

NEW ZEALAND FREE KINDERGARTEN ASSOCIATIONS INC.
Te Putahi Kura Puhou o Aotearoa

ANNUAL MEETING, WELLINGTON, 25-27 JULY 1997

ANNUAL REPORT

It is appropriate to note that in the week following the 1996 Conference, I was quite apprehensive about the position that Kindergarten would be in 12 months' time. At that time we were in a unique position.

We certainly had a good case with which to negotiate with Government for additional and more flexible funding. That had been confirmed through Government's own select committee process. But it was the timing of a new electoral process, and our ability as Kindergarten to present a unanimous position during negotiations that determined our success.

As a result, I believe that we have made real progress in securing both an increase in funding to \$3.24 per child hour, and the option to be funded for up to 360 sessions per year.

Together, these changes have given associations and kindergartens a range of options that can assist in better meeting the needs of families. There are still constraints imposed by legislation, and we will continue to advocate for the necessary change. We must ensure that as Government provides the opportunities, we fully exercise our responsibility to deliver service.

The opportunities the NZFKA has had to meet with the Minister of Education, Associate Minister of Education and the Secretary for Education have been appreciated.

A cornerstone of Kindergarten's philosophy and values has been our insistence on employing only teachers with a Diploma in Teaching (Early Childhood Education).

During the year, progress in the area of teacher training and qualifications has been less than satisfactory. Passage of the 1996 Education Amendment Act resulting in the reintroduction of compulsory teacher registration was warmly welcomed. But the decision in May by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority Early Childhood Advisory Group to recognise a multitude of qualifications ranging from Level 3 to Level 7 has real implications for the long term educational outcomes for young children. That is because this move emphasises qualifications that focus on the practical skills of childcare, at the expense of a deeper knowledge of education theory and practice. The proliferation of lower level qualifications will create confusion for both trainees and employers. Compound that with the range of training providers and the likely outcome is that the necessary growth in the number of early childhood educators will be minimal.

I am proud of the way in which we have sought to inform, consult, challenge, and lead debate on this issue.

We are heavily indebted to both Lynda Boyd and Wendy Lee from the Federation of Free Kindergarten Associations, who implemented an extremely effective consultation programme on the Unit Standards of qualification. They ensured that kindergarten teachers and associations were able to contribute to the process. The results were disappointing, but what is disturbing is that the emphasis on the physical aspects of childcare and safety, evident in some of these qualifications, has recently been reinforced by comments by both the Associate Minister of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

Any one action or comment on its own is noteworthy. Add to them the implications of the 1997 State Sector Act and it is understandable that teachers and kindergartens question Government's intentions about quality and responsibility. The assurances that have been given will be able to be judged with time.

An important aspect of the year's activity has been the growth in professional management throughout associations. The development of performance appraisal systems is encouraging. The level of support to associations has continued to expand, and reviews have been undertaken to further assist in the organisation, management and empowerment of teams.

It is frustrating that we are only able to release the NZFKA Strategic Plan at this Conference. It was certainly our intention to have achieved it earlier in the year, but the workload precluded that. The focus in this document is firmly on the role of the NZFKA in comparison with the paper presented in 1996. However, the 1996 document will be used as the basis for discussing the range of initiatives that could be provided to children and families.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Val Moreland, our new Executive Officer. Val's induction was less than adequate. Despite that hurdle, she has demonstrated an immense commitment and energy to the position. She has challenged, and cajoled, quickly developing a strong appreciation of the skills and knowledge of the position. I have enjoyed our work together throughout the year, but particularly during the change in Executive Officer, the tireless effort of the Executive has been really appreciated.

Responsibilities have been shared and there has been a strong commitment to achieving the policy goals and management objectives.

I must thank my family. Marion, Karen, Anna and Jenny have tolerated my absence and supported me during my seven years on the Executive. During the tough times they have given encouragement and throughout the girls have constantly been my reminder of what Kindergarten is about - children having the opportunity to learn how to learn and having fun doing it.

Kindergarten has a very positive future and the NZFKA will be pre-eminent in contributing to that. The issues that we face will continue to change, but two factors will remain:

- Firstly, our commitment to the right of children to early childhood education and the importance of quality training of teachers in delivering this education.
- Secondly, the strength that we have when we work to a common goal. We have demonstrated our ability to make real progress.

Let us continue as a strong advocate for young children and the benefit that Kindergarten can have in influencing their future.

Tony Rhodes
PRESIDENT

July 1997