

# It's up to mum and dad

By Alice Blackwood

**P**ARENTS soon will be required to draw on their existing and new-found skills to fill a continuing labour-shortage in the employee-hungry market.

Re-entering the workforce will become a mandatory requirement for mothers and fathers when phase three of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Welfare to Work campaign kicks in on July 1.

Sarina Russo Job Access chief executive officer Kevin Ayre said that, while the campaign also targeted people on disability support pensions, it primarily focused on people receiving parenting payments.

Mr Ayre said parents would be required to actively search for employment once their child/children turned six years of age.

"They will need to be participating in services to prepare for work and looking for a minimum 15 hours of paid work per week," Mr Ayre said.

He said that, until now, re-entering the workforce had

been voluntary on the parent's part, with active encouragement from key organisations such as

Centrelink and SRJA.

While Centrelink generally is the primary point of contact, referring people to job network organisations, parents also can directly approach job agencies.

Mother of four, Karen Sharp voluntarily chose to look for a job after having been out of the workforce for about 10 years.

Now an office and advertising manager with public relations company City Info Brisbane, Ms Sharp said she had felt a need to use her knowledge and skills in other ways and so decided to return to work.

She approached SRJA through Centrelink where she received employment direction, advice and skills support.

Although she already had people and business skills, she said being a parent had equipped her with other useful skills.

"Managing a home with four

children, you learn how to manage people," Ms Sharp said. "You know how to negotiate and keep calm."

Resolving issues, in particular personal issues, between staff and clients was a valuable skill, along with organisation and time management.

Ms Sharp said City Info Brisbane offered flexible work

conditions, which allowed her to prioritise her parental role.

"I work from 9am-2.30pm Monday to Wednesday. On Friday, I come in to do paperwork and I can bring my daughter," Ms Sharp said.

She said while many businesses were coming around to the idea of employing parents, many intelligent and skilled women were being too easily overlooked.

Mr Ayre said smart

employers would quickly recognise the need to be flexible.

"Parents returning to the workforce are a perfect fit because they want flexible hours, which suits most small

and medium businesses," Mr Ayre said.

He said there were various personal and social benefits associated with re-entering the workforce.

Many parents wanted to utilise more than just their parenting skills and teach their children the importance of responsibility and work ethic.

"What better way for them to demonstrate these qualities than by having a job," Mr Ayre said.

While at first glance the initiative appeared to have drawbacks, Mr Ayre said there was plenty of information and assistance available.

A main issue was childcare, although Centrelink offered assistance and advice on that.

"The other barrier people come up against is losing the benefits – like health benefits – provided on government allowances," Mr Ayre said.

"They won't necessarily be cut off from their benefits.

"It's important people look at (those) they can retain," he said.



**KAREN Sharp with Petria, left, Jakob and Tobias Hamiora.**

**Picture: PETE JOHNSON.**