

Childcare industry hold rally ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Local childhood professionals joined Joan O'Sullivan as they marched from Fingal County Council offices on Main Street in Swords to the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs Dr James Reilly's constituency office on North Street. This event followed an earlier National Rally in Dublin last February which was attended by thousands.

Joan, who owns Little Footsteps creche in Rivervalley, told the Fingal Independent the rally in Swords, along with one held in Cork and Sligo were organised by the Association of Childhood Professionals (ACP).

'We want to highlight the need for improved pay for early childhood professionals as a priority issue for the Government and for election manifestos leading into the next Programme for Government,' said Joan, who is a committee member of ACP which advocates for quality in Early Years Education and fair working conditions for those working in the profession.

'Early childhood education and care is a vital public service, on par with primary education, yet it is not accorded the same respect and level of investment.'

Ireland currently spends 0.2% of GDP on the early childhood sector, compared to an OECD average of 0.7%.

The early childhood workforce includes 25,000 people and research carried out among the profession found that the majority of the workforce is earning just above the minimum wage of €8.65.

She said parents cannot afford to pay more for early childhood education and care and neither can professionals continue subsidising the true cost by virtue of their low wages.

'We are also looking for recognition from the Department of Education for the invaluable service that we offer to parents and children during this key stage of development and paid accordingly,' said Joan.

ACP chairperson Marian Quinn said 'we need to convince our Finance Ministers to make substantial investment to ensure that all children, from birth to six years, benefit from high quality early childhood education and care and that all Early Childhood Practitioners receive pay and conditions that are commensurate with their role as professionals.

'Early Childhood Practitioners are entitled to wages and conditions that are appropriate for their level of qualification, experience and responsibility yet many are earning little more than minimum wage,' said Ms Quinn.

'Many, if not most, owner-practitioners are struggling to take a wage themselves and cannot afford to pay their staff more due to high costs.'

Ms Quinn said without significant increase in government investment, quality will be compromised as the sector continues to lose qualified, experienced staff and high quality centres close throughout the country.

-reprinted from Fingal Independent

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