip is useful in a number of ways including maintaining social cohesion; making comparison with others; to obtain power; reduce stress and anxiety and as entertainment.

Some useful examples

So when is gossip good and when is it bad? The blurring of the line between 'good' gossip and 'bad' gossip will depend on the intent of the person telling the news and the way it is told. The news of a pregnancy in the workplace is usually a good news story.

■ 'Hey did you hear the news? Kim is pregnant and expecting twins! She is so happy.'

This example may be seen as good gossip. However, if we add a few bits here and there we can make it not so great.

■ 'Hey, come over here. You didn't hear it from me, but, you know how Kim has been desperately wanting to get Bill to marry her? Well now she's pregnant! I reckon it was a ploy to get him to commit. No wonder she is so happy. What do you think?'

In this example, the story is the same but with a twist. Our storyteller has decided to embellish it a little with their personal view of the situation and innuendo to cast doubt over

Good Gossip Guide

How do we trim the grapevine and keep it under control? Unfortunately there are no quick fixes, especially if gossip has been allowed to flourish in a workplace. Some things that may be useful include:

- **not passing on negative information** about a colleague no matter how juicy it sounds;
- **confronting the gossip** if possible (however there are usually power issues at play which make this difficult);
- **keeping abreast of the grapevine** and know what's been said;
- **displaying professionalism** and not engaging in the darker aspects of the gossip by asking yourself how the person would feel if they heard you talking about them negatively.



Kim's motive in falling pregnant. Obviously this has the ability to hurt the subject of the gossip.

Gossip is one of those difficult and secretive subjects that occurs in the workplace. It does serve a functional purpose but has a dark side and we all have a part to play to make sure our grapevine doesn't become poisonous. It is important that we remember the ECA Code of Ethics and our collective roles in ensuring that the workplace is a safe, pleasant and productive place for all including staff.

Colin Slattery Director, Semann & Slattery
www.semannslattery.com

References available on request. If you are interested in reading more on this topic, see:

- Ben-Ze'ev, A., *The Vindication of Gossip*, in R. Goodman & A. Ben-Ze'ev (eds.), *Good Gossip*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1994.

What is Children's Services Central?

Children's Services Central has been funded by the Australian Government to co-ordinate professional support for all Australian Government-approved childcare services in NSW.

That includes training courses for:

- Long Day Care Centres
- Family Day Care Schemes and carers
- In-Home Care Schemes
- Occasional Care Services
- Mobiles
- Before and After Care Services
- Vacation Care Services
- MACS
- and other Australian Government-funded non-mainstream care services.

Children's Services Central is managed by The Alliance of Children's Services, which is a consortium of the seven key organisations that resource and represent the various sectors of children's services in NSW:

- **Community Child Care Co-operative (lead agency)**
- **NSW Family Day Care Association**
- **Network of Community Activities**
- **Contact Incorporated**
- **Ethnic Child Care Family and Community Services Co-operative Limited**
- **Child Care NSW**
- **Semann and Slattery.**

Children's Services Central, the Professional Support Co-ordinator for Children's Services in NSW, is a program of The Alliance of Children's Services. The Australian Government funds the Professional Support Co-ordinator initiative as part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

Children's Services Central

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Telephone: (02) 8922 6444
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Email: info@cscentral.org.au
Web: www.cscentral.org.au
ABN: 81 174 903 921

New Ways!!, New Ideas!!"

**Children's Services Conference,
 Saturday, 24 May 2008
 TAFE NSW - Western Institute, Orange**

This conference aims to help services understand some of the new ideas and ways to work with children, offering practical and easy to implement ideas for your service. For more info contact: Judy Hansen: 6391 5642, or by email: Judy.Hansen@tafensw.edu.au

★ ROUNDUP

Immunisations

What are the recommended immunisations for childcare workers? The National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) recommends that childcare workers should be vaccinated against:

- hepatitis A;
- measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) (childcare workers born during or since 1966);
- varicella (for childcare workers who have not previously been infected with chickenpox);
- pertussis (whooping cough) (an adult booster dose is recommended, especially for those workers caring for the youngest children who are not fully vaccinated).

NSW Preschools

Children's Services Central is pleased that more people from NSW Community based preschools are taking advantage of DoCS subsidies to undertake training courses at the same cost of all other children's services. If you did not receive a training calendar look at the courses online at www.cscentral.org.au.



Training Calendar out: Courses filling up quickly!

All services should have received their copy of the latest Children's Services Central Training Calendar. Please take the time to examine the sessions on offer in

your region and make bookings for your service's team. Some of the more popular sessions are already filling up.

All bookings can be made online at:
www.cscentral.org.au/training

FaCSIA/DEEWR: Who is it?

As most services would know the change of Federal Government at the end of last year brought with it a shake up of departments.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), created in December 2007, brings together elements of the former Departments of Education, Science and Training, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Youth and Early Childhood functions from the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Changing departments like this is a complex process, so it may be a while before personnel all move to the new Department. The previous Department (FaCSIA) has now become FAHCSIA, with the addition of Housing to their responsibility.

Special Tomato Soft Touch Sitters: How they are helping children access childcare in NSW

Have you heard about the Special Tomato Soft Touch Sitter? It is an in-demand item from the Specialist Equipment Pool that has greatly improved the ability of many children living with conditions such as cerebral palsy, to be included in general childcare service activities. The chair helps children to engage in play-based activities to facilitate their personal growth and development.

This sitting chair, like many other pieces of special equipment that may be accessed from the Pool, provides much needed structural support to help a child to sit upright while keeping the child close to the ground. The chair also facilitates mobility (moving the child around) when the castors or wheels are attached. This means that the specialised chair can facilitate both a child's inclusive interaction with other children in their care environment and assist the childcare staff in providing the general and specialised care the child may need.

Feedback from services who currently use this piece of specialised equipment have advised that it helps them to move children easily between play areas and around activities in designated play areas, and enables the staff to provide essential care in a safe and timely manner. For example, some children with conditions like cerebral palsy need special positioning when feeding. The Special Tomato Soft Touch Sitters enable the child to remain upright after eating without assistance. This in turn allows more time for staff to focus on other play-based activities, such as storytime or craft time, to promote learning and development in the care environment.

Access to specialised equipment in childcare services also facilitates better social inclusion of children with special needs. For example, the Special Tomato Soft Touch Sitters are

designed in a fashion that enables other children to approach and freely move the child around the play area in the chair. The chair is close to the ground and enables a better height for generating good eye contact between children to develop good communication skills. The closeness to the ground also supports the play and learning activities that are delivered to other children while seated on the floor. This suitably includes the child in the activity rather than having the child sit off to the side in a larger more cumbersome seat.

Other equipment borrowed from the Specialist Equipment Pool may create access to the environment (for example, portable ramps) or allow a child with high physical support needs to participate in the daily childcare program and activities (for example, standing frames, full support swings). The Pool also provides specialised 'basic furniture' items, (for example, chairs, tables, desks, sleeping equipment). Some equipment allows caregivers to safely lift and transfer children when carrying out basic care functions, such as changing and toileting (for example, hoists, slings, harnesses, change tables, commodes, toilet seats/steps, potty chairs, and mobile stools, seating/posture aids for care givers). There is also specialist inclusion toys such as switch sensory mats.

Children's services trying to include a child with ongoing additional needs may access the Specialist Equipment Pool by contacting their local Inclusion Support Agency. They can then request consultation with The Inclusion Support Facilitator (ISF). The ISF will help them complete an Inclusion Support Subsidy Application where appropriate to identify a need for specialist equipment or resources to build the capacity of the service to include the child into their care program. The Specialist Equipment Pool catalogue and general information plus specialist equipment request forms are available online at: www.cscentral.org.au/inclusion/sep.html

The Specialist Equipment Pool is operated by Lady Gowrie Child Centre for Children's Services Central and is another part of the Australian Government's Inclusion & Professional Support Program aimed at supporting the inclusion of children with ongoing additional needs into children's services. Many children living with permanent disabilities and attending children's services in NSW have already benefited from the equipment loaned by the Pool.

Ashleigh Jenkins: Inclusion Support Co-ordinator for Lady Gowrie Child Centre

Why Special Tomato?

The designer of the Special Tomato chairs has a daughter with Down's Syndrome. The year she was born he was picking tomatoes from his garden. There was a differently shaped tomato on the bush that got his attention. It had a large, smooth, bright red enlarged side that made him want to pick it up and study the bump because it was so unique. At supper, that tomato was just as juicy as the others. After being told the story his daughter thinks of herself as the special 'tomato' on her family's bush.



There are children's services in **Tibooburra** too!

Children's service options vary across rural and regional Australia. In NSW a number of service types are offered in a variety of unique ways. These can range from services on one site such as long day care, occasional care and out-of-school hours centres to services operating from many sites. There are itinerant services such as mobile children's services that provide programs to a number of areas and childcare services in a number of venues. They are supported by professional staff that travel to the sites and administration performed at one base location. Other examples of services that are available include on-farm, in-home, family day care and registered home-based carer arrangements.

Regional demographics influence the types of programs available and attracting and retaining appropriate management and skilled staff is paramount to the success of the service. Appropriate training is not always accessible for rural and regional children's services. Often, funded training programs are offered in larger regional towns and may have limited application across service types. Attendance at training is also influenced by factors such as costs of petrol, the need for accommodation and access to relief staff.

In recognition of these many dynamics, Children's Services Central has worked towards offering a variety of training and support opportunities.

Contact Inc. is one of the contracted professional support service provider that has responsibility for co-ordinating a variety of rural training events. Contact accesses key players within each Inclusion Support Agency (ISA) region to identify how best to deliver training – from six hour to multiple three-hour sessions in different rural communities. Contact Inc. then has responsibility of co-ordinating a variety of training events that best respond to identified regional requirements.

An example of this responsiveness has occurred over the last six months. In the NSW South West region, three hours of complex communication needs training was offered in Wagga Wagga, as well as Griffith on separate weekday evenings. In NSW North, a full-day six-hour training event was co-ordinated on a Saturday at Glen Innes offering sessions about children's behaviour and talking to families about hard issues.

In a number of instances children's services have hosted

regional training events on weekends and in the evenings. In these situations, participants have access to an actual service to further learn and discuss children's services ideas, in addition to the workshop being offered. Outdoor environment training events have also been offered in some 'host' children's services. In some situations, the trainer and participants have had a tour of the host centres outdoor environment and explored practical application of the theories discussed in the training session.

Children's Services Central is pleased with the level of attendance at these events and a grant from the NSW Department of Community Services is now enabling state funded preschools to also attend at a subsidised rate. Connections with regional children's services support staff such as ISFs and children's services advisers are further encouraged enabling these professionals to share in the experience and then reinforce the learning by following up with services on future visits.



Phone and video links have been instigated in recognition of issues associated with distance and the difficulties in accessing relief staff. Phone Linkups have been successfully offered on a diverse range of topics such as marketing, financial management, thinking about culture and identification of children with additional needs. Each Phone Linkup lasts for an hour with a maximum of eight participants. Professionals with expertise in the topic are contracted by Contact Inc. to develop a discussion paper relating to the topic and then join in the Phone Linkup. A follow-up linkup is then offered to talk through the learning.

In 2008, Phone Linkups are to be trialled as a follow-up to face-to-face rural training to enable participants to further develop learning from the workshops they have attended. This is also aimed at enhancing the networks and connections between regional services attend training sessions.

Video links enable a number of sites in remote areas to access a broadcast video link workshop with skilled professionals. These will be offered again in 2008. As we are still trialling this technology, events are invitation-only at this stage.

Children's Services Central in consultation with Contact Inc., the Mobile Children's Services Association of NSW



(MCSA) and the National Association of Mobile Services (NAMS) has instigated a newsletter specific to mobile services. *On The Road* is enabling the Australian Government-approved rural and regional mobiles to further access a relevant information source targeting their specific needs.

Children's Services Central and Contact Inc. are pleased to work together in delivering professional development opportunities in regional and remote communities. Contact Inc. has long-term credibility in rural areas and in depth understanding of various regional needs.

One of the ways this works well is the fact that Contact Inc. has a number of ongoing rural community development roles funded through a variety of other sources. Contact Inc. is able to use knowledge of Children's Services Central programs to build upon other activities in communities. Contact Inc. is currently working in a large regional town through a project funded by the NSW Government to support culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families. The community has

high level CALD populations, many children's services and no bicultural workers currently recruited within the Bicultural Support Pool. Contact Inc. is working across the community and with the Inclusion Support Agency to define a whole of community recruitment strategy for CALD volunteers in which future bicultural workers may be sourced and trained.

Contact Inc. and Children's Services Central are very aware of the special issues that act as barriers to accessing professional development in rural and remote communities. Issues such as distance, lack of relief staff, inability to attend due to costs of petrol and accommodation, and the need to access training and support processes that can be shared with colleagues within service are not easily solved.

Through using innovative methods such as the ones outlined above, we hope to be able to reduce some of the barriers and ensure that our professional development opportunities are more accessible to all.

Sue Kingwill, Contact Inc.



Outback Mobile Resource Unit in Broken Hill: Sue, Vicki and Wendy.



At the Galloping Gumnut base office at Lithgow. This is the dining and entertainment area.

Looking for resources?

Check out Children's Services Central's General Resource Library!

Free postage!

The General Resource Library is a specialist children's services resource pool which contains over 20,000 different resources - books, articles, videos, and a range of other resources that children's services in NSW may wish to access.

Yearly membership of the library costs only \$44 (inc GST). All children's services in NSW are able to borrow from the library after becoming a library member.

The Children's Services Central General Resource Library is delivered by Lady Gowrie Child Centre for Children's Services Central.

To view the Library catalogue and to join the Library go to:

www.cscentral.org.au



CCMS: Are you ready?

Now that the first batch of long day care centres and family day care schemes has already implemented the new Child Care Management System (CCMS), it is vital that services ensure they have taken the required steps to complete their own transition. As at Monday 24 March 2008, 163 children's services in NSW were operating under the CCMS.

What is the exact process? By now services should have applied for any additional funding to help with the transition. At some stage in the next few months, most long day care and family day care services will receive a letter from the CCMS Task Force nominating a transition date to the new system.

This date will be at least 60 days after receipt of the letter. As long as this date is acceptable to your service (for example, it is not just before your Self Study report is due) then this is the date your service needs to be ready to make the transition.

At this stage, your service will receive a transition pack from the Task Force which will include training material and a copy of the CCMS Child Care Services Handbook 2007/2008. This should be the often-consulted bible for all things CCMS! (The handbooks are currently being printed, so those services that have already transitioned will be sent copies mid April)

At least 28 days before the actual transition date, your service should receive passwords into the CCMS system. Formal enrolments can be created under the system from this date onwards. Seven days before the transition date, your service should receive enrolment advance payments for all the children your service has created formal enrolments for, if your service has chosen this option.

Once the transition is completed, services must remember to submit attendance information at least once every fortnight.

Services also need to remember to submit the final return up until the transition date under the old system to ensure all monies that are still owed to the service, are received.

Children's Services Central is aware that many services are still very nervous about transitioning to CCMS. There is help available (see box below) and services are strongly advised to access the help that they need.

Remember, it a service's responsibility to ensure that their software provider is a registered CCMS software. As at 26 March 2008, 17 software providers had gained registration of their CCMS solution and appeared on the CCMS webpage advising of this status. Seven other childcare software providers are at various stages of their software development and registration. To check, go to www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/ccms.htm or call the CCMS helpline on **1300 667 276**.

Do you need help?

Help with funding, knowing when you are going to transition, general CCMS information...

- Contact the CCMS helpline on 1300 667 276, or email the helpdesk ccmshelpdesk@facsia.gov.au

Help with your software, understanding how to enrol children, etc...

- Contact your software supplier

General understanding of CCMS

- Get the DVD of one of the CCMS training events held last year. See www.cscentral.org.au or call 1800 157 818
- Consult the training material that the CCMS Task Force sends you at transition. You can also look at the CCMS Child Care Services Handbook 2007/2008 online at www.facsia.gov.au/childcare/handbook2007-08_ccms
This is the definitive CCMS guide.

Support with getting your service ready to transition

- Contact Children's Services Central, 1800 157 818. Children's Services Central are currently working out the best way of providing additional support to services, but please call us with any specific help you require.

OOSH CCMS Info sessions

Are you a Member of Network of Community Activities? Did you attend their Child Care Management System (CCMS) Seminars?

These regional forums were an opportunity for OOSH services to find out more about the Child Care Management System (CCMS). To see if there are still any forums on in your area, call Network on **9212 3244** or **1800 157 818 and press '3'** (a free call via Children's Services Central).

Later in the year, Children's Services Central, in conjunction with Network, will be running more CCMS training sessions for OOSH services. More information will be sent directly to services at this time.

Are you ready? Have you:

- Arranged for internet access?
- Purchased or upgrade childcare software?
- Organised hardware upgrades or purchases?
- Set up your software?
- Organised training for administration staff and the director/manager/owner?
- Received the Set Transition payment?
- Applied for additional transition funding?
- Collected additional information from families (for example, parent's birth date)?
- Received your transition date?
- Enrolled children into the system?
- Completed Outstanding Child Care Usage Statements under the old system?

Indigenous e-news

The Inclusion and Professional Support Unit (IPSU NSW & ACT) has been funded by the Australian Government, under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program to provide:

- Training, support and resources to eligible Indigenous-run children services throughout NSW & the ACT;
- To work collaboratively with Children's Services Central (the Professional Support Co-ordinator in NSW) & Communities @ Work (the Professional Support Co-ordinator in the ACT); and
- To work collaboratively with the 18 Inclusion Support Agencies in NSW and the one Inclusion Support Agency in the ACT by providing advice to assist these agencies to support children's services in providing quality care that is culturally safe, appropriate and meets the needs of Indigenous children.

IPSU NSW & ACT hopes to assist children's services across NSW by providing an e-NEWS fortnightly, with information such as:

- Current issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Cultural information;
- Significant dates;
- Resources; and
- Links to relevant websites.

If you would like to receive this fortnightly e-NEWS, go to www.ipsunswact.com.au and subscribe free of charge.

IPSU NSW & ACT would also like to say a big thank you to all the services that participated in their recent survey.

Judy Tempest, IPSU NSW & ACT

Press '2' for Robert & Bronwyn

When you phone Children's Services Central helpline (1800 157 818) your call gets routed to different people depending on the type of the service and the nature of the question. When you press '2' for family day care queries, you will most likely talk to Robert Barbara or Bronwyn Keane at NSW Family Day Care Association. Robert has been taking calls on the helpline since July 2006.

He is the Manager of the section of NSW Family Day Care funded by Children's Services Central, a role that includes managing all operations of training and support and managing Bronwyn, the main call centre project worker. Together, Bronwyn and Robert take calls around support, advice and training for both family day care and in-home care sectors.

Robert has a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) Degree from Macquarie University and a Certificate IV (Workplace Assessment and Training). He has put on hold a post-graduate degree in linguistics at Macquarie University. Robert has over 20 years experience in diverse roles within the early childhood sector and previously worked at TAFE as a Child Studies teacher. Prior to this, he worked in various family day care services as a co-ordinator and child development officer. From these experiences, Robert has the knowledge to be able to effectively advise and support the sector appropriately.

Robert relishes the depth and variety of questions he faces from services. Occasionally some questions require further investigation to give a current and up to date response. Robert says 'I enjoy researching and updating my knowledge – this is a rewarding situation in that the service and I have both updated our knowledge simultaneously'. Robert says he 'enjoys the diversity of the role. As well as advising and supporting services I also undertake face to face training and organise training events'.



Bronwyn joined the team at NSW Family Day as a Project Worker in June 2007 and, as a part of her role, has been 'manning' the phone ever since.

Bronwyn completed her Associate Diploma in 1995 and following this, she worked in a long day care centre for 12 years, as team leader of the two and three-year-old room. Advocacy for early childhood and early childhood professionals is something very dear to Bronwyn's heart and between 2001 to 2004, Bronwyn was very heavily involved in the NSW Child Care Workers Pay Equity campaign headed by the NSW Liquor, Hospitality, Miscellaneous Workers Union and brought before the NSW Industrial Relations Commission, which advocated for improved working conditions and pay for all childcare workers in NSW.

Currently, Bronwyn is studying a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) by correspondence at the

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Got a Problem? Call the Children's Services Central Helpline on **1800 157 818**



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University of New England, which she is due to complete in mid-2008.

Like Robert, Bronwyn enjoys finding answers to the diversity of enquiries she receives from services each and every day. 'At times the questions can be quite challenging ranging from working with children checks, regulation requirements for overnight care, to how to deal with asbestos in the family home and policy development'. Robert and Bronwyn also field a lot of calls from families looking for care for their children and from people who are interested in becoming registered family day care carers. As Bronwyn says: 'Each call is kind of like picking from a box of chocolates... you never know what you're going to get!'

New Services Training

Did you know there is New Services Training now available?

Offered under the Australian Government's Inclusion and Professional Support Program program the training is aimed at licensees, directors and authorised supervisors of centre-based children's services which...

- Have just started operating;
- Have changed service model, for example, from a preschool to a long day care centre;
- Have extended their service to include the ages from birth-to-two years old.

This one-day program gives training and advice on...

- Government Departments including what they do and how they can assist;
- The regulatory environment's impact of your service's operation;
- Government funding including CCB and CCMS;
- Financial planning and budgeting;
- Staffing;
- Creative, sustainable environments which support curriculum;
- Policy-writing;
- Accreditation.

Participants are also enrolled in a follow-up mentoring program which allows them to build on skills developed during the training.

To maximise participants' opportunities for discussion and networking, training is done with small groups at regular intervals around the State. These sessions will be run by Community Child Care for Children's Services Central. Please call Marie Deverill on **8922 6422** to discuss the next training day.

Planning: the key to success in FDC CCMS training

The 2008 Child Care Management System briefing sessions for Family Day Care services was a resounding success for the 209 participants. 70 per cent of all participants rated the courses as 'excellent' or 'very good'. The sessions were jointly organised by Community Child Care Co-operative and NSW Family Day Care Association for Children's Services Central.

Robert Barbara, from NSW Family Day Association said 'the participants were from a variety of community-based, local council and private services which meant we had to explore a large range of issues they might face in their transition to CCMS'.

Robert believes that 'the success of the program was due to a detailed planning approach which included a professionally developed brochure that attracted attention; a clear outline of the session; a range of venues; and a lead time which allowed clients to re-organise their schedules'.

The six venues chosen covered both city, rural and remote areas in NSW and in the ACT, to enable a maximum number of potential participants. Issues such as major road and transport connections for the family day care regions, and parking opportunities for participants were considered.

The evaluations asked clients to consider what they wanted to get out of the training, what questions were raised by the training, what they have learned from the training and what action they will take as a result of the training. The answers to these questions demonstrated a knowledgeable response and also pre-empted a possible further exploration of the topic for co-ordination unit staff and carers into the future.

The trainers, Leonie Smith and Angela Sinclair, who were well received by participants, thanked Robert 'for the opportunity to meet and hear about the individual services, their differences and similarities in management issues'. They also thanked the Family Day Care Association staff, Robert, Anita and Bronwyn and Community Child Care Co-op's Maria, for the support they were given.

Robert Barbara, NSW Family Day Care Association

