

Childcare employees' pay too low to be able to start family, union says ^[1]

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Source: The Guardian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 7 Oct 2016

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Many childcare employees are on such low pay that they can not start a family, travel, or successfully apply for a mortgage, according to a submission to the Fair Work Commission from United Voice, a union representing the childcare sector.

United Voice has called for a 35% pay rise across a range of positions in childcare, telling the commission wages were less than those of employees in other occupations where people performed equal or comparable work. The union says it believes wages are so low in part because the industry is dominated by women.

"The effect of low wages on employees in the sector are numerous and undermine the move towards professionalism of the sector and increased educational and developmental outcomes for children," the submission reads. "Low wages and poor conditions cause economic and personal hardship for employees and their dependents."

For this reason, many staff treated childcare as a "stepping stone" rather than a lifelong career, United Voice said.

"Many employees cannot obtain mortgages, travel or start a family because of their low income," the submission says. "Many qualified educators leave the sector to obtain higher paying, less stressful jobs in other occupations or industries."

"The low wages and poor industrial conditions result in job vacancies remaining unfilled or under-qualified employees being appointed to perform the work. The disruption to services caused by high staff turnover has adverse impacts on remaining staff members who are required to take on additional work and reduces staff morale."

The Fair Work Commission has been considering United Voice's application for an equal remuneration order since 2013.

The national secretary of the Australian Childcare Alliance, Paul Mondo, said he would not comment on what decision he believed the Fair Work Commission should make, saying: "We will leave the decision to them and respect their decision."

But he did say he was concerned about the impact a 35% pay rise would have on childcare affordability.

"The only concern we would have is the impact on affordability for families in a climate where accessing early education and care is already a significant cost on families," Mondo said.

"Payroll represents 70% of costs for service providers, so what impact would any wage adjustment, and one as big as this, have on families? That's our query in relation to this."

But United Voice's national secretary, Jo-anne Schofield, said the average pay for Certificate 3-level child educators was \$40,731, or \$20.61 an hour, which reached a maximum of \$23.21 an hour based on experience.

"The underpayment of early childhood educators is a national disgrace," Schofield said. "Educators are among the lowest paid professionals in Australia for one simple reason. This workforce is 95% female and their profession is shamefully underpaid."

"Educators have an enormous responsibility. They literally shape the future, one child at a time."

-reprinted from The Guardian

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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