

Childcare workers hit the streets to campaign on pay ^[1]

Author: Browne, Rachel

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EXCERPTS

A date for the federal election is yet to be set but childcare workers launched a pre-emptive campaign on Saturday, door knocking hundreds of homes in marginal electorates across Australia to declare their frustration with inaction on their wages claim.

Hundreds of early childhood specialists hit the streets on Saturday to draw attention to their poor pay which they say deserves a federal government subsidy to bring their wages into line with similar professions.

United Voice assistant national secretary Helen Gibbons said the country's 153,000 childcare workers, many of whom earn less than \$45,000 a year, deserve pay matching their skills and responsibilities.

"Every child is valuable and deserves a quality education, whether they are two or six or 16," she said.

"The government needs to accept its responsibility and step in to resolve it. The work these people do is professional work, they are highly skilled people in an incredibly responsible role. They deserve professional pay and the government needs to fund professional pay for the sector."

United Voice and the Independent Education Union of Australia applied to the Fair Work Commission for a permanent wage rise in 2013 but the case stalled after the commission asked for evidence showing that the female-dominated sector was undervalued compared with men in similar professions.

More than 80 per cent of early childhood educators have a formal qualification, with 16 per cent holding a bachelor degree.

Brigitte Mitchell, an early childhood educator at a centre in Newtown, holds a bachelor of education but earns almost \$30,000 less than her peers who work in primary schools.

She joined colleagues on Saturday door knocking in the marginal seat of Reid in Sydney's inner west.

"Unfortunately, we do see people leaving the sector because of the money," she said. "The high turnover of staff is not good for children or families."

Kerrie Devir, who door knocked in marginal seats in Melbourne, said families were often appalled by the wages paid to staff who educate their children.

"Our wages are low in relation to the responsibilities and the weight of what we do every day," she said. "Parents are shocked. Surprised is an understatement. Some parents express embarrassment. We can alter the course of a child's life for the better and that is priceless."

A spokesman for the Department of Employment said any wage claim should be heard by the Fair Work Commission.

"The Australian Government does not own or operate any child care services and has no role in setting wages in the child care and early learning sector, or any other private industry," he said.

-reprinted from Sydney Morning Herald

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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