

# **SAVE BAYSIDE COMMUNITY CHILD CARE**



**Newsletter**  
**14<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

## **Where it all Started**

On Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October, parents collecting their children from childcare were met at both the Sandringham and Hampton centres by Bayside City Council employees, who advised us that the Council had decided to close our childcare centres. The closures, they informed us, would take effect over a two-year transition period, starting with the Hampton room for 0-2yo children in just two months (December 2011). Other families were notified by an Express Post letter scheduled to arrive at their home address on Friday afternoon. Some parents are still waiting to be formally notified.

The timing (late on a Friday afternoon) and nature of the communication (Express Post) shows Bayside sought to maintain the secrecy of its decision and limit the possibility of discussion or publicity until the following week. Parents and staff were all in shock – this decision had come with no prior warning or consultation.

The Hampton Centre will close entirely in December 2012, along with the Sandringham 0-2 room, followed by the Sandringham Centre's final closure in December 2013. Bayside has indicated it will review the centres' functionality every three months during this transition period, with the effect that the centres could close at anytime.

## **How was the Decision made?**

This decision affecting community service provision was made in a closed council meeting with the minutes of the meeting unpublished. There is no public record of the decision making process. We have established that the vote was carried in favour of closing the centres 5:2.

Bayside has blamed the closures on the introduction of Federal Government legislative changes, which are being implemented over the next four years, commencing with increased carer ratios for children aged under three. Starting January 2012, the ratio will increase to one carer for every four children, instead of one for every five.

## **Legislative Changes**

These legislative changes have been on the table for a number of years and have been the subject of public consultation and open discussion in the majority of neighbouring (and indeed national) municipalities. These municipalities have worked with their communities to accommodate the new rules, ensuring council-run centres of similar sizes are continuing to function and flourish.

- City of Port Phillip – Four council-operated centres as well as community-run centres operating in council-owned buildings. This council has invested in facilities and employed additional staff so centres can remain open.
- City of Kingston – Four council-operated centres. This council has reduced the number of places but its centres will remain open.
- City of Glen Eira – Three council-operated centres. This council has increased fees to ensure centres remain open.

## **Financial Scaremongering**

The closures of our centres have been attributed to purely financial reasoning. Bayside councillors and staff claim that the Council (and therefore ratepayers) is subsidising the centres in the region of \$200,000 per annum. We dispute this and are currently waiting on the financial reporting that is yet to be made available to the community for confirmation. Our current fee structure is in fact more expensive than some of the private (for profit) centres running in the region. We have not been offered the opportunity to consider an increase in fees.

Our 2011 fee schedule:

0-2 Room – \$91 per day

2-3 Room – \$91 per day

3-4 Room – \$86 per day

4-5 Room – \$91 per day

It is interesting to note that Bayside has a current annual revenue of \$94 Million dollars, has spent \$8 Million dollars on renovating and refurbishing the Corporate Centre in the last 3 years, and has an additional \$150,000 budgeted to increase the staff parking at the corporate centre in early 2012.

## **Mixed Messages regarding Kindergarten Services**

We believe Bayside is deliberately sending mixed messages in regards to its involvement in the municipality's kindergarten programming. In particular, it has been claimed that any savings made from closing our centres will be redirected into kindergartens.

The fact is, **Bayside does not provide any other kindergarten service** apart from that provided at our childcare centres – all other kindergarten programs run in the Bayside community are either through private (for profit) centres or run by independent parent groups/management committees who rent the site from the Council. The Council is a landlord for the kindergarten services only.

### **Federal Grants Available**

Any Bayside City Council spending on kindergartens is in relation to asset management – not service provision. The Federal Government has made available \$210.6 million in funding to help Victorian kindergarten providers implement these changes. In fact, Bayside has already assisted two independent kindergarten providers, who operate out of council-owned buildings, to apply for these funds, which have been granted. This was not presented as an option for our centres.

We have major concerns about why Bayside elected to put all this investment into one form of Early Years Education (being the independently run kindergartens) at the exclusion of the service they already provide. Our centres enable local residents to access a kindergarten program for four-year-olds in a setting that also provides long day care. Access to such programs is essential for children of working families.

Bayside has not declared what, if any, of its own ratepayer-funded revenue it will put towards infrastructure upgrades at these kindergartens where it is 'landlord'.

### **Council Meeting – 8th November 2011**

More than 70 concerned parents, community members, staff members and private centre managers attended the Bayside City Council meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> November. After much heated debate among councillors, two urgent motions were passed by Cr Felicity Frederico and seconded by Cr Clifford Hayes.

- One motion promised "a comprehensive briefing on the background analysis for Council's decision to cease its role in the provision of long day child care", with the information to also be presented on its website.
- The other motion ordered a report "assessing the financial viability of establishing community managed, not-for-profit child care centres" by "transferring the management, operational and financial responsibility" of the Hampton and Sandringham centres to a community management committee, with the Council maintaining legal title of the properties. Mayor Alex Del Porto opposed this motion. This report will be presented at the February 2012 meeting.

### **Going Forward**

We have requested that the briefing document be made available to the group prior to the briefing meeting taking place. At this stage the initial meeting with council officers and our elected representatives has been scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup> November. Council officers have indicated the documents will be ready during the week prior.

We have requested the following information, to help us understand the motives for closing our centres:

- All reports generated internally and externally that relate to Bayside's

decision in relation to the closure of the two childcare centres. In particular we are interested in the financial reporting and cost analysis presented to councillors at the closed council meeting where they approved the closures. This includes 'depersonalised' breakdowns of staffing costs where necessary. We understand salaries will need to remain confidential and therefore also request the current EBA and agreed room classifications and EBA rates associated with this.

- All cost substantiation (quotes, estimates, inspection reports, scopes of works, any other related information) for the required capital works referred to in the council meeting as 'approximately \$200k for the next financial year' and 'approximately \$300k for the following year'.

**We also request access to the site maps, building plans, external title maps for both sites being 11 Sandringham Road and 461 Bluff Road.**

Additionally, we need to investigate the current modelling that is in practice in relation to the arrangements between Bayside and the independently run kindergartens housed in council-owned buildings – including rate of rent (peppercorn/market rate) and public indemnity insurance.

## **HOW YOU CAN HELP**

### **Join a review group**

As soon as we have the briefing document, we will divide into groups to review the information according to our specialist skills and interests. We will need groups to: analyse the financial data and communicate findings to the entire group; provide legal advice; develop strategy for the briefing meeting; and investigate potential models for community-operated childcare centres. If you think you can help us get ready for the next stage of the campaign, please don't hesitate to get in touch by emailing [saveourcentres@gmail.com](mailto:saveourcentres@gmail.com).

### **Representation at the Council Meeting**

Please get in touch if you would like to represent the group at the council briefing. At this stage, the plan is to have a group of 3-5 representatives attend the briefing, with people from the above review groups to assist in discussions.

### **Talk to your local Bayside Councillor**

Although many of our local councillors contributed to the decision to close our centres, some are now aware that the community places great value on these services. Bayside has agreed to engage in a degree of community consultation. Call or email them to explain how the closures will affect you and other families – and why these long daycare centres provide an essential service for working parents. We must continue to have a majority vote at any further considerations in relation to our centres staying open. Councillors' contact details are at <http://www.bayside.vic.gov.au/councillors.htm>.

**Put up a flyer in your neighbourhood**

Put up the attached a Poster to increase community awareness of the current situation. Talk to your friends, families and neighbours, let them know what is happening, how it affects you, and what you think of the Council's decision to close our centres.

**Read up on our recent media coverage via the Facebook Page:**

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Save-Bayside-Community-Childcare/166336193458613>

**Sign our petition:**

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-bayside-community-childcare.html>