

Gender pay strikes to shut childcare centres ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Children in daycare centres will be sent home early on Thursday, as some of the sector's 80,000 mostly female staff strike to narrow the large pay gap between men and women.

Several childcare centres in Melbourne's north and south-east will be forced to shut soon after 3pm, and staff will suspend normal activities at a centre in western Sydney, in a dramatic escalation of the early childhood workforce's battle for better wages.

The unprecedented strikes are set to disrupt the daycare arrangements of up to 500 children, the childcare union said.

Educators in the early childhood sector are paid as little as \$20 an hour – slightly above the national minimum wage and well below average incomes of primary school teachers.

In a landmark case before the Fair Work Commission, childcare workers are arguing that the female-dominated workforce is paid less than men with similar qualifications because of an outdated notion that childcare is viewed as "women's work in the home".

Union members say their claim for a substantial hourly wage rise would go a long way in reducing the 16.2 per cent pay gap that exists between men and women in Australia.

Monash Caulfield Child Care Centre director Rukmini Bose-Rahman said her profession was woefully undervalued. The centre, which has 75 children enrolled, will close for three hours from 3pm on Thursday when she and her colleagues walk off the job.

"Our wages are so low because of how our service has historically been viewed in the community ... which comes from 'babysitting'," she said.

"We are committed to our profession, to the children we educate and their families. The work we do is just as important as our colleagues in primary and secondary education, and it's time this is reflected in our pay."

Figures compiled by childcare union United Voice show childcare educators with a certificate III qualification earn \$20.13 an hour, or \$39,776 a year. Educators with a diploma have a maximum pay of \$23.20 an hour, or \$46,000 a year.

Jo-anne Schofield, the union's national secretary, said the underpayment of early childhood educators was a national disgrace.

"Almost half a century since the principle of equal pay for equal work was enshrined in Australia, early childhood educators are still being paid as if it's 1969," she said.

"Educators are among the lowest-paid professionals in Australia for one simple reason – this workforce is 95 per cent female."

Ms Schofield said the decision to strike and close several centres was "strong action, but it is justified".

Parents at affected centres have been notified of this week's strikes in advance. The centres that will close on Thursday afternoon for three hours are East Brunswick Kindergarten and Childcare; the Dawson Street Child Care Co-operative; Monash Children's Centre; Monash Community Family Co-operative; and the Monash Caulfield Child Care Centre.

Australian Childcare Alliance state president Paul Mondo said payroll was the most significant expense facing childcare centre operators, but the union's pay case was a matter for the independent industrial umpire.

"We think the commission is the appropriate organisation to be making decisions in relation to wages and wage claims," Mr Mondo said.

-reprinted from Sydney Morning Herald

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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