

23 November, 2010

EARLY childhood education is important as the wealth of a nation rests in young children.

This was the comment made by Professor of Early Childhood at the University of New England Margaret Sims.

Speaking on Issues and Challenges in Early Childhood – the way forward for a nation at the National Education Conference at the Fiji National University’s Lautoka Campus yesterday.

Prof Sims said disadvantage in the early years creates life-long disadvantage which costs the nation in terms of lost productivity, increased welfare, health and justice costs.

“The future of Fiji rests on how you support the welfare and development of young children today,” she said.

“Education starts from conception NOT from when children start school
We know how to support families to create good quality child rearing environments for young children.

”We know what makes good quality learning environments for young children both inside the home and outside the home (child care, playgroups, preschools, kindergartens etc).

“We need to persuade politicians, funders and businesses to invest in young children. If we do that we can change the world in one generation.”

Prof Sims said the experiences children have shapes their brains.

Adding that children’s brains determine what kind of people they would be.

She said what happens outside our brains impacts on growth inside ones brains.

She said stress also played a key role in both of these pathways neurological and biochemical.

However children were not stressed when they felt safe, secure, confident, when they are not hungry, thirsty, uncomfortable or unwell.

“We know what are needed--Quality early childhood programmes that focus on learning in the context of secure relationships. Quality family support programmes that empower parents and extended family members. Quality communities that are places where parenting is valued and supported.

“All have the have a responsibility---to explain how important the early years are to the wellbeing of a nation to other professionals, to community, to organizations, to the media and to politicians.

- We need to create a demand for quality early childhood and parenting services
- We need to demonstrate in our actions that we value early childhood/parenting
- We need to collect evidence of what works internationally and adapt this to the context of the Pacific
- We need to try our best to develop pilot programmes to PROVE that our efforts work
- We need to be active and assertive
- We need to plan how we can all work together”