

## CASE STUDY

### EMPLOYER

## Franklin Kindergarten Association

**R**igid classroom hours and fixed student-child ratios make flexible working hours an impossible dream for most kindergarten teachers; unless they're employed by Franklin Kindergarten Association (FKA) that is.

FKA operates 25 kindergartens in the Franklin region, employing 70 teachers and 30 support staff. Staff retention is critical to the business due to a serious shortage of qualified early childhood teachers and the importance of continuity of care for young children.

During the 1990s, FKA was finding it increasingly difficult to meet its burgeoning administrative responsibilities as well as the operational needs of its kindergartens. It needed to take a more professional approach to managing its business and to HR. It now proactively adopts best employment practice and adapts it to suit its unique environment.

With limited funding and no room to move around classroom hours or holiday periods, Professional Practice Manager Raewyn van Lingen says that a combination of determination and creativity mean FKA can provide some flexibility and other work-life options.

FKA offers part-time and job-share positions, and a recent change in the collective agreement and some innovative thinking create scope for even more flexibility.

"Changes in the way short-term relievers are paid mean we can now employ them for just an hour rather than in half-day blocks," says Raewyn. "This allows for much more flexibility because a reliever can work an extra hour at the end of her shift to cover for another teacher. We're still adjusting to this new way of employing relievers but it's going to make a real difference to the amount of flexibility we can offer."

FKA is proactive about asking staff what support they need to do their jobs well. When it learnt how much work its head teachers were taking home it was determined to

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**Raewyn van Lingen — Franklin Kindergarten Association**

ease the load. As well as limiting flexibility in obvious ways, high workloads tend to have a severe impact on morale and commitment.

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Another initiative gives FKA's staff more control over their holidays. Kindergarten teachers often find it hard to take an uninterrupted break during holiday periods as administrative work, professional development, kindergarten cleaning and other interruptions can all intervene.

Since 2005, FKA has tried to ensure that teaching staff are not interrupted by any work matters during the first week of their break. "Previously there was no clear definition around which days were leave days and which were days that teachers could be required to work," says Raewyn. "Teachers can now plan their holidays knowing that the first week of each break is definitely annual leave and they won't be interrupted."

As a result of its forward-thinking approach, turnover of teaching staff at FKA over the past three years averaged only 8% per year. All of FKA's 70 teaching positions are currently filled and all its permanent teaching staff are qualified registered teachers. Just retaining employees after parental leave has saved FKA the equivalent of more than \$300,000 over three years.

FKA's commitment to work-life balance won it an EEO Trust Work & Life Award in 2007. One of the judging panel, Gary Saunders of IBM, said FKA makes good use of innovative ideas to help overcome a limited budget and rigid classroom hours. "They have as much flexibility as they can and there's a strong commitment to developing people's careers. To me they have a really good integrated culture."

