

Let me begin by stating that I support any move that encourages parents to spend more time raising their children, even though I am not planning to be in a situation to take direct advantage of it. It saddens me to see mothers rushing back to work only six weeks after giving birth and outsourcing their parenting role, consoling themselves that the little time that they spend with their children is “quality” time.

What saddens me more, though, is that the rush back to work often seems to be a product of the “me” society that we live in. Many of the people that I have heard bemoaning the high cost of childcare and how they are forced to work fail to recognise that they are in that situation by choice. They are unwilling to sacrifice on their chosen quality of life (or amount of “shiny new stuff”) for the sake of being a parent. I find the Plasma TV Test a useful yardstick – “Don’t whinge to me if you can spend that much on a television.”

My wife chose to leave the workforce for the duration of our children’s pre-school years because we were willing to sacrifice our lifestyle for the benefit of our children (and hopefully the longer term benefit that they would then provide back to the community as a result). She has found it to be a very isolating and at times soul-destroying experience – more from the societal pressures that she has encountered than from our sometimes “high-maintenance” children. She could rarely find any other children at the park to play with, as they were all either in day care or attending “baby music lessons” or some other high-cost activity of questionable value, and when there was a child there it was their non-English speaking grandparent who was looking after them. Many of the mothers that she did encounter couldn’t understand why she wanted to raise her children rather than to go back to work, so assumed that there was either something wrong with her or that she was “loaded!”

If the proposed changes reduce the stigma of being a “bummy mummy” then that will be a great thing. From what I have seen, full-time (or even part-time) mums provide a considerable service to the community. Without them, the Public Education system would suffer greatly. There was much ado in the media on the release of the report about the benefits to people maintaining employment, but no mention of the trade-off against receiving the maternity allowance. Might I suggest for future media releases that more recognition be given to the provisions made for those who aren’t eligible for the leave benefit, and that the contributions of such people are still valued?