



* Image courtesy
of Early Childhood
Management Services

Managing a successful early years centre

Centre director Sue Zacharis explains how she keeps her early years centre financially viable and frees up time to build meaningful relationships with staff, children, families and the local community.

Experienced centre director Sue Zacharis loves the challenge of managing Newport Gardens Early Years Centre, a 149-place integrated hub in Melbourne's inner west. Under her leadership, the centre has built a strong reputation within the local community and achieved a rating of "Exceeding the National Quality Standard" in its first two years.

Having access to software that enables her to run the centre efficiently and that frees up time for her to build meaningful relationships with staff, children, families and the local community has been fundamental to Sue's success.

"Using high-quality software solutions such as Ezidebit Direct Debit to manage all our long day care and kindergarten fees makes my job so much easier," says Sue. "It really does take the pressure off us.

"In my previous role as centre director at a smaller standalone centre, I managed fees manually, which was almost a full-time job. We have 280 families at Newport Gardens; imagine me having to manage 280 families' fees manually!"

Sue saves significant time because she no longer has to manually send invoices and chase up and reconcile payments. And because Ezidebit integrates so seamlessly with the centre's management system, QikKids, there are more automated and fewer duplicated admin tasks – saving Sue even more time. In fact with Ezidebit in place, Sue estimates the time she spends managing fees has dropped from 30 hours a week to less than five.

With no time to waste figuring out cumbersome software, Sue loves how easy Ezidebit is to set up and manage. And on the few occasions she has needed to contact Ezidebit's customer support team, her experience has been positive.

"They're so supportive and accommodating," she says. "They react quickly, so you don't have to waste time waiting on hold. They really guide and support you through processes."

Sue receives regular easy-to-read reports, which keep her well informed about the centre's financial performance. And by implementing direct debit, Sue has been able to keep revenue rolling into the centre.

"Because we have Ezidebit in place, we get to the end of the year and I can do a zero balance across every family," she says. "We don't carry debt."

Sue points out that the time and money saved by removing the need to recover debt far outweighs the nominal fees charged to establish an account.

Families, too, love how Ezidebit helps them manage their fee payments. "By having direct debit in place, families avoid getting into debt, because fees are automatically deducted at regular intervals – for us it's weekly – from a nominated bank account.

"A weekly fee of \$50 or \$60 is far easier for families who are struggling financially to manage than having a debt of \$500 to catch up on."

Sue believes part of the reason Ezidebit has been so well received by families is that most have already been exposed to direct debit payments, whether it's to pay their mortgage, health insurance or gym fees.

"It's just an expectation of our society, so very rarely you'll get a family saying, 'No, I don't trust that, I'm not doing that.' The handful of times we've had a family reluctant to use direct debit, we've educated them about its benefits – the safety and convenience it offers and how it can help them manage their finances. We've found most are then happy to use it."

Using direct debit also helps staff nurture positive relationships with families, by removing the need for awkward conversations about late fee payments.

"I absolutely love Ezidebit from so many aspects," says Sue.

"It takes the pressure off us and it takes the pressure off families. It gives me more time in my day to focus on what I love most about my role – supporting my team and the children and families at our centre."

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Sue Zacharis, Centre Director
Newport Gardens Early Years Centre



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