

Parents desperate for help

By Xanthe Kleinig | January 26, 2009 12:00 AM



DESPERATE parents are turning to charities for help as the cost of sending their children to school escalates.

One charity has reported a five-fold increase in the number of inquiries about its scholarship schemes, which cover part of the cost of uniforms, fees and books.

The Smith Family revealed yesterday it is being inundated for help as families prepare to send their children back to school for the year.

A so-called "free" education can cost up to \$6000 a year for high school students, and not much less for primary schoolers, once camps, excursions and the cost of internet access is factored in, said the Australian Scholarships Group.

And parents will face the new school year without the \$50 back-

How it all adds up

Item	Cost	Item	Cost
■ Summer uniform	\$55 each	■ Netball registration	\$120
■ School shoes	\$80 each	■ Netball uniform	\$100
■ Sneakers	\$75 each	■ Dance lessons	\$10 a week
■ School bag	\$50 each	■ Swimming school	\$60
■ Painting smocks	\$10	■ Excursions	\$25 each
■ Books and stationery	\$50 each	■ Total	\$1480

to-school payment, slashed in last year's unpopular mini-Budget.

Smith Family chief executive officer Elaine Henry said families in the Illawarra and western "They are doing it tough," she said.

"The parents might have a home they are just trying to hold on to, or they might have lost their job.

"The global financial crisis is now in the real economy and it is starting to impact many people's lives."

Even private school families were trying to cut costs by buying second-hand, said online retailer **Claire Pearson from Schoolxchange.com.au.**

"A new blazer is approximately \$180 retail and second hand you can buy it for half price," she said.

The Benevolent Society is urging parents to plan for next year by signing up to its program that matches savings up to \$1000 for education expenses.

"Many families find it difficult to afford educational costs in January after an expensive Christmas period," coordinator Matt Taylor said.

Glenbrook mum Kirrily Everett said increased pressure has been placed on her family following the scrapping of the \$50 back to school allowance.

She said school uniforms were one of the major costs in getting daughters Sally, 6 and Emellia, 8 ready for a new school year. "It all adds up so quickly," she said.

"Uniforms are an ongoing cost because they grow so quickly and things have to be replaced regularly."

Another area of high cost was fitting the children with proper shoes.

Ms Kirrily said she tried to save money by buying items from the second hand clothing pool at the school.

"A uniform there costs \$5 instead of \$55," she said.

The Education Department estimates about 61,000 children will start school this week, but the figures will not be finalised until next month.