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Childcare help for four hours of work

LAUREN WILSON

STAY-at-home mums would only need to do four hours of volunteer work a week to access three days of subsidised childcare under the new activity test.

The measure, designed to ensure generous childcare subsidies operate as work incentives not welfare payments, means the more parents work, study or volunteer, the more taxpayer-funded childcare they can access.

But parents only need to study, volunteer or work for eight hours a fortnight to be able to claim up to 36 hours of subsidised childcare in the same period.

It means stay-at-home mums could continue to send their young kids to day care for three six-hour days, three days a week, if they complete four hours of volunteer work.

Volunteering Australia is predicting the new rules will see a jump in the number of parents looking putting their hands up for volunteer work so they can continue to access cheaper childcare.

"There are more than six million volunteers in Australia and this has the potential to increase the numbers of volunteers working each day to deliver vital services and support to communities," a spokeswoman for the peak body said.

Jo Briskey, the executive di-

rector of lobby group The Parenthood, said for many families their personal circumstances mean consistent work or volunteering opportunities are not always available, but other mums may just look for ways to meet the activity test.

"If mum really wants to have her child access early learning, I'm sure she'll feel forced or pressured into trying to find something just to meet the hours requirement," Ms Briskey said.

The Federal Government's new package will also attempt to contain rising childcare prices by setting a new hourly cap on subsidies, starting at \$11.55 for long day care.

The move is designed to stop taxpayers having to subsidise premium childcare services charging more than \$160 a day and offering kids baby yoga and personal chefs.

PROBLEM OF SUPPLY

ARRANGING childcare is one of the biggest hassles for mums returning to work and the Government's plan is likely to increase demand for places.

Research for the Department of Social Services found almost a quarter of families with children under 12, both in and out of work, would be encouraged to work more.

Mother of two Lyndal Byford and husband Leigh of

Clarence Park, above, are making plans for Zoe, 4 and Finn, 10 months, above.

She said the Government's childcare package did nothing to resolve long waiting lists and a lack of places for babies.

"Unless they suddenly open a bunch more childcare centres, then giving me back more money at the end of the week, or slightly less money, makes not that much difference if you can't get in, in the first place," she said.

Her current plan for a four-day working week relies heavily on retired nannas.