

Territory childcare crisis forcing centres to break the law ^[1]

Author: Poulsen, Jill

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EXCERPTS

Childcare centres in the Territory are regularly breaking the law, as the shortage of qualified workers in the NT reaches crisis point.

Documents seen by the Sunday Territorian as part of a special investigation into childcare reveal Goodstart centres in the Territory have breached laws that stipulate minimum staff to child ratios.

Directors of the 10 Goodstart child care centres across Darwin and the Rural Area are required to inform management when they do not have enough educators on the floor to cater for the number of children in the centre.

Emails show that on at least five occasions from July to December last year, workers at centre locations including Bakewell, Bees Creek and Tiwi raised concerns with management they were operating in breach of relevant legislation.

But a spokeswoman for Goodstart Early Learning, Australia's largest not-for-profit childcare provider, has denied the breaches.

"A search of our records show there have been no reported breaches of the legislation in regards to educator/child ratios, nor has the organisation received any fines over a ratios breach," the spokeswoman said in a statement.

Centres can be fined up to \$50,000 for breaching child/educator ratios.

"Children are at the centre of everything we do at Goodstart Early Learning ... we take our obligations to our children, their families and Government rules and regulation very seriously," the spokeswoman said.

"The safety and wellbeing of children at our centres is a priority."

The organisation maintains that staff have been instructed not to accept attendances if the legislative ratio requirements cannot be met.

"From time to time centres are reminded of this requirement and offered solutions to ensure they avoid the problem," the spokeswoman said.

Former child care educator and United Voice union official Bronwyn Channon said the lack of qualified early childhood educators in the NT was an issue facing every provider.

"When we talk about the crisis in childcare this is what we are talking about and the problem is amplified in the NT," she said.

Ms Channon said the high cost of living coupled with relatively low pay rates meant attracting and retaining staff was the single biggest issue facing the provision of quality child care in the NT.

"Childcare is an essential service, people can't go back to work if they don't have access to quality, affordable child care," she said.

Ms Channon said the sad fact was industries such as retail and hospitality often offered higher wages.

A childcare educator starting out can expect to be paid \$17.25 per hour.

"You can't afford a mortgage on that ... we have some educators who are working two jobs just to make ends meet," she said.

"People who work in this industry do it because they love it, they want the best outcomes for their children and their families but nobody is listening to them."

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

Tags: quality ^[4]

funding ^[5]

staff funding ^[6]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/15/03/territory-childcare-crisis-forcing-centres-break-law> [2]
<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/territory-childcare-crisis-forcing-centres-to-break-the-law/story-fnk1w5y0-1227253642864> [3]
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