

# national associations meeting...a new beginning


The election of the Federal Labor Government last November prompted FDCA President Kym Groth to write to all State Family Day Care Associations.

For the first time in history, every State and Territory across Australia is governed by the Labor Party. Kym believed that this unique situation provided a real opportunity to evaluate how family day care operates at the State and national levels, and how industry collaboration could be enhanced to bring the combined strength of the family day care sector to bear on its common issues.

To this end, On 15 and 16 February 2008 FDCA hosted a national meeting with participants from each carer and staff association across Australia. The meeting also included independent State and Territory participants where such associations do not exist (ACT and NT).

The two day meeting was to focus on how FDCA could better work with State Associations in a way which complemented each others' strengths and did not duplicate effort. A professional facilitator, Cathy Mauk, who is familiar with family day care was engaged to work with the group over the two days to ensure that the discussion moved along well and to achieve agreement on outcomes that would help all to work together for the common good of family day care.

Cathy had the group thinking about the industry's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, current perceptions and a vision of where the industry should be in two years. The SWOT analysis highlighted a range of issues to address if the industry is to flourish in the new competitive environment. Key points included:

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- **Visibility:** raise the profile of family day care to attract appropriately skilled workers and new families, and acknowledge work value and professionalism of the service
  - **Business acumen:** operate services efficiently and effectively to retain viability
  - **Regulations:** lobby for consistency between States and Territories and focus on risk management rather than risk elimination
  - **Recruitment and Retention:** consider the economic impacts of full employment, rising interest rates, petrol prices etc and their contribution to family day care workforce participation and retention
  - **Communication:** improve how we share information and coordinate lobbying across the country
  - **Competition:** understand competitive forces and create new opportunities
  - **Quality:** work with government to establish quality benchmarks for new services
  - **Qualifications:** improve career paths and access training funds to further professionalise the sector
- The group discussed where the industry should be in two years and what the various roles and responsibilities of stakeholders should be. At the end of the meeting it was agreed for an open letter to be written to the family day care community to enable everyone to understand the challenges and opportunities that are before us, and to ask for the industry to work with the group to support this important work.
- The FDCA Board met in mid-March where the Directors wholeheartedly supported the open letter and agreed the role of FDCA to be that of secretariat and facilitator of future meetings. The group will meet again in June 2008 and September 2008. 🧩

17 February 2008

## Open letter to the family day care community

On 15-16 February Family Day Care Australia hosted a State Associations National Meeting with participants from each carer and staff association across Australia. The meeting also included independent State and Territory participants where such associations do not exist.

The purpose of the meeting was to consider the current state of the family day care industry, its short to medium term future and to discuss ways in which the various associations – both state and national – could better work together to facilitate the change that is needed to ensure our industry's survival.

We realised that family day care's share of the childcare market has steadily diminished over a number of years and for a range of reasons. In 2006 our operating environment completely changed with the abolition of boundaries, the change to the network funding formula and the uncapping of family day care places. We acknowledged the competitive environment in which we now operate and understand that we must effect strategic change to our operations if we are to have a strong future.

Over the two days we reached agreement that we need to work more collaboratively at all levels of family day care and that we need a forward and solution focus to our thinking. We agreed that family day care has a strong future, but we need to be strategic.

We agreed that our strength is in our unity and that the time has come to rethink our structure, roles and responsibilities and relationships; and how we communicate and share information.

Some of us were sceptical. We felt that we had heard it all before but that nothing ever changed.

This time it was different. We are starting on a new journey and at the very beginning of the journey we listened to each other and we were heard. The discussion facilitated by Cathy Mauk, whom some of you will know from her previous work in family day care, was open and respectful. Our views were taken account of and we worked as a group.

Although many of us were there to represent our various associations we did not make commitments on your behalf without consulting you. What we agreed was to consider specific strategies around:

- joining under a single industry vision
- cooperative product development
- communication
- linkages across State Associations
- revenue sharing
- complaints handling; and
- how we speak with a single voice to enhance our lobbying

We have asked Kym Groth, FDCA's President to put to the FDCA Board that this body continues to work in partnership with FDCA to drive the forward development of the industry. We hope that you will work with us in the spirit of collaboration and relationship building to support this important work.

There is a renewed sense of anticipation, hope and enthusiasm which was summed up by one participant who said that the meeting and its outcomes were "the best thing that's happened to family day care in years".

Yours sincerely,

**Ariane Dixon**, President, NSW Family Day Care Association

**Bronwyn Guy**, President, The Family Day Care Carers' Association of NSW

**Lee Finniss**, Belconnen Family Day Care Scheme, ACT

**Sue Smith**, President, Family Day Care Victoria

**Sally Cooper**, Executive Officer, Family Day Care Victoria

**Margaret Nicolson**, Vice President, Victorian Home Based Carers Association

**Kim Abbott**, President, Tasmanian Carers Association

**Pam Johns**, President, Family Day Care Council Tasmania

**Bev Sunkar**, President, WA Carers' Association

**John Buckell**, Department of Education and Children's Services, SA

**Priscilla Schwanz**, President, Careproviders of South Australia, SA

**Trish Rear**, President, Family Day Care WA

**Heather Havens**, Darwin Family Day Care Scheme, NT

**Jan Birch**, Executive Officer, Family Day Care Association Queensland

**Carolyn Brunker**, Secretary, Queensland Careproviders' Association

**Kym Groth**, President, Family Day Care Australia