



# Briefing Paper

## Childminder Start-Up Package



# Introduction

The right for families to have access to affordable, quality childcare is fundamental to Northern Ireland's future economic prosperity, to tackling child poverty, and to achieving the best possible outcomes for all children.

Lack of access to affordable, quality childcare is preventing a large proportion of women in Northern Ireland from seeking work.

Childminding is the most affordable and the most popular full-time daycare option for working families in Northern Ireland.

But there's a serious shortage of registered childminders here and the problem is getting worse.

NICMA wants to assist the Northern Ireland Executive in addressing the issue.

## our Proposal

We're asking the Executive to fund an innovative '**Childminder Start-Up Package**'. This would tackle the three problems the childminding sector here currently faces:

- a **growing reluctance** on the part of potential recruits **to embark on childminding** as a career
- a **notable unwillingness** among many childminders **to go through the registration process, thus potentially putting children at risk**
- a **high drop-out rate** among childminders during registration and during the first year in business

To address these issues, the package would include:

1. **Childminder Start-Up grants** to encourage more individuals to choose childminding and to go through the registration process. The grants would help with the cost of setting up and registering as a childminding business. These grants would be of particular benefit in those areas of social deprivation where childminding provision is low; individuals in such areas often find the start up costs associated with becoming a childminder, such as buying equipment and insurance, are particularly difficult.
2. **One-to-one mentoring support** for those individuals going through the registration process and during their first year working as a childminder. The main reason that so many prospective and new childminders drop out is a lack of support and guidance. NICMA has already pioneered one-to-one mentoring on a small scale. Our experience shows that, by providing a personal advisor to support new recruits through this crucial time, those individuals are much more likely to stay the course.

## Why is this important?

- **Registered childminding** is by far the most popular - and affordable - form of full-time childcare in Northern Ireland; it **accounts for 76% of full-time daycare places** and 44% of all childcare places in Northern Ireland.
- There has been a **19% drop in the supply of places with registered childminders** in the three years to March 2006<sup>1</sup>.
- In 2003, a comprehensive survey of parents and childcare providers in Northern Ireland found that:<sup>2</sup>
  - There was a **significant shortfall in childcare places**, particularly in rural areas and in the eastern part of NI
  - **Two-thirds of non-employed mothers said that lack of adequate, quality childcare deterred them from seeking work**
  - **Demand for childminding far outstripped supply**
  - A further **20% expansion in the number of childminders was needed to meet demand**
  - There had been a **significant increase in the use of unregistered childminders**, thus increasing the potential risk to children.
- **Northern Ireland is missing out on childminding support initiatives which have been introduced in the Republic of Ireland, and in England and Wales:**
  - in the Republic of Ireland, Childminder Development Grants of up to €630 are available both for prospective childminders as set-up grants, and also for existing childminders who wish to improve the quality of their service
  - in England, Sure Start funds Childminder Start Up Grants as part of its childminding recruitment campaign
  - the Welsh Assembly also makes a start up grant available for new recruits
- **Economic growth in Northern Ireland is forecast to be concentrated in the industries typically employing a high number of women** – if we don't have adequate childcare provision, the resulting labour shortages will prevent Northern Ireland from realising its full economic potential.<sup>3</sup>
- **Childminding is an invaluable community resource:**
  - children are cared for in their own community, enabling them to develop their own local connections and link with community based services
  - the development of childminding within communities can enhance local capacity by creating training and employment opportunities for excluded groups
  - from an economic perspective, the provision of community based childminding helps to build social

capital and ensures that earnings are both generated in and stay within the local community.

## What will it cost?

Our proposal would require just **£300,000 annually** for an initial period of three years. This would enable the roll-out of the **Childminder Start-Up Package** across Northern Ireland, with priority being given to those areas most in need of childminding provision.

The sum we are requesting would fund the following:

- Start-Up Grants to the value of £400 for prospective childminders
- The training and employment of five personal childminding advisors to enable each new childminder to receive one-to-one support during registration and their first year of operation
- The cost of publicising and administering the scheme if undertaken by NICMA

The scheme would be fully evaluated annually to ensure value for money.

## Where should the scheme be introduced first?

Families throughout Northern Ireland could benefit from this scheme - that's why we want to see it introduced throughout Northern Ireland. But we appreciate the financial constraints faced by the new Executive. That's why we're advocating a phased roll-out of the scheme..

Our evidence suggests that the need is particularly acute in the following areas:

- **Derry/Londonderry** - shortages are particularly severe in a number of Cityside wards - the Creggan, Brandywell and Bogside wards each have just one childminder.
- **South and East Belfast** - this area has seen 17% drop in childminding provision over the past few years. Inner city wards such as Blackstaff, The Mount and Shaftesbury have few or no childminders at all.<sup>4</sup>
- **County Fermanagh** - Belleek, Garrison, Newtownbutler and Roslea all suffer from low provision.

<sup>1</sup>Children Order Statistical Bulletin 2006. The actual number of registered childminders has fallen by 14% during the same period.

<sup>2</sup>Gray, A and Bruegal, I. The availability, use of and demand for childcare services among the parents of children aged 0-14 in Northern Ireland. Commissioned by the Equality Commission, DEL and the 4 Childcare Partnerships in 2003

<sup>3</sup>NISCC Stage 1 Skills Assessment Report for Early Years and Childcare

<sup>4</sup>South & East Belfast Health & Social Services Trust: Review of Early Years Services June 2005

## Why this proposal matters

Our proposal provides a unique opportunity to increase childminding provision in a cost effective way which will:

- **Improve outcomes for children and young people** as early childhood development is the foundation of lifelong learning and helps to provide a fair start in life for all children.
- Offer **equality of access** for women entering or staying in the labour market.
- Contribute to **social integration and inclusion**. Childcare helps to combat poverty by increasing opportunities for parents, especially mothers, to be economically independent.

**NICMA**

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NICMA – the Childminding Association is a membership organisation and charity working to promote and develop quality home-based childcare across the whole of Northern Ireland for the benefit of children, families and communities. It is the sole organisation representing childminders in Northern Ireland with 74% of registered childminders here as members.





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