

Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Assn (WRKFA) is the not for profit umbrella organisation for 65 kindergartens across the Wellington region as far as Levin.

## Term 3, 2011 Newsletter

### An update for the families and whānau of Wellington Kindergartens

Kia Ora! We often get feedback from families wanting to hear more from us at the regional level, we certainly have lots going on and are always keen to share information about projects we are working on to support communities and strengthen our service. So this is the first of our termly newsletters to families. It has certainly been an eventful term with kindergarten closures due to snow storms and the introduction of Whānau Contributions. At the regional and national level, we continue to promote high quality in early childhood education and advocate to reinstate 100% qualified teacher targets.

Anyway enjoy! We hope you find it interesting reading! Don't miss our **interview with a Primary teacher** sharing her knowledge on children transitioning to school.



**A huge thank you to families who made a Whānau Contribution this term. With end of term approaching we have received about 90% of our targeted amount. All funds raised are going toward teachers' salaries.**

#### Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association - Annual General Meeting

Recently, WRKFA held its AGM. Key points:

1. A \$517,000 surplus was posted for the financial year ended 30 June 2011.
2. WRKFA is budgeting for an \$853,000 deficit in 2011/12 (due to reduced government funding and increased operating costs).
3. It is likely that investment in to kindergarten property maintenance and environment projects will be markedly lower than previous years.

For further information our Annual Report is on our website or you can contact our Chief Financial Officer, Brendan Fyfe-Gits – [brendanf@wn-kindergarten.org.nz](mailto:brendanf@wn-kindergarten.org.nz)

#### Kindergarten Holiday Programmes

We were planning on trialling a kindergarten holiday programme at Paraparaumu Kindergarten over the term 3-4 break but due to the short time frame we haven't had the uptake we needed. However the response has shown that there is a demand and we'll definitely be looking at doing it in several of our kindergartens next year in the April, July and September breaks.

#### Y-Men –

*'..aimed at introducing a group of long term unemployed young men to the early childhood profession through paid, supported placements in kindergartens'.*

WRKFA (with funding from the Ministry of Social Development) is trialling a scheme to increase the numbers of male ECE teachers and reduce the high numbers of unemployed young people between 18-25. We have eight young men undertaking a six month programme of supported placements in our kindergartens, professional development and career planning. We have dedicated mentors to support and guide them. The children have loved the energetic, youthful perspective of these young men and we've had some great feedback from parents.

#### (Quote from a parent):

*'Scott talked about him all last week to everyone he met – his dad, granddad and auntie and told them all about his new "man teacher". He told them all about how he made a chainsaw – a wooden one – with Perry.'*

*'What was just lovely from my part - as a parent - was that Perry gave me very rich feedback about his interactions with Scott. He said to me that Scott seemed to have a great interest in chainsaws and that he designed and hammered it all himself. It was very insightful of Perry to tune into Scott's passion – as his most favourite thing in life is chainsaws and he couldn't wait until the next kindy day to show his real chainsaw to Perry.'*

100% means a great start for children. The introduction of a voluntary donation for families was a difficult decision for WRFKA and we know some still question the need for 100% qualified teachers in ECE. We also know that having confidence in kindergarten to ready their child for school is important to parents. So we asked a new entrant teacher to answer some questions around how well kindergartens support transition to school.



## **A new-entrant teacher's perspective**

(Deborah is a new entrant teacher with 26 years of teaching experience.)

### **On average - what percentage of your children would come through kindergartens?**

Almost all children come to school with preschool experience. Around 80% of our children come from kindergartens.

### **Ideally, what skills or dispositions help children transition smoothly to school?**

Because schools and kindergartens work in different ways it can be quite a change for young children. The structure of the school day is driven by curriculum timetables and children working together in their class groups, then going outside to a busy playground full of 'big kids' for morning tea and lunch breaks. There is a lot for young 5 year olds to get their heads around and the pace of the day can seem quite fast and confusing initially. Five year olds who have a level of independence and self managing skills are quickly able to adapt to school. Communication skills are key - being able to take turns, work and play alongside others in a group, cooperate in games and have the skills to deal with conflict are important. Both expressive and receptive communication skills are important. There are a lot of new people to talk to at school –the class teacher and other staff members, classmates and older children in the play ground. If children come to school being able to express their thoughts, needs and ideas with some clarity, it really helps. Following instructions is an ongoing thing at school. Being able to follow increasingly complex instructions will boost children's confidence and independence skills. Children who can ask questions, make decisions and problem solve at an age appropriate level will be setting themselves up for being independent, self managing learners.

Practically, there are many skills which are important - knowing how to do tasks such as opening lunch boxes and food wrappers, being able to carry, pack and unpack their school bags, self care with toileting and hand washing, being able to put their shoes on and off (velcro is a teacher's friend!) and tidying up after themselves.

### **In your opinion, is it important for children to have a basic grasp of literacy and numeracy before starting school?**

Early literacy and numeracy skills such as puzzles, construction, drawing, cutting, listening to stories and learning through playing, lay great foundations for children's readiness to learn to read and write. It is really important that children are confident 'risk takers' as they need to do this when they are learning to read and write and problem solve in maths. It is always important to 'have a go' and getting things 'not quite right' is part of the learning. Learning to read and write and be numerate is a process and the more children and others around them enjoy this journey, the quicker they will learn. Children learn at their own pace and come to school with a wide variety of skills and abilities. Being able to count objects to 10, count forwards and

backwards to and from 10 and recognise some of these numbers is helpful, but definitely not essential. Recognising and making an attempt to write their own name, knowing some letters or sounds of letters and enjoying books are all great skills to come to school with. However if your child is not at that stage yet, that's OK too.

### **In your experience, do children transitioning from a kindergarten environment transition well?**

Yes, definitely. All the kindergartens I work with are fantastic. I visit them at least once a year, the teachers are professional, they know their children well and are providing a sound educational programme for them. Taking into account there will always be a range of abilities, skills and personalities in all learning environments, the teachers in the kindergartens are skilled in personalising educational programmes for their students so that they are ready to make the transition to school.

*'Skilled, qualified teachers must be employed to give preschool children in New Zealand the best opportunity they can for the beginning of their educational journey. Trained teachers have the skills, confidence and knowledge to provide a personalized education programme for their children.'*

### **Kindergartens traditionally use an 'Exploratory Play' approach to childrens learning, i.e. the child chooses an area of interest where teachers create opportunities for them to, for example, 'consider and question', 'problem solve', 'resolve conflict'. Do you think this approach supports transition to school?**

Thinking, reflecting, questioning, posing problems and solving them, resolving conflict and good communication are hugely important skills. The more children can do of these skills at an early age, the further along their learning journey they will be towards becoming autonomous learners.

### **All teachers working in our kindergartens are qualified. We have recently had to ask our families to make a small contribution to help us retain our qualified teachers – do you think its worth the investment to have 100% qualified teachers in ECE?**

Excellence in early childhood education lays the foundation that children need to build on, as they then move into primary, secondary and later tertiary education. Skilled, qualified teachers must be employed to give preschool children in New Zealand the best opportunity they can for the beginning of their educational journey. Trained teachers have the skills, confidence and knowledge to provide a personalised education programme for their children. Children who have had access to great preschool education with skilled, qualified teachers directing and monitoring their learning have a solid foundation laid in their life long learning journey. A money value cannot be put on the price of education, as education and lifelong learning is priceless. Without it we would be a very 'poor' society. Every dollar spent on the greatest resources preschools have – professional, competent, skilled teachers – will be repaid in abundance in the lives of our most precious resources -our children!