

■ Karrimah Jacobs, chairperson of the Mitchell's Plain Educare Forum.



Photos: Fouzia van der fort



■ Loretta Groepies principal at Little Green Dolphins Educare in Colorado Park.

ECDs urged to register ahead of amnesty deadline

FOUZIA VAN DER FORT

About 80 early childhood development centres in Mitchell's Plain still need to be registered with the Department of Social Development before the end of the month.

Earlier this year Former MEC for Social Development Patricia De Lille, announced a six-month amnesty period for unregistered daycare facilities from February 1 until July 31.

Daycare centres that fail to comply and register within the amnesty period will be considered illegal, and the department will shut them down immediately.

The Plainsman spoke to the department and the Mitchell's Plain Educare Forum about the process and the way forward.

Melany Kühn, spokeswoman for the MEC of Social Development, Albert Fritz, said there were 78 registered partial care facilities in Mitchell's Plain.

"The department has identified 159 unregistered partial care facilities in Mitchell's Plain – all of them have or are completing the required registration forms," she said.

Ms Kühn said the department hoped the unregistered centres would wake up before the deadline.

There are two distinct processes that applicants for registration would need to follow which involves the local authority where rezoning, health clearance, traffic, and fire and safety inspections are done by officials from the City of Cape Town.

"Depending on the complexity of the application the process should take six months.

"If there are appeals or objections the time frame could stretch to two years," she said.

The second process is the application to the Department of Social Development once all of the local authority clearances

have been obtained. She said this would not take longer than six weeks. "The benefit to the partial care facility is multi-faceted. It means that the child via the facility has access to a social safety net which includes being subsidised, quality developmental programmes, as well as regular checks to ensure norms and standards in the Children's Act are being maintained," she said.

Mr Fritz said he was encouraged by the number of ECDs in the area that have made application to be registered.

"If we are going to put the needs and welfare of the children first, it is important that facilities are compliant with the Children's Act.

"I also want to remind those who have not yet made application, to do so before the amnesty period expires on Sunday July 31.

"There will be no extension of this date," he said.

Institutions which have not been registered and have not started the registration process will be closed down and will not be allowed to accept children.

Karrimah Jacobs, chairwoman of the Mitchell's Plain Educare Forum said they were glad about the province's call to have institutions registered but that "human error" has hampered the process.

She said officials and applicants had been working together to ensure the speedy registration of all centres.

"Officials go on leave, applicants misplace their paper work and they don't hold each other accountable to ensure all the forms are filled in. Not forgetting the backlog of cases," she said.

Mrs Jacobs said parents were also more alert when deciding where to send their children.

"Parents now ask whether we are registered," she said.

She said it was refreshing to

see that when the government put its foot down applicants and officials take action and are proactive.

Mrs Jacobs said people were no longer just starting crèches because of their love for children but have become empowered to have all the necessary certificates and documents making them an accredited facility.

She also called on educare centres to register with the forum to improve their voice and share their problems with like minded people.

According to the forum more than 50% of their 60 members were being registered.

Loretta Groepies, principal of Little Green Dolphins in Colorado Park, said it took her three years to have her centre registered. She started the process in 2004 and by 2007 she was registered and had a non-profit organisation certificate.

"I made a nuisance of myself. I would go to the civic at least once a week or month, whatever it took to get registered," she said. Mrs Groepies said it took a while because an application required the authorisation from several departments and that the municipality has now taken on more duties including the advertising and regulation of public participation.

She said many principals were scared of regular inspections, even if they were registered but that it was in the best interests of the children.

"It is the right thing to do and these are things we must do to ensure that our children are safe and well looked after," she said.

● The Provincial Department of Social Development also maintains a database of all registered daycare facilities, which is available to the public and especially parents who want to ensure that their children's daycare facility is registered.