

High demand for childcare centres ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Fears have been raised over the quality of early childhood education in the Bay as Tauranga's swelling population creates record demand for providers.

Waikato University lecturer Jayne White said there was an unprecedented demand for early childhood education services in the Bay and providers were concerned poor-quality providers could be taking advantage of the boom.

Ms White said a national boom in children needing care combined with local migration from Auckland to the Bay was responsible for the demand and no fewer than eight new licensed services opening this year alone.

Ms White said this reflected a near 30 per cent increase in migrants moving to the Bay and the boom highlighted the need for educators to better diversify services to provide longer hours, which many were now doing.

"They are also exploring new ways of working with diverse families whose needs are not necessarily the same as a traditional New Zealand family.

"There is more need than ever before for teachers to adopt high levels of inter-cultural competency - not least in responding appropriately to the unique linguistic, emotional and educational needs of unique families."

Ms White said teachers had genuine concerns that current licensing requirements were inadequate.

"The rise of private early childhood education in response to demand in the Bay calls for extra vigilance since it is possible for providers to offer mediocre quality by employing untrained teachers and cutting costs which can compromise standards of delivery.

"Never as much as now do we need teachers who can advocate for children and their families by promoting the highest standards possible.

"Access cannot compromise on quality."

Ms White spoke at a conference at the university's Tauranga base this month about responding directly to the changing dynamics.

Michelle Pratt, co-owner of New Shoots Children's Centre, said centres were limited by resource consent. In New Zealand Early Childhood Care facilities are bound by resource consent rules which restrict their ability to hire extra staff or take on extra children, she said.

"So it's great to have that demand but we can't just jam in extra children."

New Shoots has centres in Papamoa, Tauranga, another due to open soon in Sandhurst Drive and a centre in Girven Rd, Mount Maunganui, which was in the process of applying for a resource consent.

Ms Pratt said while the high-quality providers were likely to be full up, people looking for early childhood care should refer to each centre's Education Review Office reports to help avoid the cowboys.

Student and part-time teacher Donna Williams said she'd noticed the demand, which had buoyed her confidence in finding work after she graduated.

"There's definitely jobs out there. The growth is absolutely happening," Ms Williams said.

-reprinted from Bay of Plenty Times

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