



Illawarra issues

by Keeli Cambourne

Easing The Transition

In the last week or so, mums and dads all over the South Coast and Illawarra have stood at school gates watching as their little ones start out on their educational adventures.

Thanks to a revolutionary community-based program in the region, making the transition from preschooler to big schooler is much easier. The Transition to School program is run by the Illawarra Children's Services (ICS) and funded through Families NSW, and has been running for a number of years.

Clementina Velasco, project officer for the program, explains that "it links together a range of early-childhood services in the community from the departments of health and education, the community and private preschools.

"We have a number of networks throughout Wollongong, Shellharbour and Albion Park, and now the Shoalhaven, which bring all the players together to plan events like the big school expos at the start of each year and the picnics in the park later in the year."

Velasco says the program also allows schools and community organisations within the region to identify kids with special needs and link them up with appropriate services.

Events for kids starting school in 2010 are already planned for the next couple of months. These include the school expo, and special forums for parents to find out how to prepare their littlies for big school.

Enq; log on to www.transitiontoschool.com.au or call Illawarra Children's Services ☎4283 9925.

Singling Out Single Mums

For the past 17 years, the Salvation Army has been assisting single mums in establishing friendships and networks to help them bring up kids on their own.

A Camp for Single Mums is held each November at the Collaroy Centre on Sydney's northern beaches. It brings together about 22 mums and their preschool-age children. Sherrie Cocking, a coordinator of the program, says although the camps run for only four days, it gives mums a break from their normal routine. "We teach them some life skills, and positive parenting techniques, financial planning, and self-esteem-building exercises. But we also do a little pampering. The women get some hair and make-up classes and we take them and the kids to the zoo for a day out.

"When the mums get together in this sort of environment they start to share their stories and realise they are not the only ones in their situations. ... It builds a whole new