

Low child care wages turn many off industry [AU] ^[1]

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Source: Maitland Mercury

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Jul 2005

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Poor wages are discouraging people from pursuing a career in child care, a Maitland worker believes.

Lyndall Job has worked at the Metford Child Care Centre for the past 14 years, gaining the position after completing a two-year TAFE course straight out of school.

Ms Job loves her work but said it could be a "thankless job" at times, which deserved greater recognition and higher wages.

"We're the forgotten industry, we don't even have a union of our own," Ms Job said.

"We're looking after the future of our country and getting paid rubbish."

Her comments followed the release of an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report this week that showed child care workers were being paid almost half the wages of primary school teachers.

Full-time child care workers across Australia take home about \$522 a week before tax, while their primary school counterparts - who also work almost two hours less a week - walk away with \$964, according to the report.

Child care workers' average rate of pay rose by 1.8 per cent annually between 1996 and 2002, while primary school teachers received 4.3 per cent more annually in the same period.

Opposition child care spokeswoman Tanya Plibersek said poor wages and conditions were contributing to a national shortage of trained workers. Ms Job agreed.

Ms Job said the disparity between the wages of TAFE-trained and university-trained child care workers should also be reduced.

The AIHW report also showed that parents were being forced to pick up more of the national child care bill.

An average of \$1154 was spent per child aged between birth and 14 years in 2002-03, with \$625 of this contributed by parents.

Metford Child Care Centre director Kate Bennett said the Federal Government should increase child care funding.

"I think any government should be spending more on child care to make it more affordable for everybody," she said.

"A lot of people, even if they are at-home parents, like to have their children here for their social skills.

"We like to be available for non-working parents as well, but for a lot of parents child care is out of their price range (without government assistance)."

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures released in April showed child care costs rose by about 12 per cent last year.

- reprinted from the Maitland Mercury

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