



# Illawarra issues

by Keeli Cambourne

## Celebrating Childhood

Childhood is a special time, so why not celebrate it? That's exactly what Shellharbour/Albion Park Events (SHAPE) is doing this month, with a week-long festival celebrating everything that is good about being a kid.

With the support of local businesses, community and service agencies, SHAPE has organised the first of what it hopes will be an annual event. Focusing on children from 0 to five years old, KidsFest isn't just concentrating on entertaining the kids, but also offering parents and carers the chance to find out exactly what is available in terms of support programs, networks and business in the region.

"We needed to have a 'ground up' approach to show families what is available to them in the area," said festival coordinator and Albion Park Chamber of Commerce representative Pauline Dawes.

KidsFest will start on Mother's Day (11 May) in Shellharbour and will continue all week, with entertainment for the kids including discos, face painting and even a 'baby rave'. There will also be educational forums and parenting seminars for the adults, which aim to not only enhance life skills, but might also lead to employment opportunities. A localised Kids Day Out will be held in Albion Park, Shellharbour

and Oak Flats on the Thursday and Friday of the week-long festival.

"Parents can register their kids to take part in the festival and then they receive a passport and a map with a list of all the activities that are happening in various locations throughout the week," Dawes said. "Each passport will be an adventure trail, with children collecting stamps from participating businesses, agencies and entertainment events and they can hand that in at the end of the week to go in the running for a prize. This is a new way of forming those business-community partnerships that are so important."

For more information, visit [www.communitiesforchildrenshell.org.au](http://www.communitiesforchildrenshell.org.au) or contact Albion Park Chamber of Commerce ☎4257 3399.

## Saving Grace

With rising interest rates, petrol prices soaring and the cost of living heading skyward all the time, it is often hard for families on low incomes to find the extra cash needed for things such as school excursions, books or even school uniforms.

The Benevolent Society has established a program to help these families put a little extra away for those all-important educational needs. "The Saver Plus program is an innovative program designed

to help eligible families establish or enhance a regular savings habit, expand money-management skills and support lower-income families to save to meet the costs of education," says Liz Tinney, the Illawarra and Southern Highlands coordinator of the program.

"While on the program, participants save towards educational goals and their savings are then matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$1000. The matched amount can be spent on educational items such as uniforms, camps, excursions, computers, books, stationery, tutoring or a diverse range of extracurricular activities and other school-related expenses," Tinney says.

Tinney explains that the program is run in partnership with the ANZ Bank and is specifically for parents on low incomes with children at school or who are studying themselves (and who have a health care or pension card).

For more information, contact Liz Tinney on ☎4633 3721 or ☎0407 310 205

## Smoothing The Way

I consider myself lucky that my children all went off to big school without a worry. The only tears on the day were mine, which were quickly cured by a quiet cup of coffee and the knowledge that in just six hours the house would be overrun with noise again.

But for many children, going to big school can be a rather traumatic experience, which is why the Transition to School program was established. It has been running in the Illawarra successfully for a while, and is now making its way to the Shoalhaven.

The Shoalhaven Transition to School program aims to promote a successful start to school for all children, particularly supporting families who may be experiencing difficulties or who are disadvantaged.

Billy the Backpack, the mascot for the Transition to School program, made a visit to the Shoalhaven last year, but he will soon become a regular guest in the region.

Transition to School activities are being planned for the Shoalhaven and will start later in the year. Any ideas from early-childhood professionals involved with the transition process are always welcome. ■

For more information, contact Kath Smith, Transition to School Project Officer at Illawarra Children's Services, on ☎4283 9947 or ☎0418 972 789.

If you have any comments or suggestions, please email them to me at [illawarraissues@live.com.au](mailto:illawarraissues@live.com.au)

## MAY EVENTS

### Park & Play Shellharbour - Weekly Throughout May

Free activity program aimed at 0 to five year olds. 10am-12am. Mon: Mood Park, Albion Park. Tues: Croome Cemetery Park, Albion Park Rail; Little Park, Shellharbour. Wed: Pool Park, Oak Flats; Esperance Drive Park, Albion Park. Thurs: Wilsons Memorial Park, Albion Park Rail; The Village Green, Flinders. Fri: Hinchinbrook Park, Shell Cove.

### Illawarra Live Steamers - 25 May

Free BBQ facilities, picnic tables, amenities and off-street parking. Kiosk. Free entry. \$1 per train ride. 10.30am-4pm. Virginia Street, North Wollongong. Enq: ☎4227 1645.

### Berry Celtic Festival - 31 May

All proceeds go to the Shoalhaven Linear Accelerator Appeal. A\$8 C\$4 F\$20. 9.30am-4pm. Berry Showground, Victoria St, Berry. Enq: Col Hanbridge ☎4234 1346



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