

# Children’s Week Is a Time to Invest in Our Shared Future

 Post by Sample Smith

This editorial uses an annual event, Children’s Week, as an opportunity to educate its readers about the importance to our nation’s future prosperity of investing in children’s healthy development.

It opens with the tested “*Value of Return on Investment*”, establishing the idea of a collective benefit from children’s positive development outcomes that continues throughout the narrative flow of the argument that follows. The editorial then builds an Explanatory Chain to show how ensuring young children’s healthy early development is foundational to their future ability to contribute to Australia’s economic and social wellbeing. Applying the “*Metaphor Weaving Skill Ropes*” makes the explanation “sticky,” or memorable, by illustrating the interdependence of the skills young brains develop and the environmental factors that can affect their brain-building outcomes. Next, the editorial models the “*Metaphor Developmental Amplifier*”, which is used to explain why supporting high quality child care programs is an important resource for children’s skills development. Presenting Solutions, such as policy reform and improved access for children from disadvantaged communities, helps readers to match an appropriately scaled fix to the problem. Lastly, the op-ed closes with a final appeal to the Value Return on Investment.

Next week is Children’s Week, an annual celebration of Australia’s youth. Local councils, schools, childhood services, and organisations will sponsor events and activities geared towards building awareness of children’s needs and their achievements. An Australian expansion of the United Nations’ 60-year-old Universal Children’s Day, this national event also, according to the Children’s Week Council, “calls us in Australia to consider those conditions in society which affect the lives and future of our own children.” We might well substitute “our own future leaders, citizens, and workforce,” since that is, after all, what today’s children will be soon enough.

As much as we can appreciate the effort invested in planning the hundreds of activities across the country that will mark the week, let’s also take time to reflect on the investments we will make to our nation’s future—the youngest members of our society—during the other 51 weeks of the year.

A good place to start is with the state of child care access in Australia and the importance of updating our system to match our society’s needs, both now and in the years ahead. According to Carol Bellamy, former executive director of UNICEF, “The economic benefits of investing in children have been extensively documented. Investing fully in children today will ensure the well-being and productivity of future generations for decades to come.”

*The “Value of Return on Investment” establishes the idea of a collective benefit from children’s positive development outcomes that continues throughout the flow.*

Early child care programs and services may seem to be more about family choice and less about our domestic economy, but they play an important role in our country's shared prosperity. Think about it like investing: putting money in the bank now yields dividends later. The earlier we begin investing, say, for our retirement, the more our account yields in the long run. But investment, done right, is a careful process. We figure out how to get the biggest return on our investment.

We need to do the same with early child care. The greater our investment now in our children's healthy development, the greater our shared prosperity in the future—in our communities' health, productivity, and civic engagement.

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The first years of a child's life, from 0 to 5, are critical to brain development. What happens in these years plays an important role in determining children's later educational, health, and social outcomes. What adults may see as simple child's play—from babbling to crawling to moments of discovery—is actually hard work: for young children, the development process is about

the brain learning to weave skills together. Like the many strands of a strong rope, the emotional, cognitive, social, and physical skills children need to function well are interdependent. As their brains develop, they learn to weave, stretch and reweave these skills into skill ropes that they use for all of life's tasks and activities. Building strong skill ropes requires positive relationships with adults, interactive play, and the opportunity to explore new things in a supportive environment.

High quality child care programs are an important resource for children's healthy development, because well-trained educators know both how to support brain-building activities and how to recognise potential developmental problems or delays that need to be addressed. Think of them as developmental amplifiers. Just as an amplifier makes a signal louder and clearer, good child care programs enhance the important developmental work that families are already engaged in with their children through daily interaction and play.

Our current early child care system is outdated and keeps many families from accessing the services and resources their children need. By updating the system, we can ensure that the families who need these resources the most have access to them. For example, the amplifying effects that early child care programs provide are especially important to improving the cognitive, emotional, and physical outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with special needs. Improving their outcomes increases their likelihood of becoming engaged and productive citizens.

It makes sense to use our public resources to support high quality early child care programs and policies that will yield the best return for our country's shared future.

That's an investment we can celebrate 52 weeks a year.