



31 October 2014

ELAA celebrates volunteers - and calls on the Commonwealth Government to recognise the true value of early learning

ELAA's 23rd Annual General Meeting on 30 October provided the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of volunteers - and for parents and early childhood education providers to call on the Commonwealth Government to continue funding for 15 hours of kindergarten beyond 2015.

"We were proud to play a leading role in the debate on the future of Commonwealth funding for 15 hours of kindergarten, and to help secure that funding for 2015," Mr Shane Lucas, CEO of ELAA, told ELAA members and stakeholders.

"But the *Keep 15 Hours* campaign goes on – and we will need to keep working hard as parents and early learning providers to lobby the Commonwealth to maintain funding beyond next year."

On the eve of the Productivity Commission providing its final report on childcare and early childhood learning to the Government, ELAA members were also reminded of the critical importance of the early years by Associate Professor Sharon Goldfeld of the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health.

Professor Goldfeld informed the meeting of some of the latest research being conducted by the Centre.

"A child's early years lay the foundation for social, economic and well-being outcomes over the whole life course," Professor Goldfeld said.

"Our research demonstrates that high quality early childhood education and care is good for the economy – and it's also just good for kids."

The ELAA AGM also celebrated the achievements of volunteers in the sector through the annual McArthur Early Childhood Volunteer of the Year Awards.

The 2015 winner was Tania Watts-Hall, a parent at Olympic Avenue Kindergarten in Cheltenham.

Tania is currently in her third year as Vice-President of the Committee of Management and consistently volunteers up to 30 hours a week in order to ensure Olympic Avenue Kindergarten is the best it can be.

"The dedication and commitment of volunteer parents like Tania help ensure that 15 hours of high quality early learning programs are delivered to children in well-managed, well-maintained, not-for-profit services," Mr Lucas said.

"Parents like Tania are the first and most important educational influence on a child – and they are the unsung heroes of the early learning sector."

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