

To whom it may concern

My name is Karen Bradbury and I am the Director of a small rural community based pre-school service near Maitland in the Hunter Valley. I have been working in the Early Childhood sector for 15 years and continue to do so because I love and value the opportunities that it provides me to make a positive contribution to our world every single day. I am saddened though at the complete lack of value that the wider community have for what myself and my fellow Early Childhood Educators provide and nurture each and every day at work. My colleagues and I have been too submissive for far too long. The conditions, awards and lack of financial remuneration that we continue to experience sums it up.

For years we have hoped that one day everyone else would get it, they will see how important what we do is and then there will be change but I am afraid that this will not be the case. It seems to me that our society in fact, thinks in exactly the opposite way...those jobs that attract the big bucks are the ones that are really important. Think about it. In what other field would a vital workforce continue to sit quietly in hope for change and recognition. I believe that if miners were asked to work for the wages that Early Childhood Educators earn we would all be sitting in the dark...simple as that, we would run out of coal and that would be it. Please don't get it wrong, I am not devaluing miners but what I am saying is that the education of the future leaders of our nation is in the hands of my pre-school and many hundreds of other staff just like mine.

We are working not just with the children but also their families, identifying children with challenges and referring parents to the appropriate care or specialists. We are advocates for families with social problems and supporting them through very difficult periods, strengthening families and the resources that have to parent better in the years to come. We don't have children walk in at 9 and walk out at 3, I am a university trained teacher that is rostered a 40 hour week, we don't get lunch breaks or overtime, don't get any perks or privileges nor, do we want them. I speak for all of us I am sure when I say that what we do want is to receive a wage at the end of the day that is comparable with any other professional that has equivalent study, knowledge, experience and responsibility in their field. Why is it ok that I earn 25% less than teachers working in the a primary school that has the same degree as I do? Smaller children should not mean smaller wages and by not valuing the work we do we as a community are continuing to send the message that those we work for are also of less value. So next time you look at your 3 year old why don't you seriously think about...what's more important?

If you want the best people educating our youngest children then we need to value what they do and the knowledge that have. Uni graduates are heading into primary environments in droves and it is by no coincidence that they know that they will be paid better for it. The Early Childhood sector though is crying out for teachers, we are in the process of ensuring that all services have a trained teacher contribute to their curriculum, and for good reason, but instead we are having trouble keeping early childhood educators of all qualification levels in the sector so that we are able to tap in that wealth of knowledge built over time (demanding hours stressful working conditions an very low wages being the main reasons for the turnover) so why are we failing to connect the dots??

Regards

Karen