

## Child Care - Issues

One of the underlying issues with childcare as I see it, is the premise that the

"market" will sort itself out. Who is the "market"? It must be made up of people! Unfortunately, privately run businesses, such as many childcare centres, require profit in order to keep operating. This means keeping wages as low as possible and reducing outgoings while increasing charges to parents. This results in the maintenance of low wages for child care workers and increasing daily fees together with additional charges if you pick up your child 'late'. I support the need to increase childcare workers wages as they are invaluable and this would ensure good quality staff. This would have an impact on fees passed on to parents.

The childcare rebate targets the users of the system as compared to the providers which seems to be trying to influence the demand and availability of childcare places within the "market". Obviously the "market" is unable to service the needs of parents within their financial limitations. If this situation played out then the demand for positions would decrease, centres would close down, and women would either not return to work (resulting in a lower standard of living) or rely even more heavily on friends and family.

This issue, that the expense of childcare can be inhibitive to women returning to work, particularly if they are unable to return to positions which provide appropriate remuneration, highlights the lack of part-time or flexible work hour positions that are available and also that many of these positions are within the lower levels of organizations. Many organizations work to accommodate the needs of women returning to work after maternity leave, which is wonderful. Unfortunately, the workplace is still centred around the 'male bread winner' model of 9am – 5pm (more like 8am to 6pm) which does not provide much flexibility for employees with children whether female or male.

The majority of women I know who are in my situation – working part-time with young children – utilize their extended family for care. Often

this is combined with paid care as is the case for my children. This raises its own problems as family care is inflexible in many cases and can become “unavailable” at short notice, as when a family member is ill. The additional travel that is involved is also a consideration. Most often, paid care is found locally whereas family members may live a distance away.

Something I find really disappointing, is that after all this time, it is still the woman's responsibility to organize the care and negotiate with family members (often their in-laws). I had a conversation with my husband the other night that although there is the understanding that one person in a couple is the primary breadwinner and the other is the primary carer, they should not be restricted to their roles. Surely on the days that the children go to care because the primary carer is going to paid work, all childcare and housework tasks are shared evenly! I believe this to be a logical argument despite getting blank stares from some of my friends when expressing this idea.