

**MEDIA RELEASE 22 FEBRUARY 2021**

**An open letter to Premier McGowan**

Dear Premier McGowan, we need to talk about children.

As we inch closer to the WA State Elections, it is increasingly obvious that you likely don't need to do too much to retain your position for the next 4 years. By all accounts, a McGowan Government re-election is imminent.

So let's skip to your biggest election commitment ... Jobs.

You stated that a re-elected McGowan Labor Government's plan is '**to create 125,000 new jobs by 2025-26 and continue its proven record of diversifying the economy and creating jobs for Western Australians**'. Fabulous news, a solid goal indeed.

You have also made a commitment to '**get an extra 9,000 WA students into VET courses by 2024**'. Again, truly awesome. It's little wonder why you're a TikTok sensation with our youth.

But we need to talk about something that's missing. A really critical fundamental issue at the core of this – Childcare.

There is 1 reference in your Jobs Plan to "*work with local government and businesses to address the lack of childcare in the regions*", but this isn't just a regional issue, it's a broad state based issue. While there are certainly immediate concerns on lack of childcare availability in the regions, the bigger issue at stake is a dwindling workforce across WA.

During a State Workforce Reference Group meeting last week, I learnt a staggering statistic – it is estimated we will need **39,000 additional Educators by 2023** across the country, making childcare the second most in demand occupation listed by the National Skills Commission. It's safe to assume that a fair whack of those Educators are needed in our very own great State.

If there is anything that was highlighted during the height of the pandemic, it was exactly how critical the childcare sector is to ensuring economic stability. It was so critical in fact, that while the rest of the state went into restricted lockdowns, the Childcare sector, better known as the Early Childhood Education & Care Sector (ECEC) was literally and figuratively left holding the baby. The wonderful educators put their own health concerns and anxieties aside, to do what was best for WA.

One could argue that it was the ECEC sector that quietly nurtured our economic stability over the pandemic period, and again most recently during the 5-day lockdown period. Without childcare, families are left helpless trying to find care for their children, impacting their jobs and their livelihood.

Economics aside, it's not just us that think this is a critical matter, even [Bill & Melinda Gates](#) are urging Governments to ensure ECEC is prioritised. "As governments rebuild their economies, it's time to start treating child care as essential infrastructure – just as worthy as roads and fibre optic cables. In the long term, this will help to create more productive and inclusive post-pandemic economies", Ms Gates said.

Closer to home we have had the Minderoo Foundation's Dr Nicola Forrest advocating for investment in early learning particularly for children that are developmentally vulnerable. In WA, [more than 20% of children arrive at school with a developmental vulnerability](#). Speaking at the National Press Club last week Dr Forrest emphasised the cost of inaction in supporting children before the age of 5 across our country "\$5.9billion for child protection, \$2.7billion for youth crime, \$1.3billion for mental health".

It's 2021 and we still have these sad statistics which quite simply, aren't ok. If we think of an average classroom in WA, that's around 5 to 6 children that will likely experience lifelong issues when we could have made a difference in their early years. We could be changing the trajectory of these children's lives.

It will take brave governments to invest in children upfront and possibly not see their ROI for some time, but that's another open letter for another day.

For now if we can just focus on your Jobs Plan Premier, we're quite simply asking that the ECEC workforce is put front and centre into decision making. We know that the regions are experiencing significant issues with childcare, we know that there are going to be critical workforce shortages across the entire state, and we know first-hand from work that we are currently doing in the Pilbara alongside our funding partners BHP, that we need a very unique approach to developing, strengthening and growing our own workforce here in WA.

It's not a straightforward fix, it is multi-faceted, it is complex and it requires a coordinated approach with Government working alongside and supporting the sector. We're not big on coming to you with our problems, so we've already started piecing together workable solutions and look forward to sharing those with you very soon.

Premier, while we will continue to advocate for the needs of a well-equipped workforce to ensure childcare is available for families to stay employed or gain employment, at the core of all of this is a fundamental issue. The children.

A child's early years are arguably the most critical, so let's support the professionals working with our children. Let's create career pathways for young people (namely women, in this female dominated workforce). Let's attract and retain a workforce that truly nurtures a child's development in their early years so that every child has the best possible start upon school entry. Just imagine if all children started school with an equal opportunity?

Let's address the childcare workforce issues to complement your broader Jobs Plan, and let's stay focused on the most important part of all...the child.

It's a win win all round,

Yours sincerely

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