

Out of school care investment pays huge dividends: YMCA Central

Struggling parents – especially single parents – are finding out of school care (OSCAR) prohibitively expensive, and it's a problem for all New Zealanders. The Out of School Care Network recently released a plea for more investment in the OSCAR sector, with some heartfelt stories from parent surveys. Their research also shows Kiwi parents are paying over the odds for out of school care compared with families in other similar nations.

Y Central is one of the largest out of school care providers in the lower North Island, and we're also grappling with the new legislation that has ramped up operational costs.

"Parents who need to work should be able to have access to quality, affordable childcare," says Brendan Owens, CEO. "We don't want to increase our prices, but even as a not-for-profit operation it's becoming difficult to keep costs as low as they are. More support from government would have huge benefits for the most vulnerable families in our community."

When the cost of childcare is too high, it fuels inequality and the gender pay gap, while also making it harder for families to escape poverty, according to an OECD report into childcare during Covid-19. By contrast, accessible quality childcare facilitates parental employment, 'boosting family income, and by promoting child development, child well-being, and success later in life'.

The teams at Y Central work hard to come up with rich, hands-on learning programmes that do more than just take care of kids – they contribute to the development of physical and social skills. It's far more than a hands-off babysitting service: working parents can be confident that their kids are learning, growing and making friends, not just staring at screens.

Only our social enterprise business model has allowed Y Central's OSCAR pricing to remain relatively consistent over the last few years. With new regulations making it more expensive to run our services, we need support to prevent us having to pass those costs onto local families. Here at Y Central we fully support the OSCN's appeal for a rethink in government investment in the OSCAR sector. We also agree that funding support for the sector should be brought more into parity with the rest of the childcare and child welfare sector.

"We know that excellent childcare programmes have positive outcomes for everyone," says Owens. "They benefit parents, kids and the wider economy. People who want to work can do so with confidence, and their success drives the future success of their children. This is an area of government investment that pays massive dividends in future."

The nationwide YMCA network is the largest not-for-profit provider of sport and recreation services in New Zealand. Together we provide services throughout the country, including indoor and outdoor sport and recreation options, health and fitness programmes and water-based activities. With over 2.7 million participations nationally in YMCA active recreation programming (as of April 2020) it is estimated that 1 in 6 New Zealanders is involved in some way with the YMCA.

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