

Childcare is a disgrace [AU] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Here's a test.

What are the names of all the carers who look after your kids at childcare? What are their qualifications? What do they get paid an hour?

If you can't answer these questions, what are you doing dumping your kids with these people?

I'm not trying to pile guilt on to parents. This is about getting good childcare for kids, not making parents feel bad.

But if parents aren't taking an interest in childcare quality, we will never get it.

Governments give people only what they demand, and sadly we aren't demanding good childcare, we are just demanding cheap childcare.

So standards come a sad second to price, and our kids pay for it.

The real problem is that the pay for childcare workers is really lousy - as low as \$15 an hour - so centres struggle to get good carers.

And there's just no incentive for workers to upgrade their skills to make them better, more professional carers, so many don't bother.

For example, figures from the LHMU - the childcare union - show workers receive only \$1.94 an hour more for upgrading from a Certificate III to a diploma. It's hardly an incentive given that the upgrade also comes with significant additional responsibility.

All this means that in most centres, staff shortages are so dire that there's an ever-revolving roster of agency strangers shipped in to fill places.

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Even those who do it for the love of the kids are getting out of the industry, because they can't afford to raise their own families on the paltry salary.

And when you are making about \$10 an hour less than people in other industries with similar qualifications, who can blame staff for giving up?

When we pay staff so little, we are saying that the work they do doesn't matter - that we don't really value the job they do.

And this is a national disgrace.

I know the easiest thing is to blame the federal or state governments or the industry.

But ultimately we need to blame ourselves.

Why aren't we out there supporting staff and their push to be paid properly and to be treated like professionals?

This extra pay doesn't have to come from us. Governments can fund it, if we insist they do. But we don't - so they don't.

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And I really appreciate the 50 per cent childcare rebate that halves the cost of childcare for all families.

But I would forgo some of that rebate to see the money going to improve staff wages and qualifications.

Sure, it will cost me a little, but research shows it's the kids who really pay the cost of cheap childcare.

Childcare run by poorly trained, unimaginative, uncaring staff can damage vulnerable kids for years.

According to the LHMU, this financial year \$3.1 billion is forecast to be spent on the childcare benefit and the childcare rebate.

But this does nothing to improve the quality of care, wages or availability of places. In fact, it provides an incentive for operators to increase fees because then they get more money back from the government.

Survey after survey by the union shows parents want more sophisticated educational programs from childcare workers, and less turnover of staff, but they don't want their fees to go up.

Parents are also kidding themselves about the level of qualifications of childcare workers.

Two thirds of parents surveyed recently said they thought at least one in four carers had a university degree. In reality, most centres would be lucky to have one member of staff in the whole centre with a degree.

And 20 per cent of parents thought - falsely - that all staff had to have a degree or diploma.

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Our kids are worth nothing less and, with the Senate inquiry into childcare under way, now is the time to get the message through to the Federal Government.

Ultimately, there is one lesson poor funding of childcare teaches. It's that childcare workers don't count and, as a result, neither do our kids.

- reprinted from the Herald Sun

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