



MEDIA RELEASE

31 March 2009
For immediate distribution

Victorian education system needs to do more for preschool children with a disability

*'The Victorian Government needs to ensure reform and improved funding for disability support in early childhood education in the upcoming State Budget, Meredith Carter, CEO of Kindergarten Parents Victoria, the peak body for early childhood education, said today. Parents and leaders in early childhood education and disability support will explore the difficulties and inequalities faced by families and services in a discussion of inclusive kindergarten programs at the **Every child is welcome seminar at the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission this Wednesday 1 April.***

'Children with disabilities are missing out', agrees John Forster, CEO of Noah's Ark Inc., a service supporting 850 children with disabilities and their families at home and in over 1000 kindergarten and child care services. 'The program of support in kindergarten is antiquated: it's nearly 30 years old. It's incredibly difficult to get help. It puts parents through an ordeal, just so their children can go to what is supposed to be a universal service'.

Jeanette Paisley, whose son Nicky requires disability support to attend kindergarten adds 'Parents have to pay kindergarten fees plus the fees for the early childhood intervention service. Combined with fees for speech therapy and occupational therapy, it's a real strain on the family budget...You pay because you have to, but it's hard'.

'Families find it very challenging to navigate the service system and access the supports they need for their child with a developmental delay or disability, Associate Professor Susana Gavidia-Payne President Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian chapter), said. There are different eligibility requirements depending on whether your child is ready for kindergarten or school, even though these programs are now under the same Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Also a parent of a child with additional needs, Sophie Carasso says "A positive experience of kindergarten restored hope and allowed my family to dream of an optimistic future for our child."

'Time and time again parents of children with a disability tell us a successful kindergarten experience has dramatically improved their child's social connection with others and paved a smoother path into mainstream primary education', Elizabeth McGarry, CEO of The Association for Children with a Disability, said.

'The Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service received a boost in last year's State Budget but the support provided averages 5 hours a week. Kindergarten programs are at least 10 hours per week. Our member kindergartens tell us they sometimes meet the shortfall in the costs to include children with additional needs out of reserves accrued by parent fundraising. They should not have to do this.' Ms Carter said.

Interviews with parents of children with a disability and professionals working in the field can be arranged through the following numbers. Alternately, interviews and photo opportunities with parents of children with a disability can be arranged through Kindergarten Parents Victoria: Louise Mitchell on 0431 839 128 or 9489 3500.

Interviews - Families of children with a disability who attend kindergarten or have recently attended kindergarten

- Sophie Carasso (parent of child with a disability)
0419 481 260
- Jeanette Paisley (parent of a child with a disability)
0401 273 430
9444 7645

Commentary from professionals working in the field

- Meredith Carter, CEO KPV
0400 511 763
9489 3500
- Elizabeth McGarry, CEO Association for Children with a Disability
0419 595 468
9818 2300
- John Forster, CEO Noah's Ark
0409 074 411
9500 8133
- Susana Gavidia-Payne, President Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian chapter)
9925 7710

Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV) is the peak organisation and employer body promoting the voice of parents in quality early childhood education for Victorian children, representing over 1000 centres serving more than 200,000 Victorian children and families each year.

End media release