



**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc.)
"Access to Education"**

**Submission
to the
Senate Standing Committees on
Education and Employment**

into

**The impact of Australia's temporary work visa programs on
the Australian labour market and on the temporary work
visa holders**

from the

**Federal Council
of the
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
ICPA (Aust)**

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), is a voluntary, parent body, dedicated to ensuring all rural and remote students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. This encompasses the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. The majority of member families of the association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia and all share a common goal of access to an appropriate education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this.

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the opportunity to highlight issues that concern our members in relation to the impact of Australia's temporary work visa programs on the Australian labour market and on the temporary work visa holders.

In relation to the Terms of Reference for this submission, ICPA (Aust) responds to point:

i) any related matter.

ICPA (Aust) made a submission to the Public Inquiry into the Productivity Commission's Future Options for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning. We refer to the following draft recommendation in relation to temporary working visa programs:

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.7

The Australian Government should simplify working holiday visa requirements to make it easier for families to employ au pairs, by allowing au pairs to work for a family for the full 12 month term of the visa, rather than the current limit of six months.

ICPA strongly promotes this recommendation for consideration under the terms of this inquiry and we request that the criteria be extended to include not only au pairs but also staff (referred to as nannies or governesses) hired in rural and remote areas to care for or teach isolated children. ICPA is asking that this type of work be included in the 'rural work' category that allows for a second year visa. We believe that these visa changes would enhance the options available for child care for distance education children.

For many years ICPA members have raised concerns about the difficulty of finding suitable people to employ in their homes to provide child care or to teach their children residing in rural and remote Australia who must be educated by distance education.

Distance education tutors and child care workers such as a nanny, provide a valuable service to many families residing on rural properties as they release the mother to undertake essential duties involved in the running of the farm or station business. Due to geographical isolation, there is a distinct lack of Australian workers including qualified child care and educational workers, who are willing to undertake work where remoteness is an issue.

CASE STUDY

"I have been on the waiting list for the Longreach In Home Care Scheme for the last five years. We moved into town in Alice Springs briefly after being unable to receive financial support to care for our children, but Alice Springs' rental proved even harder to sustain financially and there was a shortage of child care places in town as well.

My children are now 6, 8 and 13. My 13 year old has complex needs and multiple disabilities having caught meningitis as an infant. He is now in care in Alice Springs as we could not keep a carer in the bush. No one would apply for the position, caring for such a difficult client in a remote location – no mobile phone, limited access to Facebook, no workers wanted to apply. The only carers I have been

able to attract for him over the years out here were backpackers who could only stay for a maximum of six months, due to their visa restrictions. This year we have placed him in care in town to attend the Special School. He can't walk, talk or see and I am not with him, simply because I cannot attract long-term carers to the position. With a review of the Working Visa programs my son could come home. "

A solution to this employment problem is to extend the current list of occupations qualifying as rural work for people entering Australia on a 1263 Working Holiday visa. Along with widening the available employment opportunities for these travellers, it would increase the employee pool for rural families and assist them to fill these positions on offer. The current employment guidelines for a second Working Holiday visa are that applicants must complete at least three months (88 days) of specified work in regional Australia.

For a foreign nanny, governess or au pair to legally work in Australia beyond the 417 and 462 Working Holiday visa, is an extremely difficult task. The 1263 Working Holiday visa does not include these occupations so they are not an approved work activity. Currently, the list includes agriculture, mining, construction and fishing. ICPA would like to see this visa revised and In Home Care and governess work included as accepted employment occupations for rural families.

The addition of a new category to the approved list of occupations would prove beneficial to both workers and families residing in rural and remote areas. Allowing foreign backpackers to be employed under a new designated education category would have dual benefits: widening the available employment opportunities for these travellers, and to increase the employee pool for rural families, assisting them to fill positions on offer. ICPA does not believe that the proposed change to visa work conditions would dissipate the support employment resource provided available to industries currently supported such as agriculture. What we are suggesting could in fact enable a family member to be freed up from the task of providing educational supervision and allow them to re-engage in the agricultural workforce.

In October 2013, a letter from the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, addressed the request to expand the range of eligible specified work activities. The Minister stated that the second Working Holiday visa initiative was established due to "the presence of a persistence of labour shortages," and that "the program is not a work visa program and is not a long term solution to structural labour shortages. "

It is the belief of ICPA (Aust), that there is no long term solution to labour shortages in remote and rural areas. Families who have played a vital role in the agricultural economy of Australia have had difficulty accessing options to assist with child care and the supervision of their children in the classroom. The limitations of the Working Holiday visa do not readily benefit these families and businesses in need of real assistance due to the visa work restrictions. Adjusting the terms of Working Holiday visas and extending the qualifying categories by adding Education and so including the role of distance education tutor could help ensure the success of the Federal Government's recently announced trial, commencing January 2016, of the Interim Home Based Carer Subsidy Programme. The real value of this program to those living in remote locations will be dependent on the combination of this ability to access staff and through a broader list of job categories, a larger employment pool.