

## KPV Kinder Survey 2006

The KPV 2006 Parent Committee Survey was completed by 252 kindergarten presidents or other committee members and explores their experience of managing a kindergarten in 2006. Responses were from a representative group with almost a third of the respondents from rural kindergartens, 9% regional and the majority metropolitan.

- The survey showed that kindergarten committees continue to make a significant contribution to their community with the average contribution of time by the committee as a whole estimated at 28 hours per week. This finding should be treated with some caution as it varied considerably from 10 to 12 hours at one end to around 40 at the other. The variation can be explained by factors including the level of fundraising and other activities undertaken by committee members. It may also relate to the size of the centre and diversity of programs offered (eg 3yr old and 4 yr old programs, or plus childcare for example).  
*"We have a large garden with hens, ?birds, vegetables, compost, etc and the maintenance workload is high....The fundraising committee (also) worked very hard... Each member organized a particular fundraiser."*
- Some tasks were particular causes of pressure:  
*"The workload for enrolment and treasurer was excessive. We have implemented assistant positions to help these committee members."*
- Parents overwhelmingly report benefits as well, especially in terms of valuable social interaction with others (96%) and that they are making a contribution to the community (93.3%).  
*"We believe very strongly in local parent/community involvement in kindergartens and so encourage a committee."*
- Other benefits described include developing new skills such as understanding financial statements (82.5%).and for some parents at least this has led directly to employment opportunities.  
*"The bank who helped us set up automated payments of parent fees offered me a job."*
- Kindergarten committee members often felt divided about their role on the committee, reflected in the survey finding that while just under 40% of respondents considered their time contributed to their kindergarten to be reasonable just over 60% (61.7%) did not.  
*"I'm happy to give my time to the kinder and think being a community run kinder is great for community building but I don't think its fair that if there is a big problem at the kinder I could be held personally liable...Having said that I really enjoyed it."*

- Many respondents felt that better administrative support would make a big difference. Not surprisingly joining a group employer model (called cluster management) helped alleviate the pressure on committees. Around 1/3 of kindergartens have now entered cluster management groups. However only 15% of responding committees currently employed a bookkeeper or other administrative support.

*“Since becoming a member of (a group employer) the workload has decreased! Many of our problems can be solved by a group employer.”*

*“Unfortunately there are a very few parents who have the time and the skills to keep up with the day to day running (of the kindergarten). So the majority of work falls onto a few... Having a funded admin position would alleviate a lot of the problems.”*

*“I believe an admin person needs to work at each kinder- three hours a week would be sufficient...I enjoyed my year as president but the workload was ridiculously high. It took me away from time with my preschooler.”*

*“Too awkward for committee (parents) dealing with teachers on financial and programming matters...funds should be made available so an administrator can be put into all centres to assist with committees workload and staff liaison.*
- The top 5 responsibilities respondents to the KPV survey identified as ones they struggled with were:

  1. DHS requirements such as licensing and data collection
  2. Employer responsibilities such as settling employment conditions and recruiting,
  3. Management processes eg budgeting, program planning, etc
  4. Support for staff (professional guidance, mentoring ec)
  5. Industrial relations (performance management, disciplinary action).

Many respondents felt that all of these obligations could be onerous for a volunteer committee as reflected in the following typical comments:

*“Huge amount of knowledge re: the above required to hand over to new people every 12-24 months....”*

*“Meeting the day to day needs of running the kinder is the most onerous ie. Paying bills, running pays, collecting fees, completing form after form to meet funding & licensing requirements. .”*
- In addition to contributing their time parents contribute significant income towards kindergarten running costs. On top of parent fees kindergartens reported raising on average \$6,500 each last year. This is within the range demonstrated over the last few years – up from \$6000 in 2004 but down on \$6905 in 2005.

*“We had to do a lot of fundraising just to survive...couldn't raise fees due to the (low socio-economic status of the) area.”*

- \$22.6% of respondents charged a fundraising levy with the average just under \$60 per child but up to as much as \$100 per child. These levies would raise an average of between \$3000 and \$4000. Sometimes the levy was considered as an alternative to being active in fundraising as indicated in the following comment:  
*“Committee discussing possibility of making a request to those parents who are not participating in fundraising to donate or pay a fee.”* (This committee had raised \$25-30,000.)
- These findings indicate that parent satisfaction is likely to continue to improve as the impact of increased state government funding to kindergartens is felt and indicates the increased subsidy for health care card holders expected in the upcoming state budget will be very welcome. It will render kindergarten free for most health care card holders and significantly improve cash flow for many kindergartens.
- However more remains to be done. Not surprisingly many parents believe kindergarten should be fully funded for all, a view supported by international evidence (most recently the authoritative OECD Report 2006, Starting Strong II). Parents also identified the need for funding to be extended to three year old kindergarten programs.  
*“Three and four year old kinder needs to be fully government funded and with only some monthly input (from the committee).”*  
*“We should be campaigning for free preschool for all...”*  
*“Kindergartens need more support...KPV could lobby government into putting more money into three year old programs...”*

## DISCUSSION

The findings of KPV’s 2006 Parent Committee Survey reinforces KPV’s push for continued substantial increases in kindergarten funding to ensure universal participation for all children in two years of kindergarten. This is especially critical given the evidence of the importance of quality preschool led by highly qualified staff to child development in the early years

KPV’s Vision for the future of Kindergarten is set out in VISION 2011. We recommend government funding to enable all children to attend a minimum of 12 hours in four year old kindergarten and six hours in three year old kindergarten. KPV recommends additional financial subsidies for vulnerable children to ensure fees are not a barrier to participation in three year old kindergarten. This could be targeted to indigenous and other vulnerable children in the first instance.

We also call for the federal government to do its share. This is vital in light of OECD findings that Australia lags behind many if not most other OECD countries in terms of government contribution to early childhood education and care.

Currently the federal government actively discriminates against parents seeking quality early childhood education and care for their children. This is because the 30% tax rebate on childcare fees specifically does not extend to parents of children in many community managed kindergartens and KPV has been calling on the federal government to address this anomaly.

Kindergarten Parents Victoria is the peak body for kindergartens. It was formed in 1990 to promote the importance of early childhood education and provides a range of management support to kindergartens and believes that parents are vital partners in quality early childhood education. Membership consists of Victorian kindergarten committees, cluster managers and various other organizations associated with early childhood education such as local government.

There are close to 1600 kindergarten sites funded by DHS. Current KPV membership includes around 1200 centres including stand alone kindergartens, local government kindergartens and those that are under cluster management.