



NEWS RELEASE.....NEWS RELEASE.....NEWS RELEASE

Rural funding to provide more childcare

NICMA welcomes grant to recruit more childminders

For immediate use

NICMA – the Childminding Association says it hopes to create a further 400 childcare places in rural communities, thanks to a grant from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) through the Rural Childcare Programme.

The charity has been awarded £173,000 for a pilot scheme aimed at recruiting and supporting up to 150 new registered childminders in 15 rural areas throughout Northern Ireland.

Maeve Milne, NICMA's Project Co-ordinator for the programme, says the scheme provides a valuable opportunity to help tackle the shortage of suitable childcare in many rural districts:

“We certainly believe the project will make a significant difference in the areas which we're targeting,” she says.

“We know many people in rural communities find it very difficult to access quality childcare which suits their needs.

“For many parents, the shortage of childcare is a real barrier to being able to take a job.”

In a survey commissioned by NICMA and carried out by Ipsos MORI, 43% of rural parents who'd recently sought childcare said they had found it difficult or impossible to find childcare, compared to 28% in urban areas.

In addition to creating hundreds of childcare places, the project will also offer a comprehensive programme of professional support and training for the new childminders.

“Many newly-registered childminders leave the profession within the first year and lack of business know-how is undoubtedly a factor,” explains Maeve.

“The support and training offered by this programme will equip our new recruits with the business skills and professional know-how they need to succeed.

“That's important because we want to create sustainable, high-quality childcare places which parents can depend on.”

The charity will also be working to persuade new childminders to be flexible in their approach to the hours they're prepared to work.

“Rural parents often have to commute long distances,” observes Maeve. ***“That means they need childcare which is available for longer than the traditional 9 – 5 day.***

“To some extent, it’s about encouraging childminders to be prepared to think outside the box.

“So, for instance, we might suggest to one childminder that they team up with a colleague to offer five longer days a week between them, if they don’t want to do it individually.”

The pilot scheme will be running until March 2011. NICMA hopes that the pilot will help to influence and develop future rural childcare strategies.

If you would like to find out more about NICMA’s rural childcare project or you’d like any information on childminding, please contact either Maeve Milne on 07855 144138 or NICMA on 028 9181 1015. More information is also available on NICMA’s website: www.nicma.org

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