



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia

*Working together for equity of access to education for all students who live in rural & remote
Australia*

MEDIA RELEASE

ACCESS DENIED! – EARLY LEARNING NO GO FOR BUSH KIDS

Wednesday 19 Feb 2014

They are just as cute, just as smart and just as keen to start school as their urban counterparts, but Australia's rural and remote four year olds, whose only access to early childhood learning is by distance education, are just not able to enter the early childhood education arena. By failing to extend the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme to include four year olds, the Federal Government continues to deny these families affordable entry to early education.

In urban centres, access to early childhood programs involves little more than paying a small fee. Parents of the 280 rural and remote children enrolled in 2014 Distance Education early childhood programs around the country must bear the cost of establishing, stocking and maintaining their own classroom as well as delivering the curriculum to students. Often, they must drive their children up to 500km each way to their nearest major town to attend education centre based activities without recompense for their costs or time.

The value of participation in early childhood programs, the knowledge and self-confidence it gives children and parents and the smooth transition into schooling it ensures, has been widely acknowledged by government and experts. Providing equitable access to early childhood education for all four year olds across Australia must be a priority at every level of government.

Federal President of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, Judy Newton, commented that while State and Territory Governments provide wonderful distance education programs for isolated children, ICPA believes the Federal Government must address the financial inequity facing rural families wishing to access an early childhood program through distance education.

Mrs Newton said "The costs involved in assisting this small group of Australians would have a negligible impact on the budget's bottom line, but a significant effect on those few families involved. The existing Assistance for Isolated Children scheme already assists with both the setting up and ongoing costs of running a school room, but does not recognise enrolling four year olds as eligible for payment" .

ICPA (Aust) requests the Federal Government address the financial inequity facing rural families wishing to access a recognised distance education based early childhood program by extending the AIC allowance to include four year old students.

For further information and comments please contact:

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