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Childminder shortage stops mums working

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When Rosie Campbell passes Arthur's Coffee Shop in the County Antrim town of Cushendall, she can't help thinking how much better her life could be.

41-year old Rosie, an unemployed single mother, was offered a waitressing job at the café.

She's been unable to take up the offer because she can't find a registered childminder to look after her two year old son, Daire.

"I tried all six registered childminders in the area, and every one of them is full," she explains.

"Much as I love Daire, I really hate sitting at home all day just waiting to go to the post office to collect my income support cheque.

"I want to be back in work – it's a really soul-destroying situation."

The childminders' organisation, NICMA, is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to take urgent action to tackle what it says is a serious and growing shortage of childminders in many parts of Northern Ireland.

"The problem is really a simple and stark one," explains Bridget Nodder, NICMA's Director. ***"Too few individuals are starting up careers as childminders and too many drop out within the first year of registration.***

Although the shortages aren't confined to rural areas, they have a particularly harsh impact on rural parents.

“In many rural districts with scattered populations, like the Cushendall area, childminders are often the only viable childcare option, particularly where pre-school children are concerned,” says Bridget.

NICMA is currently lobbying Executive ministers to provide the funding for a special Start-Up Package of grant aid and mentoring support for new childminders.

The proposed package has been designed to tackle two specific problems – the fact that many new childminders find the official registration process a daunting one, and the fact that many potential childminders are put off by the expense involved in starting up in business.

If implemented, NICMA calculates it would cost just £300,000 annually for each of the next three years.

“This modest investment would have an enormous pay-off in terms of getting unemployed parents, particularly women, back to work,” says Bridget.

“Jobless mothers who want to work constitute a tremendous untapped resource for the Northern Ireland labour market.

“Our Start-Up Package proposal gives the Executive a means by which it can tap that potential and strengthen our economy as a result.”

MAIN ARTICLE ENDS

Editor's notes:

1. NICMA – the Childminding Association is a charity, and is the sole organisation representing childminders in Northern Ireland. 74% of registered childminders here are members. For more details about NICMA, please go to: www.nicma.org

CASE STUDY ONE

‘Unemployment isn’t what I want – for me or my kids’

18 months ago, Theresa McCaughey, a mother-of-two from Cabragh, Co Tyrone, was forced to give up her job due to lack of childcare.

“My sister, who’s also a childminder, had been looking after my kids, but then she moved away from Cabragh,” she says.

“There were simply no other registered childminders with available places in this area, and I had to leave my job.

“It’s been pretty tough financially, but I also find it really embarrassing and demoralising being on income support.

“It’s not what I want for myself or my children.”

Indeed, so determined is Theresa to get back into employment that she’s just registered as a childminder herself.

“I’m looking forward so much to being a working mum again, and doing something I know I’ll love,” she says.

“And, of course, this move will solve my childcare problems.”

CASE STUDY ONE ENDS

142 words

CASE STUDY TWO

'I may have to give up work' – Crossgar mum

One mother in Crossgar, Co Down, is currently faced with the prospect of having to give up her job because she can't find a childminder.

Ciara Dobbin, who has two children – Caitlin (3) and Finn (1) – works part-time as a nursing auxiliary at the City Hospital in Belfast.

She began looking for a new childminder in August when the childminder she had been using gave notice that she was changing careers.

"At the time, I never thought there would be a major problem in finding someone else," explains Ciara.

"But, over the past weeks, I've tried no less than 16 registered childminders in the local area and they're all full up."

Relatives are currently helping Ciara out with childcare, but that's not feasible for much longer because none of them lives nearby.

"I'm seriously facing the possibility of having to give up my job and I really don't want to do that," says Ciara.

"Although we could live on my husband's income, I love what I do and my career matters to me."

"I really don't want to have to give up work."