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Occupational therapy and child care centres in the Bankstown area: Understanding local child care worker's perspectives.

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Background: With children increasingly spending more time in childcare or preschool services, and more children with disabilities or developmental delay included in mainstream settings, there are increased demands on childcare workers in meeting these children's needs. For occupational therapists to effectively collaborate with childcare workers it is important to understand the perspective and needs identified by child care workers.

Aim: This study explored the perceptions, skills, knowledge and needs of childcare workers in the Bankstown local government area.

Method: Using a qualitative research design, grounded theory was used for data collection and analysis. In depth semi - structured interviews were conducted with five child care workers from privately run early childcare settings in the Bankstown local government area.

Findings Childcare workers discussed their role in working with families, community groups and health care professionals to get assistance and support for children with disabilities, developmental delay and those at risk of developing additional needs. Their understanding of occupational therapy needs and inclusion of children they worked with varied and were often overshadowed by their needs for better access to funding, resources and training to better assist them in their roles of providing care and support to children with additional needs.

Conclusion: Understanding the diverse skills, demands and perceptions of childcare workers in the Bankstown LGA will allow for better collaboration and support to occur between stakeholders.

Learning Outcomes: It is envisaged that this study will challenge and encourage occupational therapists to become more actively involved with identifying local needs, the development and review of services, current funding policies, and be involved in shaping the future education and support provided to childcare workers across New South Wales.