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CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL Draft LTCCP 2009-19

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Submissions close on 16 April 2009

I wish to talk to the main points in my written submission at the hearings to be held between Monday 11 May 2009 and Monday 18 May 2009.

Are you completing this submission:	On behalf of a group or organisation
If you are representing, how many people do you represent?	
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Your Submission:	<p>SUBMISSION BY ST ALBANS EDU-CARE CENTRE INC IN RELATION TO THE PROVISION OF PREMISES FOR EARLY LEARNING CENTRES</p> <p>Introduction This submission is made by St Albans Edu-Care Centre Inc, the operators of an early learning centre (‘opreschool’) on the corner of Thames Street and Westminster Street. The premises of the preschool are owned by the Christchurch City Council (‘the Council’), and leased to the preschool. The Council’s responsibility for the preschool is that of landlord.</p> <p>Rent was paid during the earlier years through a grant from the Shirley/Papanui Board or Council, and in recent years the Council has charged the preschool the GST component of the rent. We are not aware whether the rent has been reviewed every three years as the lease provides. We have received no notification of any rent review.</p> <p>The draft Long Term Council Community Plan (‘oLTCCP’) makes it clear the Council intends to maintain its provision of premises for not-for-profit, community-based preschools such as ours (page 118), even stating (page 58) that early learning centres contribute directly to three of the nine agreed Community Outcomes, namely, a city of inclusive and diverse communities, a safe city, and a city of lifelong learning.</p> <p>However, because the plan assesses the activity as having a very high level of direct benefit and because it identifies a variety of other funding sources, the LTCCP proposes (page 58) that the Council provide nil to minimal funding (for the rentals.) The preschool understands from Council staff, that this means a move to market rents, which will be negotiated in September</p>

this year. The preschool is not sure that previous grants provided by the Council to meet the rent will continue to be made available, thus leaving the preschool to pay the whole amount of a market rental.

Submission

The preschool asks the Council to maintain the status quo, thereby providing the preschool premises with the continued subsidised rent. If the Council does adopt the Financial Policy outlined in the LTCCP it would undo the Council's stated Community Support Policy to continue to provide leased premises for early learning centres. St Albans Edu-Care, like the other eleven community preschools, may struggle to continue operation.

Details

St Albans Edu-Care was opened in October 1985. It was formed by a group of parents, and initially operated with one teacher and a number of willing volunteers. It now has nine teachers, including the Senior Teacher / Manager and a part time administrator, but it otherwise remains a community preschool, run by a Board of Governance of elected volunteer parents.

St Albans Edu-Care operates 8.30am to 3.45pm only, consistent with its community status. It does not provide care for children of full time working parents. The preschool is licensed for 35 children at any one time during the day. Because the majority of children do not attend fulltime, the actual number of children who directly benefit from the centre over the week is 86. There are over 100 children on the waiting list which is currently closed for children over one year of age, as some families have already been waiting well over a year for a space.

The growth in early childhood education, and the Ministry of Education changes to preschool funding, has meant a number of operational changes have been necessary. To a small extent, it has also changed the organisational policy of the preschool, in that it now has a more formal enrolment and placement system, but in all other respects, St Albans Edu-Care holds the same place in the community and meets the same needs as existed when it was first set up.

In the late 1990s, when the Council was considering replacing the St Albans Edu-Care premises, a needs analysis report was commissioned. The following is an extract from that report dated October 1999.

"the area has pockets of high density under 5 population, a high number of single parents, a high number of households on low incomes and a high number of households without a car. Although the Shirley Ward is well served by early childhood education facilities overall, these are different services, many being private centres for working parents, and others being weekly playgroups here parent attendance is essential"

St Albans Edu-Care has taken up the Ministry of Education's 20 Free hours policy for children over 3 years. Our centre was able to consider participation, in part because of the Council's support of the premises. It choose to enter the scheme because that policy was consistent with the aims of the preschool "to provide early childhood education to all in the community, irrespective of economic means. These free hours have had a marked effect on our roll, and that of preschools in general because it has enabled more parents to afford early childhood education or afford more hours of early childhood education for their children.

When a centre agrees to enter this scheme, it is prohibited from levying any further charge to the parents. This has meant that the income of the preschool is largely fixed. The only way to increase revenue is to increase child numbers. This is impossible for St Albans Edu-Care as its current premises are at capacity. Thus any increase in operating costs not met by a direct grant threatens the viability of the preschool.

The draft LTCCP notes that the Christchurch City Council is the only council in New Zealand providing childcare facilities, and it seems to imply that this alone shows the Council should withdraw. Yet the Christchurch City Council

is the only council in New Zealand that has the World Buskers Festival, the Ellerslie Flower Show and many other similar examples. These are not seen as examples of the Council's foolishness or improper spending of Council/ratepayer funds, but as visionary, progressive, good governance. The same is true for the investment the Council makes in facilities for early childhood education. The children who directly benefit, pay for that through fees, as a visitor to the Flower Show pays for a ticket, but some of the total cost is paid by the ratepayer to make it possible, and that investment is justified because it furthers the agreed Community Outcomes. We want a city, we need, a city that provides for diverse communities, that encourages life-long learners and that is safe.

Over the years the community preschools have provided early childhood education for families who may not have felt confident to source that elsewhere or who may not otherwise have been able to afford it. Parents have been supported, and taught good parenting skills, children have received consistent care and the skills for learning that lead to later success. Christchurch, statistically, has a significant population of low-income families, yet it does not have the matching level of crime statistics. There are many reasons that could be advanced to explain this, but maybe it is because this Council, unlike any other in New Zealand, has made the investment in children and learning for more than 70 years.

Conclusion

There are a great many calls on the public purse, but we ask the Council:

1. to continue this long tradition of subsidised rent for community, not-for-profit preschools, that has benefited so many children, families and communities.
2. that money be allocated in the LTCCP for a council grant to cover the rent of the renegotiated leases of these preschools.

