



CHILD CARE A KEY TO RETAINING WOMEN'S SKILLS: EOWA DIRECTOR

Research by the Federal Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA), shows that only 3% of the 3000 organisations that report to the Agency provide child care centres for their staff.

The research also showed that the majority of organisations, 68% offered no assistance with child care. 21% provide some kind of formal assistance and a further 11% offered an informal or information only based service.

EOWA Director, Ms Anna McPhee, said that "this research showed that the current government child-care policy of providing FBT exemptions to onsite child care only benefited a small part of the business community and therefore a limited number of families. Ms McPhee said she supports calls for an expansion of the exemptions to off site care.

However, Ms McPhee has also pointed to the many other low cost ways that businesses can assist working families. "Child care is not the only way to make life easier for working women," she said. There are many simple but innovative ways to encourage women to return to the workplace".

"Organisations do not need to have large staff numbers and big budgets to ensure female staff are supported and have the opportunity to advance and balance work and family life."

Some of the initiatives used by leading edge organisations that report to EOWA to assist staff include providing child care and elder care referral services; providing the option to salary sacrifice child care costs; offering quality part time work; offering staff the opportunity to work from home; providing child care costs for staff when they are required to come to work on days when they do not usually work; allowing children to come to the workplace in emergency situations; or altering shifts to accommodate children's child care hours.

Winner of the 2004 EOWA Business Achievement Awards, Mt Pritchard & District Community Club (Mounties), provides on-site child care for female applicants being interviewed at night and on weekends, breast-feeding breaks, a mother's room and an option to return to work part-time after maternity leave. The Club is also introducing new pay structures that allow for salary sacrificing of child care costs.

Overnewton Anglican College in Melbourne, also an EOWA Business Achievement Awards winner, provides free childcare to staff when meetings are held outside school hours. Primary carers are also entitled to 156 weeks unpaid leave with the option of another 52 weeks if they have another child in that time. Same sex couples can also access the policy.

ENDS

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