



# Family day carers needed

By Bronwyn Farr

DEMAND outweighs supply for family day care across the Upper Hunter with working parents unable to find suitable care for children.

Upper Hunter Shire Council's children's services coordinator Jenny Wade, who heads a service that extends across the entire Upper Hunter and Muswellbrook Shires, said there was a state-wide chronic shortage of family day carers.

"Most schemes across NSW do have a shortage and our service is in no different position," Ms Wade said.

"At the moment we have several carers who have been with us for a long period of time and are now looking to move on to other things, so there is a shortage particularly in the Scone area," she said.

"At present we have 22 carers and ideally we would like to have 30 across the region to meet the current need in the area."

She said advantages of becoming a Family Day Carer included the flexibility of being self-employed and being able to care for your own children at the same time.

"Carers can set their own fees and work their own hours that fit in with the family," Ms Wade said.

Working parents of younger children liked the fact their children were placed in small groups and siblings were not separated.

"Younger age groups in particular thrive in family day care, but children from 0 to 12 are catered for with programs for all age groups," Ms Wade said.

"A lot of parents prefer the fact that care is not centre-based, it is a home-based, relaxed environment with the same activities and monitoring that you might find at a centre.

"Plus there is scope for flexibility with hours of care offered outside standard operating hours - we are able to offer some weekend and night-time care," she said.

"I think parents like the fact that they can get care close to home, so children stay in their own community - we do have carers in Muswellbrook, Scone,

Satur, Merriwa, Aberdeen and Denman," Ms Wade said, but would love to hear from interested carers in other areas also.

Being at home with her own children is a big plus for Scone-based Family Day Care mum Katrina Clements.

The mother of five-year-old Joshua and two-year-old Danielle said having a job that enabled her to be a full-time parent to her own children as well was ideal.

Operating under the Family Day Care scheme, Ms Clements cares for three other children on Tuesdays and Wednesday and four children on days when her son Joshua attends pre-school.

"I love being able to work from home in my chosen profession, which is early childhood education," Mrs Clements said.

She holds an Associate Diploma in Social Science (Child Studies) and has almost completed a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood).

"It can be challenging at times when you are on your own with the children but we organise outings, excursions, playgroup, storytime at the library, and we network with other family day carers," she said.

"The reward is that I get to stay with my kids, I provide care in a home environment and each child gets some one-on-one time.

"Seeing the smiles and seeing children go home happy at the end of each day is great."

People interested in becoming a family day carer can contact Jenny Wade on 6540 1100.



REWARDING: Family Day Carer Katrina Clements (back right) with Kyah Clay, Cecilia Cooper, Waylon Britt, her own daughter Danielle Earl, and Teegan Mills-Smith.