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Media release:

Barnardos to offer free early childhood education

Barnardos New Zealand has opted to offer the Government's 20 hours a week free early childhood education for three and four year olds in its Early Learning Centres and KidStart, its home-based education and care service.

The initiative, which takes effect from 1 July, will be available to all three and four year old children enrolled in Barnardos early childhood services throughout the country. There are currently 1800 enrolled in these services.

"We have not taken this decision lightly," said Murray Edridge, Barnardos New Zealand's Chief Executive. "The provision of up to 20 free hours a week comes at a cost to us as an organisation. We are concerned that the rates set by Government do not cover the full cost of providing quality early childhood education to children and families. Barnardos will be picking up the shortfall to ensure that quality is maintained under the new funding regime."

Murray Edridge said significant work still needed to be carried out to manage the implementation of the free 20 hours initiative and that Barnardos would continue talking to the Government about the adequacy of the rates.

"However, as an organisation with the guiding principle 'Ko ngā tamariki i te tuatahi, Children come first', Barnardos supports the Government initiative."

"Barnardos is committed to providing affordable, quality early childhood education for children and families," said Murray. "Research together with our extensive experience working with children and families show there are significant on-going benefits for those children who participate in quality early childhood education."

"And the introduction of up to 20 hours free education should mean that cost is no barrier to all children taking part."

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