

Childcare plan may not have the numbers ^[1]

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Source: The Australian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 31 Jul 2012

EXCERPTS:

THE peak childcare union has warned late-night and weekend childcare is doomed to fail unless the Government acts to fix the crisis in the sector's workforce.

Sue Lines, United Voice Assistant National Secretary said the Government's priority in early childhood education and care must be implementing a lasting solution to the "well-documented and worsening childcare workforce crisis".

It comes after The Australian revealed the nation's largest childcare group is working with the Gillard Government to offer late night and weekend childcare in a move to revolutionise the nation's childcare industry by providing round-the-clock care.

The Australian understands the government is considering a proposal to allow a trial at several long daycare centres of "flexible" hours to allow centres to operate on weekends and longer hours into the evening.

Goodstart Early Learning, the biggest childcare provider, has told the government it wants to start trials of extended care to make life easier for families, particularly for shift workers.

"There is an increasing need for improved flexibility to support the changing needs of Australia's families," chief executive Julie Davison told The Australian.

Ms Lines said: "now is not the time to lose focus on key issues".

"Childcare is a critical service for working families and for the economy. Greater flexibility is obviously desirable but our research shows this is not a priority for parents.

"Recent research commissioned by United Voice revealed parents want Government to act on affordability in the face of increasing fees and to enforce standards to ensure quality education and care for their children by increasing wages paid to the workers.

"As daily users of the system, parents know staff turnover is a major problem for centres across Australia. They are well aware of the negative impacts on their children of the constant churn of staff. The growing reliance on casual workers is a worrying trend for families.

"Every week 180 workers leave childcare and centres face the continuing struggle and cost of trying to replace them. The main reason for this tide of workers abandoning the work they invariably say they love is the woefully low pay paid in the sector.

"How will the sector find workers to provide late-night and weekend childcare when it struggles to find workers for existing services? The reality is staff won't be willing to work at night and on weekends for only \$18.51 an hour.

"Our members will work with Government and GoodStart to ensure any expansion to night and weekend childcare is sustainable and in the best interests of children and not at the expense of their educators and carers," Ms Lines said.

-reprinted from the Australian

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