

Long wait list [AU] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Demand for childcare places has reached saturation point at the Murray Bridge Child Care Centre with waiting lists of up to 18 months, according to centre director Amanda Guerin.

Mrs Guerin said the centre was licensed for up to 40 children, and internal space, room structure and staffing shortages saw the centre running at 36 to 38 children daily.

She said they could use another 15 to 20 daily places to accommodate the current waiting list.

To achieve this, funding was required to restructure the internal layout and use of the existing building.

"We have a great location at present," she said.

"We just need to better use what we have."

At the moment the child care centre has a waiting list of 130 children.

"A large amount of my time is spent on the phone taking calls from parents who want child care and I have to explain that we just can't fit them in at this stage," Mrs Guerin said.

"Most people are fairly understanding because they know the situation, however parents are frustrated because most need the care before they can go back to work - it can make or break their work situation.

Mrs Guerin said feedback from many families had highlighted a growing need for parents to return to the workforce after having children sooner than before due to the financial needs of the family.

"If they cannot return to work because they cannot get child care it puts a fair amount of strain on a family," she said.

Mrs Guerin said the current waiting list, lack of government funding and support, as well as a shortage in qualified staff were big issues at the Murray Bridge Child Care Centre.

"The waiting list doesn't warrant another child care centre in Murray Bridge, we just simply need to restructure ours to accommodate another five children in each of the three age groups - at the moment it is just so much harder for parents to enter into the workforce," she said.

"There has to be money there for the places that people keep asking for.

"We also need to find qualified, experienced child care workers.

"Unfortunately the low pay and hard work don't seem to be enticing people into the industry."

For the past 12 months a sub-committee has researched the prospect of expanding the current child care centre.

"We needed to be sure that the waiting list remained as it was over that time, indicating it wasn't just a passing trend, and to look into how we could keep everyone happy given Murray Bridge's changing needs," Mrs Guerin said.

"Organisations such as the Murraylands Regional Development Board are doing a great job at promoting and bringing business to our Community, however, we need to ensure that the structures that support those families can cope with the growth.

"We run to such a strict budget and use every available cent to keep the centre running day to day, which means there is no money left over for major renovation works.

"We need to look into government or community funding for that.

"If we can fund the restructure of our centre we can obtain an increase in licensed numbers and we can then meet the needs of our communities parents."

Education Minister Trish White said South Australia had lost child care places as an unmet demand for vacation and before and after school care places reached new heights.

"The demand is clearly there," she said.

"We have long waiting lists across all forms of child care but we are just not getting the places."

Ms White said she could not see the situation easing without the Federal government putting in the required funds.

"Federal Government figures show we currently have a requirement for an extra 2357 out of school hours care places in this state and yet the Federal government provided not one new place in this year's budget," she said.

"It is the third year in a row that South Australia has been forgotten in children's services."

-Reprinted from The Murray Valley Standard

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