

## **LISBURN CHILDMINDER WINS**

### **COW & GATE CHILDMINDER OF THE YEAR**

LISBURN childminder **Irene Leonard** has been selected by baby nutrition experts, Cow & Gate, and the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) as the winner of this year's Childminder of the Year Award.

This year is a very special year for the award as NICMA is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The finals took place on November 23<sup>rd</sup> at Malone House in Belfast, when the 6 chosen finalists competed for the title, a Tyrone crystal trophy and a cheque for £500.

Stefan Menet of Cow & Gate, said, "Cow & Gate is delighted to be working with NICMA on the Childminder of the Year Award this year, especially in their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

"NICMA registered professional childminders are a very important part of many households all across Northern Ireland and provide a service which is second to none. Cow & Gate recognises the sterling work they do and through these awards are able to recognise and reward the best of them.

"I have no doubt that this year's winner, Irene Leonard, will once again reflect all that's good about the profession of childminding."

Bridget Nodder, Director of NICMA, said, "NICMA is now 25 years of age and has been working with Cow & Gate for more than half of those years on the Childminder of the Year Awards. These Awards are the Northern Ireland Oscars of childminding. Irene Leonard is a childminder who in the judges' opinion has attained the highest standards in the profession and deserves the recognition of being named as Childminder of the Year.

"Congratulations to this year's finalists. You are a credit to your profession. Although there was only one winner, in fact, the real winners are the children which all of our members take care of and their families."

(more.....)

Irene was nominated for the award by Joyce Cleland of Lisburn whose three children Dawson (9), Abi (6) and Jack (2) Irene looks after while Joyce is at work.

Joyce says, "I nominated Irene because she is an outstanding childminder who puts so much effort, love and care into her job. She provides an organised, secure and nurturing environment for my children where they get the chance to go on trips, play games and have fun. I love the texts she sends me with photos of a play-doh cake or someone on the swings. And she hasn't had a day off sick in almost 10 years!

Irene may be looking after Joyce's children for ten years but she has been a professional childminder for 25 - exactly the same time as NICMA has been in existence!

She gave up her bank job and started childminding when her own family were small in order to be at home with them and also have a profession. She and her husband, David, have three children Stephen, Paula and Rebecca who are now grown up.

Irene currently looks after four children and reckons she has minded about 19 in total over the years.

"I was completely shocked when I was told that I had been selected as a finalist in the Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year Award", she says. "I don't know how Joyce found out about the awards but I am very pleased that she considers me good enough to be nominated."

Irene takes her job very seriously and would advise anyone thinking of going into the profession to take it seriously too. "It is a huge commitment", she says, "and I would advise anyone thinking of taking up childminding to think about the effect it might have on their own family. I would also advise them to speak to other childminders to get a good idea of what it all entails. And, of course, to speak to the people at NICMA."

Her childminding along with her Keep Fit regime means that she starts at 6.15 in the morning in the gym; gets home at about 7.20 and prepares for her charges arriving at about 8 am. As well as her interest in Keep Fit Irene also works hard for the Girls Brigade in her local church.

(more....)

Irene says that she would use the prize money to buy herself some sort of memento of the occasion and also on an outfit for her daughter's forthcoming wedding.

During her 25 years as a childminder Irene has had experience of the great support which NICMA gives its members. "I think my NICMA membership to be very good value", she says. "They guide us all through the insurance maze and through any training we would like to do. There is always a listening ear there when we want to talk; they provide useful literature and help us with any form-filling we have to do to comply with current legislation."

Irene aims to ensure that her little charges are happy to come to her; that they feel secure with her and enjoy their time with her. She aims to help to develop confident children.

"Childminding is a demanding job. It is very hard work", she adds, "and it can be solitary. So I make an effort to meet other childminders through the Lisburn Group of which I am secretary."



Winner of the 2009 Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year, Irene Leonard from Lisburn, with her Tyrone Crystal trophy.

Irene also received a cheque for £500 and her nominator, Joyce Cleland, a 'thank you' cheque for £100 from Cow & Gate. Cow & Gate runs the annual Childminder of the Year award in recognition of the sterling work that professional childminders do and to reward the best of them.

Irene was considered by Awards judges Liz McCorkell, Chair of the Northern Ireland Childminding Association and Sarah Travers of the BBC, as the finalist who had attained the highest standard in her profession and deserved the recognition of being named as Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year.

Winner of the 2009 Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year, Irene Leonard from Lisburn, receives the



Tyrone Crystal trophy from Alison Hanna, Cow & Gate Territory Manager. Also in the picture are (from left) Stefan Menet of Cow & Gate; Sarah Travers of the BBC and Liz McCorkell of the Northern Ireland Childminder Association (NICMA), the Award judges; and Bridget Nodder, Director of NICMA.

Irene was considered by the Award judges as the finalist who had attained the highest standard in her profession and deserved the recognition of being named as Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year.

The Finals took place in Malone House, Belfast.

Winner of the 2009 Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year, Irene Leonard from Lisburn, with her charges Jack (2) and Abi (7) Cleland, whose mother, Joyce, nominated Irene for the award.

The judges of the Awards, Liz McCorkell, Chair of the Northern Ireland Childminding Association and Sarah Travers of the BBC judged Irene as the finalist who had attained the highest standard in her profession and deserved the recognition of being named as Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year.



Winner of the 2009 Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year, Irene Leonard (centre) from Lisburn, with (from left) Alison Hanna, Territory Manager at Cow & Gate; judge Sarah Travers from the BBC; judge Liz McCorkell Chair of the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) and Bridget Nodder, Director of NICMA.



Winner of the 2009 Cow & Gate Childminder of the Year, Irene Leonard (centre) from Lisburn, with (from left) Awards judges Sarah Travers from the BBC and Liz McCorkell, Chair of the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) and one of Irene's charges, Abi Cleland (7), whose mother Joyce nominated Irene for the Award.