

Caring for children is no picnic, say workers ^[1]

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Source: Sydney Morning Herald

Format: Article

Publication Date: 18 Nov 2012

EXCERPTS:

Those charged with looking after Australia's infants and toddlers earn about \$10 less than the average Australian wage.

Childcare workers with their Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care earn just \$18.58 a hour, which centre operators claim can lead to high staff turnover and low morale.

The owner of Moore Park Gardens preschool and day-care centre, Alice Voigt, said there had been a 180 per cent staff turnover at her centre in the past two years, with most citing pay as their reason for leaving.

"About 100 staff members have come through the centre in two years and it's at the point where we might have to close," she said.

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"Staff are moving into working in supermarkets, nannying or teaching, while many of those who stay have a second or third job as they need to supplement their wages to survive."

The Gillard government had implemented good reforms to make sure childcare educators were better qualified, Ms Voigt said, but had not increased pay to reflect their increased responsibilities.

On Saturday, thousands of childcare workers and the families who attend their centres took part in the first National Big Steps Day, with events held in each capital city. About 3000 attended the Sydney event in Hyde Park, calling for the federal government to recognise their plight.

It was organised by their union, United Voice. NSW branch secretary, Mark Boyd, said miserable wages were forcing about 180 workers out of the industry each week.

"The industry is in real crisis at the moment," he said. "People come into the sector because they are passionate about young children, but they have to live as well."

Mr Boyd called on the federal government to step in and fund professional wages for childcare workers.

The director of Master Kid Childcare Centre in Matraville, Emily Donnan, has been in the industry for 16 years and said she had spent 12 of those working two or three jobs at once.

She said many of her staff were living at home because they could not afford to rent. "They will never be able to even think of having a holiday, getting a mortgage or even owning their own car," she said.

The federal Education Minister, Peter Garrett, denied the government was responsible for improving pay. "The responsibility for setting award minimum wages rests with industrial tribunals independent of the government of the day," he said.

-reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

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