

Childcare centre fined over young wanderer ^[1]

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Source: West Australian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Mar 2011

EXERPTS.

A major childcare group, whose managing director is president of WA's childcare industry body, has admitted letting a two-year-old boy escape unnoticed and wander up to 75m from one of its centres.

It was only when John McAlister arrived to pick up son Oliver in December 2008 that staff realised the toddler was missing from the Little Rascals Childcare Centre in Leda. Oliver, who only has one lung, was found playing in a park next to the centre, not far from busy Gilmore Road in Kwinana.

Vassallo Corporation, which owns or runs 21 childcare centres in WA, was fined \$8500 and ordered to pay \$4000 in legal costs after pleading guilty in Perth Magistrate's Court yesterday to failing to adequately supervise enrolled children.

Rory Vassallo is president of the Childcare Association of WA, the State's peak association representing childcare centres.

Yesterday's conviction was the second in a month involving centres associated with Vassallo Corporation. On February 4, Magistrate Peter Malone found staff at Smarties Early Learning and Kindy in Lesmurdie, which is managed by Vassallo Corporation, guilty of breaching the same regulation after two boys aged five and seven escaped in January 2009. WA Childcare Pty Ltd, which owns the Lesmurdie centre, was fined \$6000 and told to pay \$14,000 in costs.

Mr Vassallo yesterday defended his presidency of the childcare association, saying the escapes happened more than two years ago and he had since been elected unopposed to the position.

"The things I have learnt from these experiences will inform me as the Childcare Association of WA lobbies for improvements to national childcare centre safety regulations," he said.

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Mr Vassallo, 28, bought his first childcare centre at the age of 20.

Vassallo Corporation has an annual turnover of \$17.5 million.

-reprinted from The West Australian

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