

Family daycare business booming

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November 07, 2006

FAMILY daycare services are thriving, with the first increase in 18 years of mothers willing to become carers and look after other people's children in their own homes.

The Howard Government has been pushing the use of family daycare as an alternative to traditional centre-based childcare, believing it can help solve some shortages.

Earlier this year the Government made a budget decision to scrap the cap on the number of family daycare centres, after which more services sprang up.

National Family Daycare Council spokeswoman Linda Latham said hundreds of women were signing up to do the work.

"There's been a 2 per cent increase in the first quarter of this financial year, which translates to about 248 carers," Ms Latham said.

"Each time a state increases its regulatory requirements we see a pronounced decline, and this is the first time it's picked up - and it's picked up right across Australia."

Family daycarers are licensed to look after a maximum of five children, including their own, but are ineligible to receive the childcare benefit, worth up to \$6500 per child a year, for their own children. They can get the benefit for minding other people's children.

Federal Family and Community Services Minister Mal Brough said: "If the reported increase is right, then this is great news and shows why the Australian Government is supporting family daycare and the choices parents are making."

Ms Latham said the sector would grow further. "If this continues throughout the year, we are looking good."

There are 11,500 family daycare workers across the country.

"There were about 18,000 in 1990-91 but since then it's been in decline," she said.

Ms Latham said the increase occurred after an intensive marketing campaign as well as federal Government endorsement and promotion of the service as legitimate.

"It's the increased profile of family daycare, and some of that has been Mal Brough and the previous minister, Senator Kay Patterson, talking us up, but it's also been after a large marketing campaign that we've been running," she said.

"It takes about three months to recruit a carer.

"It's reaffirming that we are a steady player in the market. We are attracting carers, and this is really significant because people are realising what the opportunities are with becoming a family daycarer."

Almost half the family carers were women with young families aged in their mid-20s to early 30s, with another 45 per cent or so in their 50s.

Ms Latham said it was not difficult to earn \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year, and some carers were making as much as \$70,000 to \$80,000 a year.

She said many family daycare centres had now turned into small businesses.