

Being prepared for prep



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MOST parents don't realise how many skills their children need before they start school.

Things like recognising numbers, letters and even familiarity with their own name make the first year of schooling a lot easier.

Lizzie McDonald said she had no idea how much preparation was required until her children started prep.

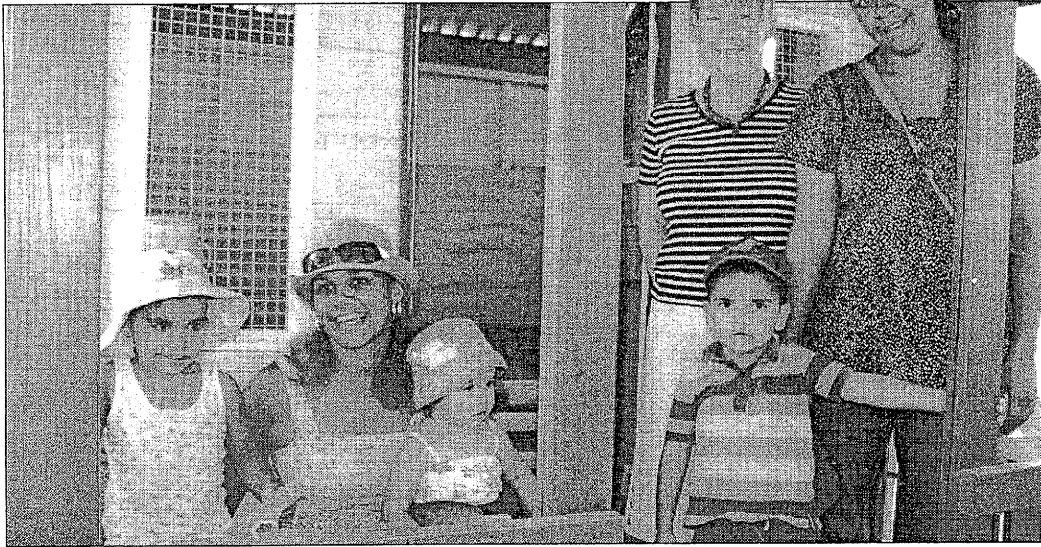
Now she is involved with Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), a Centacare-run project aiming to get children school ready before they reach prep.

She is being trained as a tutor for the new project and can't wait to start.

"I'm looking forward to getting started and being able to help other parents to get their kids skilled-up for school," she said.

"It's hard to know as a parent that you're doing the right thing by your kids, so this is a little bit of help in that area."

HIPPY is a two year home-based par-



GETTING SCHOOL READY: Kalinda Donaldson-Stevens, 3, Anita Donaldson, Serita Donaldson-Stevens, 1, Julie Hill, Lizzie McDonald and Jerome Swan, 4, are involved with the HIPPY program.

enting and early childhood enrichment program that targets children aged three-and-a-half to four-and-a-half years old.

The Commonwealth Government funded project will launch in Pioneer once 35 families sign-on and three tutors are trained up.

Already Centacare has 17 families on the books with more inquiries each day.

HIPPY coordinator Julie Hill said it was a service that was desperately needed in the area.

"A lot of children, particularly in the Pioneer area, don't attend kindy or any early education program which delays

their development," she said.

"We've identified that need and this program is a great way to counter it and promote school readiness."

Ms Hill said while the funding was for Pioneer, she wouldn't discourage parents with young children in other suburbs from applying.

Anita Donaldson is the mother of three girls under 5 and has already put her hand up to take part.

"Education keeps changing so this will be a good basis to start preparation for school," she said.

HIPPY will officially start next month.

Teachers back program

PREP teachers in Mount Isa have welcomed new program aiming to get students school ready.

St Kieran's Catholic Primary School prep teacher Peta Mawn said anything that helps parents develop basic skills needed to start prep would be a plus.

"It would be great to see a program like this are out there and available to parents," she said.

"It's sometimes hard to know what skills your children need before they start school so it would help with that."

She said it would also help address the widespread of skills of students in their preparatory year of schooling.

"Because it's the first year of schooling kids come in with a variety of skills, knowledge and experiences," she said.

"I've got some children that are reading some basic words already and then other kids that are starting to find their voice for the first time."

She said because prep was not yet compulsory it was a challenge to get the students to the same education level.

"A lot of people don't realise that we teach kids how to socialise at school, how to line up, how to listen and so much more and if they don't have those skills by the end of prep they go into year one behind," she said.

"Prep's not like kindy, it's not just about playing."

St Kieran's principal Kath Tarttelin said she also welcomed the program, however she'd like to see the funding extend beyond Pioneer to other suburbs in Mount Isa.