

# Centres face subsidy challenge

MAROONDAH'S community-based child care centres are determined to continue despite financial hardship which will be caused by the removal of the Federal Government's operational subsidy.

The funding, up to \$40,000 for a 35-place centre, will be cut in July.

Paula Dell, director of Knaith Rd Child Care Centre in East Ringwood said the loss of the subsidy would "make life difficult" for them.

"We'll try to soften the blow for parents by subsidising some of the cost rises this year, but half of the shortfall will have to be passed on. Fees will have to go up at the end of June because it's a loss of almost \$40,000 in funding for us," Ms Dell

said. "It means we have to make decisions in relation to our budget, while still retaining the quality of our service."

She said a fundraising committee had been formed as part of a strategy to make up the shortfall of funds.

She said community-based child care centres offered many benefits for parents and children, a major one being that they were non-profit organisations.

"We're not here to make money out of the children. All profits are channeled back into the children and the program.

"What sets us apart from commercially run centres is our size. We have 35 places, so we have small groups

which means our children have close contact with the staff. The quality of our care is our competing edge.

"We're okay at the moment, but with so many centres in the area now — there are 26 — it is difficult to fill vacancies."

Director of North Ringwood Community Children's Centre Jo Payne agreed the loss of the subsidy would mean a rise in fees.

"It's inevitable. While it will be harder for us, the parents and staff here are committed to having a community-based child care centre, so we will do everything we can to make it work," she said.

She said people were often unaware of the differences between commer-

cially run centres and community based centres.

"Importantly, parents have a say in how the centre is run. The parent committee runs and operates the centre and has an input in training of staff, programs and facilities," she said.

"Our centre is a 35-place centre, so there are smaller groups and we have a very low staff change-over. Since we opened in 1992, we have had only two staff changes which means greater consistency for the children.

"The bottom line is that we are non-profit, so all the money we make is channeled back into the centre."

**FAYE MICHELSON**