



## Big win for child carers in local government

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**For years the role of child carers has been recognised as one of the most important in the community. However, concrete recognition through wage rates rather than pats on the back have been hard to win. Until now.**

The ASU-Victorian Authorities & Services Branch began an important case in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) last year seeking increases for the child care workers the Branch covers (those working for Victorian local government) and last week the case was finally settled in favour of ASU members.

With the invaluable assistance of its legal team who worked on a pro bono basis (ie. for no charge), the ASU has won wage justice for child carers who have been underpaid for too long.

These workers have effectively subsidised child care in Australia by taking home a salary that does not adequately reflect the importance of the work they do nor the skills required. Moreen Lyons, who coordinated the case for the Branch, said, "Child care workers cannot continue to subsidise long-day care in Australia. There's actually a chronic shortage of childcare workers nationally because of the low wages."

The practical result of the case will be that child carers will be paid under the main pay structure in the Victorian local government award, just like everyone else who works for a council. Until now, they have been covered by a separate structure which has allowed them to be paid comparatively less than other local government workers. This is despite the requirements for qualifications and regulation they must meet.

The wage increases range up to \$150 per week and will be subject to phasing in over the next year. The ASU will assist members in the complicated translation process that will soon begin.

This case has once again highlighted the crisis in child care funding. The ASU argues that the industry is chronically under funded, quoting figures that rank Australia 26th out of 28 OECD countries when it comes to funding for early education programs as a percentage of GDP.

Without proper recognition in the form of wages and conditions, many highly qualified child care workers are leaving the profession in disgust. With their own families to support they are just not in a position to continue doing the work they love and have trained for when faced with the rising cost of living.

As Moreen Lyons has said, this case is "a significant victory for one of the most underpaid and under recognised groups of dedicated professionals."

Greg Combet, Secretary of the ACTU, has sent a congratulatory letter to the ASU stating, "It was with real pleasure that I heard about the settlement that the ASU has reached with the Victorian Local Government employers to significantly improve the rates of pay for childcare workers... [it] recognises the value that we as a community place on the professional care provided by your members, and provides a career path commensurate with the qualifications and skills they bring to their work."

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