

Families at the Centre research project

Insights into child care and early education: Fitzroy



UNSW



How was the research done?

In each neighbourhood we talked to around 20 families about the care and education of their young children. We talked to the mothers and fathers, grandparents and aunts. People volunteered to take part in our research, and we gave them \$50 for their costs and to say thank you. We spoke with them for about one hour each. Their information remains confidential - that is, we will not

We met people at various places in the neighbourhood and through early childhood and family services, at playgroups, libraries and neighbourhood centres. We also talked to early childhood workers and service providers in the

We talked to 25 families in Fitzroy in November 2012.

What does this booklet say?

This booklet details what we found out in Fitzroy. It starts with some information about the suburb, the kinds of people who live there, and the care and education services available in Fitzroy. It then describes what kinds of families

About Fitzroy

Fitzroy is an inner city suburb of Melbourne, located approximately 2 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD.

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In 2011, the population of Fitzroy was 9,430. This represents a 6 per cent growth from Fitzroy's population of 8,825 in 2006.

Fitzroy is a multicultural suburb. Just a little over half (55 per cent) of Fitzroy residents were born in Australia. Other major countries of birth include the United Kingdom (5 per cent), Vietnam (4 per cent), New Zealand (4 per cent), and China (4 per cent). Though the majority of residents (62 per cent) speak English at home, there is a strong representation of languages other than English, including Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Italian and Greek. Less than 1 per cent of the population of Fitzroy identified as Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander in 2011.

Compared to other suburbs in Melbourne, as well as Australia more generally, Fitzroy has high levels of housing mobility. In 2011, more than one-quarter of residents (2,489, or 26 per cent) had moved in the last year, and more than half (4,798, or 51 per cent) had moved in the past five years. The high housing mobility in Fitzroy may partly reflect the high proportion of public housing in the suburb, as well as its proximity to the University of Melbourne.

Most of the dwellings in Fitzroy are classified as semi-detached terraces, or as flats, units or apartments. Most are rented, with an average weekly rent of \$350.

In 2011, there were 829 families with at least one child aged 15 years and under living in Fitzroy. Of these, a little over 40 per cent (346) were sole parent families. This figure is considerably higher than the national average of 25 per cent of sole-parent families but is not unusual for the area. The Census shows similar a proportion in neighbouring suburbs like Carlton, Collingwood and East Melbourne.

A total of 4,876 Fitzroy residents live in sole parent families. This is 56 per cent of the total population of Fitzroy.

Child care and early education in Fitzroy

There is a different mix of services in each state. Victoria's early education and care sector is focused on local planning and service delivery. Approximately half of long day care centres were privately managed in Victoria in 2010-11, while one-third were community managed. In 2011, 35 per cent of Victorian children aged 0 to 5 years were attending Australian Government approved child

vacation care.

Below is a map of the child care and early education services in Fitzroy and

MAP 3: CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION SERVICES, FITZROY AND SURROUNDING SUBURBS, 2012

In 2011, there were 501 children aged 0-4 living in Fitzroy. These children represented approximately 5 per cent of the population of Fitzroy in 2011. Here are some of the other things the Census tells us about children aged 0-4 in Fitzroy:

- 274 have one or both parents born overseas
- 153 live in low income families, which earn under \$800 a week
- 113 live with a single parent
- 426 live in one-family households
- 13 live in multi-family households
- 169 live in houses that their family owns (either fully or

- 248 live in families who are renting
- 188 live in a house or semi-detached terrace
- 301 live in a flat, unit or apartment

Map 4 shows that Fitzroy has a higher proportion of families with young children who live on a low income (less than \$800 per week) than the surrounding suburbs.

MAP 4: PERCENTAGE OF LOW INCOME FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGED 0-4, FITZROY AND SURROUNDING SUBURBS

About the families who talked to us

In Fitzroy, 25 families spoke to us about child care and early education for their children. We met people through different early childhood and family support services in Fitzroy: the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Acacia Fitzroy Crèche, the maternal child health nurse, and Atherton Gardens kindergarten. Fifteen parents spoke to us in one-on-one interviews, and a further 10 spoke to us as part of

Twenty-two parents filled out a demographic survey after the interview. Their information is below. Some parents declined to answer certain questions and

	21 women	1 man
	21-25:	1 person
	26-30:	2 people
	31-35:	7 people
	36-40:	8 people
	41-45:	3 people
	Unknown:	1 person
	Australia:	
	Vietnam:	
	Ethiopia:	4 people
	Sudan:	2 people
	Somali:	2 people
	China:	1 person
	Iran:	1 person
	Tanzania:	1 person
	Hong Kong:	1 person
Whether they live with a partner	12 do, 10 don't	
How many children they have	1 child:	9 people
	2 children:	
	3 children:	3 people
	4 children:	3 people
	5 children:	1 person
How old the children are	Ages range from 0 to 14	
The highest level of education	Uni:	2 people
	TAFE/vocational:	10 people
	High school:	10 people
	Not completed high school:	

The languages they speak at home	3 people speak only English at home 19 people speak other languages
Whether they are Aboriginal or	No one was of ATSI background
	At home: 11 people
	In paid employment: 2 people
	Self employed: 2 people
	Student:
	Unemployed: 2 people
	\$200-\$399 per week: 9 people
	\$400-\$599 per week: 4 people
	\$600-\$799 per week: 2 people
	\$800-\$999 per week: 1 person
	\$1000-\$1199 per week: 2 people
	\$1400 or more: 1 person
	Unknown: 3 people
	Owns outright: 1 person
	Has a mortgage: 1 person
	Private rental: 2 people
	Public housing: 18 people

What the families told us

Each family is different. They have different stories, different lives, different opinions, different experiences with the child care and early education they use, and different ideas about what they would like. We don't have the space here to report everything the 25 families in Fitzroy told us. Therefore we briefly describe some of the topics relating to child care and early education that they talked about, important concerns they mentioned and where they felt things were going well. Some of the topics are explained with a quote from one of the people we talked about. We have left the quotes anonymous so that people cannot be identified.

Most of the parents we spoke to in Fitzroy were using some form of child care or early education. Sometimes there was a mix, with children attending different types of care on different days of the week. Most children attended child care or kindergarten part-time. Full-time use of child care was rare.

“We go to a couple of playgroups, and then he also goes to kindergarten.”

because they were studying. Some of the parents who had come from overseas were enrolled in English language courses. Other parents were completing courses at TAFE or university. In most cases, parents were not attending classes full-time but were balancing studying and caring for their children.

“Because I go to school three times a week...I bring her here.”

Family day care – when a child is looked after in a home setting rather than at a formal centre – was a relatively popular choice for the parents of Fitzroy compared to the parents of the other neighbourhoods we visited. Family day care was thought to hold many advantages over alternative forms of child care. For example, family day care was a more affordable option for many parents. For others, the flexibility of family day care hours was an important consideration. Parents who came from overseas also tended to favour carers from the same

Culturally sensitive child care

Many of the parents we spoke to had grown up in a different country, and it

practices. For example, it was important to the Islamic parents in this study that their children would not be served pork products while at child care. Parents told us that in their view centres in Fitzroy appeared to be amenable to their

Early education is important

Many parents stressed the importance of early education for ensuring that their children got a good start in life. For parents from overseas countries, having their children learn and advance their English-language skills was of paramount importance, especially in preparing them for school. Most parents also talked about the importance of social interaction for children in helping them get ready

to attend school. One parent who had been in Australia for a short time said that her child had been in a playgroup in Australia for a few weeks and was already learning English. She said that she was very happy to see her child interacting with other children and learning the language.

comfortable leaving their children in care. Therefore, the quality of the service was very important to them. Parents weighed up many factors when judging quality of different child care options. These included: perceived health and hygiene of the centre – for example, if the centre was clean and tidy, or if the meals were nutritious and balanced; the space – if there was a backyard, for instance; and the friendliness and professionalism of staff. Additionally, many parents were highly sensitive to their children's experiences in care. Parents wanted their children to build an emotional connection with carers, and to make friends with other children. Above all parents stressed that they wanted their

“It was important to me that they respect the child's feeling ... my concern is he is happy in here, and that's enough for me.”

Many of the parents we spoke to had limited family support. Most of the time this was because they came from other countries and had left their families and friends behind when they came to Australia. Other parents had family interstate or in different parts of Melbourne.

A lack of family support caused some families to feel quite isolated. They said that they had none, or very limited, child care options in an emergency or crisis.

People find Fitzroy very family friendly. There are parks, museums and lots of other activities which are useful not only for entertaining children, but also for

A mult cultural neighbourhood

Fitzroy is a mult cultural neighbourhood, home to both Australian-born parents and many people from overseas. Many parents commented on this with pleasure and spoke about how living in Fitzroy exposed their children to many different cultures from around the world.

Get ng around

There are good transport links to Melbourne city from Fitzroy. The suburb is serviced by buses and trams. Because everything is so close, most of the parents found it easy to get around Fitzroy on foot, even with young children in tow. Get ng to child care or early education was not an issue for the parents in Fitzroy, mostly all the services were so close. Some people had specifically moved to the area because of its good transport.

“Everything that I can buy is near. It’s not needed, to have a car.”

References

The information in this booklet came from the families and service providers who talked to us and:

ABS Census Community Profiles 2011,
http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/0

AEDI Community Profile 2012, Yarra Community, Victoria,
<http://maps.aedi.org.au/lga/vic/27350>