



Foreword

Welcome to the Women's Centres Regional Partnership(WCRP) Childcare Mapping and Research Report 2010. Women's Centres have been providing community based childcare services since the early 1980's. These services are accessed by children and parents from the most disadvantaged communities throughout Northern Ireland.

The report aims to bring to the attention of government the extent and far reaching influence of the childcare services provided on a daily basis throughout each year. The contribution this makes to community development in deprived areas is often under estimated, overlooked and undervalued. Early interventions and support for thousands of children is a powerful pillar of support in communities where poverty and underachievement are the order of the day.

Our aim is to influence future government policy and agents of change in society to ensure the maintainence and sustainability of these crucially important front line childcare services. Thanks to all who contributed to the report and to DSD/VCU for their assistance and support.

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Chairperson - WCRP Childcare sub-group.
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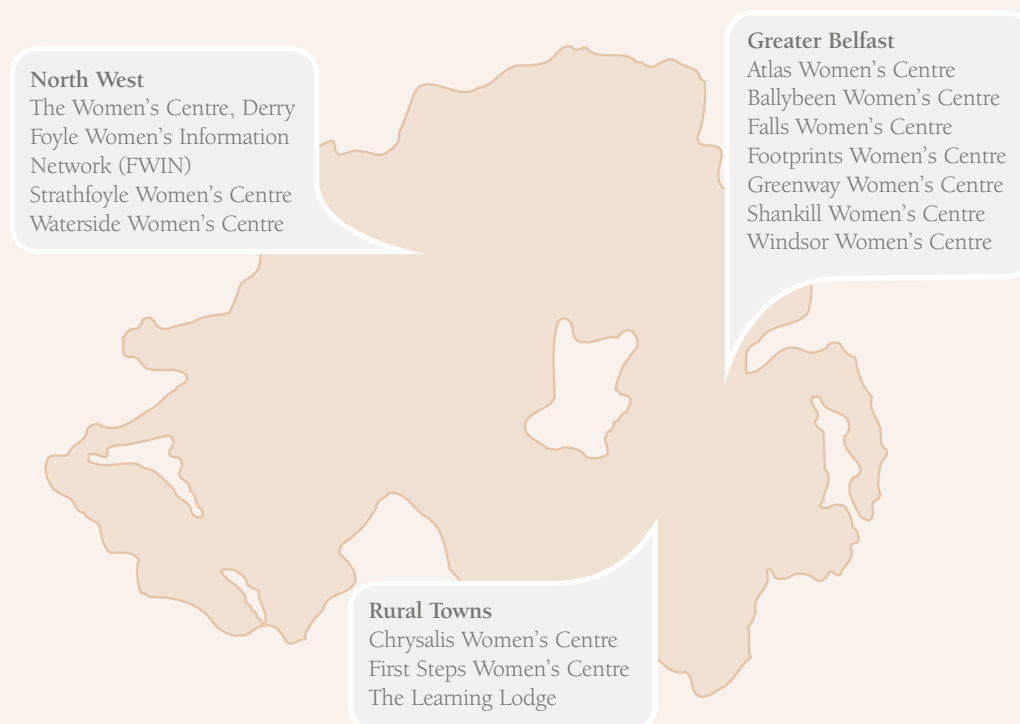
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1.0 Introduction to the Women's Centres Regional Partnership

1.1 WCRP and Location of Women's Centres

The Women's Centre Regional Partnership (WCRP) is a partnership of four lead organisations established following the 2005 cross departmental review of the women's sector. The lead partners are the Women's Centre Derry, the Women's Support Network (WSN), the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). There are fourteen stakeholder women's organisations within the partnership. These centres are highlighted in the map below.



The WCRP aims to tackle women's inequality and support community development in the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The partnership encourages collaborative and strategic work on key areas such as influencing policy, identifying needs and gaps in relation to training, education and childcare services, improving communication on good practice and lessons learnt across the sector, and identifying potential sources of funding.

The women's organisations comprising the WCRP are situated in areas of very high levels of social and economic disadvantage. According to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), the majority of the women's centres are situated in the top 30% most deprived super output areas. Five of the centres are geographically located in the 10% most deprived Super Output Areas; four are in the 10-20% most deprived Super Output Areas; and a further four are in the 20-30% most disadvantaged band.

Table 1: Deprivation statistics relating to women's centres

Centre	Geographical Area	Overall SOA Ranking	Band
Shankill Women's Centre	Greater Belfast	2	0 - 10% most deprived
Foyle Women's Information Network	Derry	36	0 - 10%
The Women's Centre Derry	Derry	36	0 - 10%
Windsor Women's Centre	Greater Belfast	59	0 - 10%
Waterside Women's Centre	Derry	89	0 - 10%
Footprints Women's Centre	Greater Belfast	94	10 - 20%
Strathfoyle Women's Centre	Derry	96	10 - 20%
Falls Women's Centre	Greater Belfast	135	10 - 20%
Atlas Women's Centre	Lisburn	175	10 - 20%
Ballybeen Women's Centre	Greater Belfast	183	20 - 30%
Greenway Women's Centre	Greater Belfast	231	20 - 30%
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Craigavon	249	20 - 30%
First Steps Women's Centre	Dungannon	267	20 - 30%
The Learning Lodge	Magherafelt	576	60 - 70%

Note * This table reflects the location and SOA ranking of the Women's centres. It is important to note that children from the 10%-20% most disadvantaged areas use facilities and access the service at all of the above centres.

There are women's centres situated in pockets of deprivation that are, in some cases, surrounded by areas of affluence. For example, many of the women who attend Greenway Women's Centre live within a block of flats even though there are houses opposite that have a high market value. Women attending the centres who live in outlying rural areas face additional barriers including lack of facilities (for themselves and for pre-school children) and often limited access to transport. This adds to social isolation, for both parent and child.

Many of the women and children attending women's centres situated in less disadvantaged Super Output Areas come from socially marginalised backgrounds. For example, many of the women and children accessing childcare provision at The Learning Lodge come from either Leckagh estate (a predominantly Protestant estate) or Killowen estate (a predominantly Catholic estate). The centre sees itself as a cross-community Centre catering for those experiencing social isolation, who are unable (or unwilling) to access statutory support services.

1.2 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to map the childcare service offered by the women's centres in the partnership in order to inform government, potential funders and relevant stakeholders of the impact of the service on women and children from disadvantaged communities.

1.3 Women's Centres Services and Childcare

The women's centres provide children from disadvantaged communities with access to regular high quality childcare based in local community settings. In addition centres organise programmes that enable mothers to access opportunities for learning and development in a flexible and supportive environment. Programmes are designed to increase skills, employability and the confidence to transform lives and promote community development. Table 2 a and b provide an overview of the services offered.

Table 2 (a): Childcare Services

Childcare Services
Free childcare for education and training programmes
Sessional day care (up to 4 hours)
Social Services referrals
Special needs childcare
Drop in childcare (flexible)
After schools childcare
Summer Scheme childcare
Respite childcare
Full day care (4 hours +)
Sure Start childcare

Table 2 (b): Programmes/Services and Course offered

Programmes/Projects and Courses
Range of FE/HE Education Course
Range of Project provided education programmes
Accredited vocational training programmes
Health related programmes
Drop-in services
Counselling
Young Women's programme
Minority ethnic targeted programmes
Advice services
Young Mums programme
Complementary therapy
Toddler yoga, baby yoga, and baby massage
Supported back to work programme
Culture and diversity
European projects
Information and signposting
Dance groups
Life skills
Parent advice clinic
Parent and child play therapy.

The women's centres are well established organisations, located in areas of social and economic disadvantage throughout NI. Table 2(a) demonstrates how the women's centres provide a comprehensive range of childcare services. Their expertise enables them to successfully target and customise programme delivery. The centres have created holistic effective models to meet the needs of women and children. For many women it would not be possible to access services without the availability of childcare highlighted in Table 2(b). This mapping report also identifies that for many babies and children this is their only access to social play and integration outside the home.

"Some of the children at our crèche live in flats and do not get the opportunity to play outside in a garden. Attending the crèche gives them the opportunity to do so." Childcare Worker

1.4 Current Funding of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland

The level of funding provided by the Executive across Northern Ireland for functions that are directly related to childcare is detailed in the table below.¹

Table 3: Childcare funding programmes

Programme/Dept.	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	Total
Rural Childcare Programme (DARD)	£ N/A	£ N/A	£1.3m	£1.3m
NICMA Funding (DE)	£68k	£69k	£70k	£207k
Steps to Work Programme - The Childcare Allowance Scheme (DEL)	£587K	£585K	£633K	£1.8m
Further Education-Care to Learn (DEL)	£150K	£326K	£351K	£827k
Further Education Awards (DEL) *	£99K	£213K	£379k	£691k
Further Education - Support Funds (DEL)	£111K	£137K	£ Not available until July 2010	£248k
European Social Fund (DEL)	£230K	£394K	£383K	£1.0m
Children and Young People's Fund (DSD)	£881K	N/A	N/A	£881k
The Women's Centres Childcare Fund (DSD)	£ N/A	£850K	£889K	£1.7m
Neighbourhood Renewal - Childcare element (DSD)	£630K (est)	£630K (est)	£630K (est)	£1.9m (est)
Gingerbread (Derry) Funding (DSD)	£ N/A	£ N/A	£19K	£19k
Overall Total	£2.8m (est)	£3.2m (est)	£4.7m (est)	£10.6m (est)

Note * FE Awards relate to the childcare costs of students and are not just FE awards i.e. student grants

The main challenge facing the thirteen centres is sustainable funding. Currently the women's centres have to seek funding from two or more funding bodies.

A survey carried out by the WCRP in 2009 highlighted that an estimated £1.3 million is required on a yearly basis to cover the costs of supported childcare in the 13 women's centres (see Table 4a). Feedback from a questionnaire distributed to WCRP centres showed that a significant proportion (67%) of the total funding received by the women's centres is from DSD. For 2009/10 this is around £889k. The tables below show the total childcare running costs for centres, the range of funding bodies from whom the thirteen centre's currently receive funding; and when the current funding finishes.

[1] Information obtained from written answers to questions to the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister, AQW 6334/10, 21 May 2010, see www.niassembly.gov.uk/qanda/2007mandate/writtenans/2009/100521.htm

Table 4 (a): WCRP Womens Centre Total Childcare Running Costs

Centres	Salary Costs	Running Costs	Total
Greater Belfast:			
Atlas			
Ballybeen			
Falls			
Footprints			
Greenway			
Shankill			
Windsor			
TOTAL	£727 586	£134 055	£861 641
North West:			
The Womens Centre			
Strathfoyle Womens centre			
Waterside Womens Centre			
TOTAL	£144 939	£16 320	£161 259
Rural:			
Chrysalis			
Leaming Lodge			
First Steps			
TOTAL	£126 595	£157 372	£283 967
OVERALL TOTAL	£999 120	£307 747	£1 306 867

Table 4 (b): Funding programmes supporting WCRP Centres childcare service

Agency / Funder	No of Centres	When funding ceases
DSD Women's Centre Childcare Fund	13	March 2011
Health and Social Care Trusts	7	March 2010 / March 2011
Early Years (formerly NIPPA)	5	March 2010 / March 2011 / June 2010 ²
Sure Start	3	March 2010 / June 2010
Lottery funding	2	March 2014 / June 2010
Children in Need	2	June 2011 / November 2010
DEL	2	March 2011
DENI Pre-school expansion	1	March 2010
NIHE Small Pockets of Deprivation	1	March 2011

Table 4(b) indicates that not all women's centres access the full range of government funding schemes available for childcare. In addition, the majority of funding received by WCRP centres for childcare service ends in 2011.

Currently funding supports salary costs, insurance, running costs, equipment, and maintaining quality childcare provision. The greatest challenge for centres is securing enough funding each year to pay for the staff required for all aspects of work with children. The high level of short-term funding (including Service Level Agreements) results in staff being regularly placed on protective notice; this lowers staff morale and can result in a high staff turnover as they seek secure employment.

[2] There are three dates here as different centres funding ceases at different times.

The limited funding within the WCRP women's centres restricts the number of childcare places they can accommodate, staff training and development, upkeep of equipment and the expansion of the service to meet the growing need.

Government and other funding programmes have continually placed emphasis on the need to build sustainability. A small number of centres have developed a social economy business model. Those providing childcare (half-day or full-day) for working parents charge fees, at levels accessible for people on low incomes.

Without external funding the childcare provision currently offered would not be possible. Longer more dependable funding is required to help sustain the crèches. Currently there is an excess demand for services. Additional funding is required to help meet the future potential rise in demands due to policy developments, for example the child poverty strategy and welfare reform legislation.

2.0 The Policy and Strategic Context of Childcare in Northern Ireland

This chapter sets out policies relating to childcare provision in Northern Ireland. This is relevant to the work of women's centres which provide childcare places enabling women in disadvantaged areas to enter/re-enter education, training, employment and to access services such as advice and counselling. We have reviewed all the Government Departments as we believe all Government Departments have a role to play in childcare provision to support their policies.

2.1 DENI Investing In Early Learning (1998)

The Department of Education's Investing in Early Learning Strategy was published in 1998. At the core of the Strategy was a Pre-School Education Expansion Programme which aimed to secure 2,200 additional pre-school places in Northern Ireland from September 1998 (DENI, 1998:1). The strategy recognised the role of a number of sectors in pre-school education, with the Minister for Education, Tony Worthington stating:

I hope that providers of pre-school education in all sectors- statutory, private, voluntary and community-will take full opportunity to share their experience and exchange best practice in working with young children and their parents. (Ibid)

Responsibility for implementation of the programme was delegated to Education and Library Boards in partnership with childcare providers in statutory, private and voluntary sectors. To facilitate this partnership working, the Strategy announced the development of a number of Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (Ibid; 4).

The Investing in Early Learning Strategy is relevant as a number of the women's centres provide pre-school places.

2.2 Children First (1999)

The policy context for childcare in Northern Ireland is primarily located in the current childcare strategy entitled Children First which was published in 1999. Childcare policy is currently the responsibility of three departments, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSSPS), the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE). The strategy acknowledged that "childcare has been neglected for too long" and that the number of childcare places failed to meet demand (DHSSPS, 1999: 4). Furthermore the strategy highlighted issues such as affordability of childcare and inconsistencies with regards to quality (DHSSPS, 1999: 4). The strategy aimed to address these by investing in training childcare workers, making childcare affordable by providing help for childcare costs for parents in education and training, creating more preschool and out of school places, improving information on childcare to assist parents in making choices and developing childcare partnerships (DHSSPS, 1999: 7,8). The Strategy acknowledged the role of the

statutory, voluntary and community, and private sectors in providing childcare in Northern Ireland.

The Strategy aimed to increase access to childcare across a number of different settings including Sure Start, pre -school education, after schools provision and special needs provision (DHSSPS, 1999: 13). The women's centres have clearly had a role in the implementation of Children First given the range of childcare provision provided across the centres including free childcare places for women accessing education and training, after schools provision and special needs provision.

2.3 Review of Children First 2005

The DHSSPS commissioned Capita to conduct a review of the effectiveness of Children First in 2005. The Review highlighted that many steps had been taken to improve childcare in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS, 2005: 10). The Review however made a number of recommendations, including the development of a new childcare strategy for Northern Ireland, allocation of mainstream funding to the strategy, making government departments responsible for implementing the strategy by outlining clear roles and responsibilities, assigning lead responsibility for childcare to one government department and one Minister and strengthening local level capacity to implement the priorities set out in a childcare strategy (Ibid: 72).

2.4 Our Children and Young People- Our Pledge: A Ten Year Strategy for working with Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016.

The Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdFM) published the Children's Strategy in 2006. The Strategy outlines that all government departments have responsibilities in relation to childcare. The Strategy makes a number of commitments in relation to childcare including: introducing extended schools 'to provide activities beyond the school day to help meet the needs of pupils, families and the wider community' and expanding Sure Start schemes by targeting children under 4 years from 20% of the most disadvantaged areas (OFMdFM, 2006a:52).

2.5 Children and Young People's Funding Package 2006-2008

The Children and Young People's Funding Package was announced by Secretary State for Northern Ireland in March 2006. The funding package of £61.7m million between 2006-2008 was aimed at funding extended schools, extended early years provision, looked after children, youth provision, child protection, children with special needs and disabilities.³

2.6 DSD Women's Centre's Childcare Fund

As highlighted earlier in the report, the majority of funding for childcare provision in the women's centres is funded by the Voluntary and Community Unit, Department for Social Development (DSD). This fund is an emergency fund and is due to end in March 2011 as DSD anticipates that the development of the childcare strategy would be completed and that future funding would be incorporated in the new strategy.

[3] Information on Children and Young People's Funding Package obtained from www.deni.gov.uk/children-and-young-people-funding-package.pdf

2.7 OFMdfM Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2006-2016

The Gender Equality Strategy is an overarching cross departmental strategy and was published by OFMdfM in 2006. Although the strategy does not contain commitments in relation to childcare provisions, one of key action areas in the strategy is around childcare and caring responsibilities. The NI strategic objectives relating to childcare are the better collection and dissemination of data; equal pay for equal value of work; and promoting an inclusive society (OFMdfM, 2006b: 10). The strategy also highlights that there will be mid term review of the strategy and there are a number of key actions including: examination of high quality and affordable childcare options; and collating information on childcare (Ibid, 10).

Cross departmental gender action plans have been developed to implement the gender equality strategy, one for men and one for women. The women's action plan recognises childcare as a barrier to gender equality and includes departmental planned outcomes such the development of a childcare strategy and undertaking a policy and economic appraisal (OFMDFM, 2008-2011c: 12).

2.8 OFMdfM Life - Time Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland 2006

The Life-Time Opportunities anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland was published by OFMdfM in 2006. The strategy highlighted that quality childcare was a challenge and affordability remained a barrier for those working on low incomes. The strategy highlighted earlier developments in relation to childcare such as the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme which provided additional places in the voluntary and private sectors as well as nursery places (OFMdfM, 2006d:15). The Strategy committed to build on such developments by establishing children's centres in the most disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland (OFMdfM, 2006d: 30). The strategy also recognised that rural communities were also at risk of deprivation, particularly where accessibility of services was an issue (OFMdfM, 2006: 10). Some of the Early Years goals set out in the strategy included ensuring accessible day care provision and crèches for rural children (OFMdfM, 2006d: 31).

2.9 Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit

Eligible working parents have been able to get assistance with up to 80% of childcare costs through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credits since April 2006. Childcare must be registered or approved, for example: registered or approved by the health and social care trust; out of school hours childcare provided by schools or education and library boards, or registered health and social care trust; a person approved under Northern Ireland tax credits legislation; or an approved foster carer. ⁴ The Childcare element of tax credits is relevant to women's centres providing childcare based on a social economy model as this may assist working parents to access this childcare provision.

[4] Information on Tax Credits obtained from www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets/wtc5.pdf, last accessed 23 July 2010

2.10 Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) European Social Fund Programme

The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) does not have a childcare policy or strategy. However, it has incorporated financial assistance with childcare costs within a number of its training and education programmes. Of particular relevance to women's centres, DEL has provided European Social Fund Programme Funding to some women's centres for training programmes aimed at addressing women's barriers to the labour market. Childcare has been included as a support structure within such programmes (DEL, 2008: 81).

2.11 Programme for Government 2008-2011

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (PFG) 2008-2011 contains a number of goals which fall within the remit of the work of the women's centres. The document contains a commitment to ensure access to affordable quality childcare (PFG, 2008: 12). The policy document contains commitments to develop and implement an Early Years Strategy, re-establish the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and specific goals to eliminate child poverty (PFG, 2008: 34, 35).

2.12 Rural Childcare Stakeholders Report and DARD Rural Childcare Programme

The Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development established the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group in 2007. The Stakeholders group published a report in 2008 entitled "Rural Childcare: Investing in the Future" which outlined the particular challenges of childcare delivery and accessibility in rural areas (Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group, 2008: 5). The report confirmed that rural areas do face particular and distinct challenges in relation to the delivery of and access to rural childcare services. The report made a number of recommendations for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) along with other Government Departments in how rural childcare services could be improved. In particular the report recommended establishing a Rural Childcare Funding Programme "with the aim of addressing rural specific need and circumstance with particular focus on rural access" (Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group, 2008: 7). Subsequently, DARD introduced a £1.5 Million Rural Childcare Programme to improve childcare provision in rural areas. The Programme was aimed at pilot projects run by community organisations that tackled a number of priority areas including: access to childcare services; early years integration; quality and safety of provision; sustainability and affordability (DARD, 2008: 2). The report concluded that an investment in rural childcare is an investment in a rural future.

2.13 DHSSPS Families Matter 2009

The Families Matter strategy was published by DHSSPS in 2009 to support the OFMdFM Children's Strategy and contains four key themes: information for parents and service planners; access to services; supporting families and parents and working together for children and families. A central component of the strategy is the family support model which is described in the strategy as "the provision of a

range of supports and services to ensure that all children and young people are given the opportunity to develop to their full potential" (DHSSPS,2009:18).

The Strategy is particularly relevant to the provision of childcare by women's centres as some of the centres provide a range of child care places to support families and parents. For example some of the centres provide childcare places for families in receipt of family support packages, receive social service referrals for childcare places in situations where families are experiencing difficulties or provide respite childcare places.

2.14 Child Poverty Act 2010 and Mapping the Route to 2020

The Child Poverty Act 2010 received Royal Assent in March 2010. Section 9 (5) (d) of the Act sets out that the Secretary of State in preparing a UK Child Poverty Strategy must consider what measures need to be taken in a number of areas including childcare. Furthermore Section 12 of the Act sets out that Northern Ireland devolved administration must produce a strategy that sets out measures that Northern Ireland Departments must take to assist the Secretary of State to comply with targets to alleviate child poverty and to ensure children do not experience socio-economic disadvantage.

The UK Treasury has published a paper on child poverty called 'Ending Child Poverty: Mapping the Route to 2020'. This document sets out the Government's policy in working towards the development of a UK wide Child Poverty strategy. The document highlights that disadvantage can only be tackled by addressing a range of issues including employment, skills and childcare amongst others (HM Treasury, 2010: 3). The document provides that the Northern Ireland Administration is developing a monitoring framework to underpin the Life-time Opportunities strategy and the Child Poverty Strategy once published (Ibid: 39). The issue of childcare is a central factor in eradicating child poverty as highlighted by the Law Centre NI who cite childcare as barrier to employment stating "any child poverty strategy needs to make progress in this area if the route to work is to be a meaningful route out of poverty " (Law Centre NI, 2010: 4).

OFMDFM will be taking lead responsibility on developing a Child Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland which is to be published by March 2011 and has been engaging with key stakeholders in the process of policy development through a pre consultation discussion paper and public events. We will be keen to ensure community based childcare in the women's centres is recognised as having an important role in contributing to the eradication of child poverty.

2.15 DETI Social Economy Enterprise Strategy

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) published its Social Economy Enterprise Strategy in March 2010 and the vision is to encourage greater "social entrepreneurial activity and is supportive of those SEE's that want to grow" (DETI, 2010: 16). This strategy does not make reference to child care provision in the women's centres, however it makes a reference to rural childcare provision within the Rural Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework (DETI, 2010: 37).

The Social Economy Enterprise Strategy is particularly relevant as some of the women's centres offer childcare provision based on a social economy model.

2.16 DENI Funding for Pre-School Places 2010

The Education Minister, Catriona Ruane announced a funding package of £1.3million to fund pre-school places in May 2010. The Minister highlighted that there has been a shortfall of around 1,200 places and the aim of this package is to "ensure, that where possible, every child will be placed for the 2010-2011 school year." ⁵

2.17 Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 was given Royal Assent in August. The Act includes obligations for lone parents with children aged seven or over to look for employment from 25 October 2010 (Explanatory Notes, 2010: 12). Concerns were raised in the Committee stages to the Welfare Reform Bill by organisations such as the Law Centre NI, particularly in relation to provisions relating to lone parents, given that unlike in England, Northern Ireland has no childcare strategy or infrastructure in place to support the proposals (Committee for Social Development, 2010: 19).

Community based childcare provided by the women's centres have an important role to play in the implementation of this legislation. Sustaining existing childcare provision as well as providing financial resources for additional childcare places will be essential to support provisions contained in the Welfare Reform Act.

2.18 Other Forthcoming Policy Developments

2.18.1 Department of Education Early Years Strategy

The Department of Education (DE) has recently published a Draft Early Years Strategy for 0-6 year olds. The Strategy is a five year strategy running from 2010-2015 and has four key priorities or objectives including: quality of provision of outcomes; respecting the role of parents and carers; improved equity of access; and the importance of more effective linkages in the delivery of services (DENI, 2010: 15, 18). Whilst childcare provision in community based women's centres is not explicitly mentioned, the strategy states that the aims "will require all those involved-parents, the government, the community, statutory, voluntary and private sectors- to work together to provide quality learning environments and services for children..." (DENI, 2010: 18). The strategy also indicates that new financial resources may not be made available; rather "it may be a case of making better use of existing resources..." (DENI, 2010: 18). DE has also committed to working with OFMdfM in relation to future childcare policy (DENI, 2010: 19)

[5] Information obtained from press release on DENI's website, available at the following link: www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-de/news-de-may-2010/news-de-200510-1.3-million-announced

2.18.2 OFMdFM Policy and Economic Appraisal on a Childcare Strategy

OFMdFM has commissioned FGS McClure Watters to undertake a policy and economic appraisal of options for a childcare strategy. The appraisal contains a number of options including:

- Retention of current lines of responsibility;
- Preparation of a childcare strategy and action plan for 2011-2012;
- A lead department taking full responsibility;
- A single department taking lead responsibility but working through contractual arrangements with other departments;
- Devolution of childcare to district councils or regional childcare through education and health authorities.

The consultants are currently compiling their report which was initially due to be completed at the end of April 2010. We are waiting to see if the role of community based childcare is recognised within this report and in the Early Years Strategy.

2.18.3 DARD Rural White Paper

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is currently developing a Rural White Paper. In the draft version presented to Minister Gildernew on January 27th 2010 to take to the Assembly; childcare provision is addressed under the theme, 'Rural Services'. The Rural White Paper draft is currently being examined and contributed to by a cross Departmental Project Board. It is anticipated there will be a consultation process in Spring 2011; followed by the publication of the final Rural White Paper. Community based childcare will hopefully form part of its policy proposals.

2.19 Conclusions

Having considered the policy and strategic context of childcare policy in Northern Ireland it is clear that childcare policy is piecemeal and disjointed with no single department currently taking the policy lead. Hopefully this will be remedied with the development and introduction of an integrated childcare strategy for Northern Ireland. However we do not yet know the outcomes of policy and economic appraisal commissioned by OFMdFM or what shape the DE Early Years Strategy or Rural White Paper will take.

The women's centres have played a major role in the implementation of government policies, such as childcare strategies, education and training, gender equality, anti-poverty and family support services through provision of community based childcare. This can be seen in the range of childcare provision which will be discussed in the next chapter in detail. Potentially, the women's centres have a role to play in contributing to future policy development for example in the eradication of child poverty. It is therefore vital that funding is continued to enable the women's centres to sustain existing childcare services and to enable them to meet additional demand as a result of any forthcoming policy developments.

3.0 Research Findings

3.1 Introduction

The WCRP centres emphasised that the community of interest they serve is predominantly women and their families from areas experiencing high levels of social deprivation. Having considered the policy and strategic context in Northern Ireland this section will consider the role women's centres play in the implementation of these policies. The findings covered in detail in the following sections have been derived from questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with childcare staff, women and children, NVQ students and children attending the after schools clubs.

3.2 Registered children, places, childcare provision.

In 2009 each women's centre provided statistics on the childcare service they offer. The total figures for all centres are summarised below:

- There are **1364** individual children registered for childcare within women's centres.
- **4914 childcare places are provided weekly.** The total number of places provided weekly is calculated using the formula.
(1 place = 1 child x 2 hours of childcare)
- **9828 hours of childcare provided weekly**

Centres provide pre-school childcare for women accessing education and training programmes, and for other support programmes/services. The majority of the women's centres support children age 0-4 years. A number of centres also offer projects for children up to 12 years but this is mainly for the after schools childcare and the summer scheme. The table below highlights the range of services offered by women's centres.

Table 5: Breakdown of the range of services provided.

Service	No. of Centres	No. of Centres providing 0-4 years childcare	No. of Centres providing 4-12 years childcare
Free childcare for education and training programmes	13	13	4
Sessional day care (up to 4 hours)	13	13	4
Social services referrals	11	11	3
Special needs childcare	9	9	3
Drop in childcare (flexible)	8	6	2
After schools childcare	8	2	6
Summer Scheme childcare	7	7	7
Respite childcare	6	6	2
Full day care (4 hours +)	5	5	0
Sure Start childcare	5	5	-
Childcare bursaries (FWIN)	1	1	1

All of the centres have waiting lists. Current resources and staffing levels limit the number of places that can be provided at any given time so demand cannot always be met.

A breakdown of the number of children on waiting lists within WCRP women's centres is provided *Table six*.

Table 6: Waiting lists

Service	No. of Centres with a Waiting List	No. of children on waiting lists (est)
Free childcare for education and training programmes	5	56
Sessional day care (up to 4 hours)	4	27
Social Services referrals	1	13
Drop in childcare (flexible)	2	7
After schools childcare	1	1
Summer Scheme childcare	2	33
Respite childcare	1	5
Full day care (4 hours +)	1	20
OVERALL TOTAL		162

**Figures provided April 2010: The number of children on waiting lists can regularly change due to varying levels of demand and time of year.*

To provide a holistic picture of their childcare provision, centres provided further detail on the nature of out of schools childcare, respite childcare, special needs childcare and Social Service referrals.

3.2.1 Social Services Referrals

8 of the 13 centres have service level agreements with a Health and Social Care Trust and Sure Start. Current service level agreements tend to last for one year. The majority of centres reported that social services places were currently filled. Under the service level agreements childcare may be provided for a full day, after school, a two hour session or any other period of time specified. Social services refer children who require a structured play environment or whose parents who are under severe family difficulties and require time for parenting classes or counselling sessions. Women who took part in the research testified to the importance of having this service:

“I was referred to the women’s centre by a social worker. I had been in hospital and suffered from depression; and I have six children. I started a course at the centre and two of my children attended the crèche. I’ve regained my confidence. Before I knew about the women’s centre I would not have went out the door. Because the childcare was available this made it possible for me to come to the centre.” Mother

3.2.2 Special Needs Childcare

Centres providing special needs childcare cited they provided childcare to children with a range of special needs including Down’s syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, asthma, ADHD, autism, speech and language difficulties, and developmental delay. Centres have trained staff to understand the needs of children with special needs, and one centre employs a Special Educational Needs Coordinator. The childcare staff also highlighted that they have the skills to encourage learning and development of the child:

“Last year a new child started at the crèche. His mother had not made any reference to any problems on the registration form. However, we were concerned about him and raised concerns with his mum. As a result she went to the GP, who referred them onto specialist health-care; who diagnosed him as autistic. . The change in him since he started at the crèche is quite amazing in terms of social, physical, emotional and intellectual development.” Childcare Worker

3.2.3 After Schools Childcare

Centres providing regular after schools childcare have children attending from different primary schools. This often widens the children’s social circle of friends and in many cases crosses the community divide. Some centres collect children from primary schools, whilst others rely on parents, family members, social workers or others bringing children to the centre. Centres report that all after schools places are filled, and one centre has children on the waiting list. After schools clubs provide play-based programmes; which include physical activities, arts and crafts, games, story-time, and music.

One centre offers an Art Club two afternoons a week for primary school aged children. Another centre provides out of schools childcare when parents and carers are attending health, recreational, and educational courses and workshops. Six centres also organise summer schemes for children up to the age of twelve. Children who avail of this service stated that the range of activities keeps them

active and gives them something to do:

"I like the times when we can go outside and play football. The camping trips in the summer are good too (you have to be eight to go). If I wasn't here I'd be bored."

Boy in after school group, aged 9 years

3.2.4 Respite Childcare

Respite childcare is a service that is offered by many of the centres. Centres describe respite childcare in different ways. For some it is to provide support and respite for families with additional stresses, for others it provides a safe place for children to go when the mother is accessing centre support services such as advice or counselling. Referrals may come from social services, through the centre, or by the individual (who may have been signposted by someone in the community). Childcare staff in the centre emphasised that respite service is what makes the service unique:

"Recently we provided respite for someone whose mother had just passed away. She wanted to attend the funeral, but there was no one able to look after her daughter. She had tried private day care; but there was nothing available. Someone told her about us, and we were able to help. It made me realise how unique we are in what we can provide people when they face a crisis."

Childcare Worker

3.3 Quality Childcare Provision

Survey respondents spoke of the high quality childcare provided through the women's centres. Examples of positive DENI Pre-school inspections and social services inspections were given, reaffirming the quality standards achieved by the women's centres. These quality standards include the Pathways to Excellence Quality Assurance Award through PlayBoard and the Fit to Play Quality Award. The centres are also active participants in Early Years groups/forums and organisations and are therefore well informed regarding current policies and legislation. Examples were given of social services and other childcare training organisations using the centre's approaches to childcare provision as a model of good practice.

The survey highlighted the quality and commitment of the staff employed at the centres. They noted the value of trained and experienced staff; and some also cited good management structures as a contributing factor to good practice. Childcare staff are trained in specialist areas including various special needs, autism and ADHD. Many centres freely accept any child with special needs and the childcare staff team assess the needs and seek advice, guidance, and when appropriate additional training to better meet the specific needs of the child. This can also include specific information and guidance to the parent or guardian.

Within the research one centre presented feedback received during an inspection from the Health and Social Care Trust:

"During the inspection [of the centre] a warm, stimulating and homely atmosphere was observed. Children were provided with a very good choice of play materials and encouraged to be independent and individually creative. Adults in the group were calm, patient and attentive throughout the

inspection. Children in the group appeared happy and secure and comfortable with the adults and good relationships appear to have developed. Throughout the inspection adults in the crèche were consistently warm in their approach and presented as motivated, enthusiastic individuals who were confident yet reflective on their practice. This centre is providing a valuable service in the community and offering a high quality of standard of sessional care.”

Feedback from Western Health and Social Care Trust’s Early Years Team

3.3.1 NVQ Placements

The women’s centres continue to contribute significantly to building an effective childcare training infrastructure. 10 of the 13 women’s centres offer placements to students on NVQ, BTEC, HND and degree level courses. The number of women’s-centre placed students who move onto employment is high. In addition, some of the childcare staff employed in the centres are also undergoing higher NVQ Level courses. One centre noted that they also offer work experience placements to schools. Training is crucial in building a comprehensive childcare infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

Feedback from students on NVQ placements is positive; they feel they are in a busy environment and gain confidence during the placement. Feedback from students highlight that the staff are very friendly and enthusiastic about the children and their work. Students highlighted how staff support and encourage the trainees to promote a stimulating environment for the children to learn, have fun and feel safe in:

“The women’s centre is a good placement for students as there is a wide range of activities and a good age range of children. This gives students a chance to learn how to work and communicate with children of various ages. The staff are very helpful and supportive, they provide students with help and support to care for the children effectively.” NVQ Student

Two centres currently deliver NVQ courses on site. Others have done so in the past but have found that Colleges require an increasing number of students on the course to be in a position to deliver the programme. Centres encourage trainees to develop their skills and many gain employment within the organisation and other childcare organisations. During the research NVQ students spoke positively of the centres:

“The women centre staff give students all the support they need because they have been there themselves. They understand what it is like for the students and guide them. The staff dedicate time with them to ensure they are learning and are not afraid to ask questions.” NVQ Student

By offering training women’s centres are contributing to building the economy through increasing qualifications, creating employment opportunities and thereby helping to tackle financial exclusion and poverty.

3.4 Impact on Children

This mapping report highlights the additional impacts on the children who access the childcare. Children develop an improved level of independence, self reliance

and physical health. Within the first years of their life the children benefit intellectually, emotionally and socially.

The research undertaken also evidenced the following outcomes for children who use the women's centres childcare facilities:

3.4.1 Enhancement of Children's Development and Learning

The crèches mainly provide childcare to children as young as 8 weeks to 4 years old. Their self help skills develop, they gain confidence and there is improvement of fine motor skills through learning from staff and other children. Children have the opportunity to play with educational toys that they would not have the opportunity to play with at home. The children learn how to communicate with other children and adults, consequently their speech and language skills develop. Children become more independent as they are learning life skills and are encouraged by staff to join in the crèche activities. This better prepares children for nursery and school. The mothers who participated in the research emphasised that attending the crèche increases their child's responsiveness, enhances concentration and improves social interaction:

"My child has become more independent. She sees other children dressing and eating and learns from them. She had an eating problem but is beginning to eat more as she sees the other children eat at meal times." Mother

3.4.2 Addressing Child Poverty

The crèches are uniquely placed to deliver services to children in localities in Northern Ireland most affected by child poverty and deprivation. These are areas where parents and children lack the required necessities of life due to low income. Children are cared for in warm, friendly centres where staff are fully qualified and committed to improving the lives of children in their care. The childcare staff are aware of the additional needs of children from disadvantaged communities and low income families. They provide children with good quality play material and educational toys. The children are given healthy snacks and lunches.

The childcare workers stated that they aim to support each child individually. They provide signposting and information about other agencies and organisations that will support mothers and children. The research highlighted that mothers believe the extra support from the childcare workers has helped them improve their children's lives:

"We are in an area of multiple deprivation and our fees are low to support local families. This helps to alleviate poverty and supports a better quality of life for children." Childcare Coordinator

"In the centre, they will understand and encourage you because they know how difficult it can be when you have three children - and most of your energy and money is devoted to their well-being." Mother

"Many of the mothers are parents from families who have 'slipped through the net'. As well as providing childcare the staff spend time talking with mums and will signpost them onto other support services." Childcare Coordinator

3.4.3 Improving Social Confidence

Through access to a healthy play environment children become more socially aware by having fun in a safe, non-judgemental and welcoming environment. They learn to appreciate and understand difference and generally are happier. Within the research mothers revealed that they felt their children were more settled in the home environment and were eager to learn and play with other children in crèche:

“Both me and my child are much more content as I am nearby. He is a very secure child as a result. All the activities he does in the crèche help to tire him out and he sleeps much better as a result. His communication skills and physical development have benefited from being in the crèche. He looks forward to going and never wants to leave.” Mother

3.4.4 Improving Physical and Mental health

Children get healthy snacks and are naturally encouraged to eat at the same time as other children. Children have access to physical activity rather than watching television all day. They take part in active physical play such as movement and dance. Within the focus groups childcare workers emphasised that they encourage children to ‘fit in’ and learn about healthy lifestyles from others of their age:

“We have an after school’s programme that runs four afternoons per week. This is accessed by local children and a number of children from various ethnic groups in the area. These children benefit from a wide range of activities that help them learn about health issues, develop creativity, learn citizenship skills and explore a wide range of environmental issues.” Childcare Co-ordinator

3.4.5 Social Integration

The research identified that children with learning problems, behavioural problems or health problems benefit through the expertise of the staff and the diverse environment in the crèche. This increases participation of children with disabilities in a comfortable environment. Responses emphasised that the benefits for children mixing at an early stage create greater awareness and understanding.

The crèche provides ethnic minority children with access to a service that helps them integrate into a new environment. Feedback highlighted that attending the crèche has improved their English as they learn to communicate with the other children and staff. This also prepares them well for school. Comments from mothers highlighted that the other children in the crèche have the opportunity at a young age to interact with children from different cultures and backgrounds:

“My daughter could not speak English (she spoke Ukrainian/Russian). Attending the crèche has helped her to learn English. She can count and understand English. This has helped her prepare for nursery. She has a great advantage by attending the crèche as it has made her more comfortable in her new environment.” Mother

Children interact on a cross community basis. In the after schools clubs children play with children from other schools. Activities include playing football, painting and taking part in summer activities. The children benefit as there is more structure in their daily routine. This in turn prevents them from ‘having nothing to do’ which may prevent anti-social behaviour within the locality. In Northern Ireland

the majority of children are still in a religiously segregated education system. The after schools services provide an alternative cross community experience for the children. Feedback from the childcare staff and the children reinforce this:

“Because some of these children are from the Polish and Vietnamese communities they have opportunities to develop relationships with other local children outside of school hours.”

Childcare Co-ordinator

“One of the things I like about coming here is that you get to know kids from other schools; I think that’s a good thing.” Boy in an After School Group, aged 8 years

Overall the feedback highlighted how the childcare service can provide children with a better quality of life.

3.5 Impact on Women’s Equality and the benefit to their Children and Family

As demonstrated in the WCRP Barriers to Participation report (WCRP, 2010) childcare services provided by the women’s centres in local communities promote equality of access for women to participate in educational, training and support programmes. Many are single mothers who simply cannot afford to pay fees for childcare. Without access to childcare the barriers they experience to education, training, employment and social networking are significantly raised. This research found that services are accessible within ‘pram pushing distance’. They are affordable and women have confidence leaving their children in these community based crèches.

3.5.1 Addressing Social Exclusion

The focus groups and interviews with mothers provided a holistic view of the benefits to women and children. Women stated that they have become more socially active. They now leave their home to meet and talk to other people. Women reported they have more freedom with opportunities to share experiences with others. The research highlighted that those from different ethnic backgrounds use the centres to meet other women and build social networks in a new country:

“I moved to England from Eastern Europe in October last year. I knew I should go out and improve my English through attending classes, but I had to find somewhere that my daughter could be looked after. ... I am now studying English and doing three other courses at the centre; all of this helps to improve my English so I can find work here. While I am learning she is happy; and she is learning English too through mixing with other children.” Mother

Women feel on a level playing field when attending a women’s centre and explain that it is a more comfortable environment as the crèche is based within the same building. This makes them feel more secure and willing to participate. Our research found that women build relationships with other mothers who attend the women’s centres:

“Friendships are developed: there are four mothers at the centre who do not have other family, the Women’s Centre and crèche help them develop relationships and get support to develop their

parenting skills. This is the type of support you would get from family.” Childcare Worker

Childcare workers stated many women who attend women’s centres are from outlying rural areas. They are able to access childcare at the centre due to the flexibility of the service:

“Many of our women and children live in rural areas. They have very limited access to transport, are stuck in the house, and live very much in isolation.” Childcare Worker

Women stated that they could only afford to complete courses because the childcare is free and flexible and also because the classes in the women’s centres are structured around their childcare requirements. The childcare facilities within women’s centres enable mothers to access information, get help with form filling and other services.

Community based childcare provision can address social exclusion in relation to women offenders. This has been demonstrated recently in a recent research report by WSN in its evaluation of the Women’s Community Support Project. The research highlighted the benefits of childcare in enabling women offenders to access other support services within the women’s centres, such as education, training, advocacy and court support (WSN, 2010:24).

3.5.2 Addressing Poverty

For many women, attending the women’s centre is the first stepping stone to getting themselves and their children out of poverty. Participants in the focus groups indicated that they are undertaking courses to provide a better life for their children and themselves, both financially and socially. Women stated that the reason for attending the centre was to increase their skills and gain qualifications. Many women indicated that through the childcare service they have accessed programmes that have enabled them to build confidence and feel able to start looking for a job:

“I have been doing an NVQ in Childcare through the centre. My aim is to re-train and once my child goes to primary school I intend to return to work as a class room assistant.” Mother

The flexible childcare drop-in service has supported many by enabling them to attend job- interviews and begin part-time work. Women have become volunteers within the centres and other community organisations to develop their experience. Many women go on to gain paid employment. This has immediate economic benefits for the women, their family and the community as people are earning their own incomes and contributing to the community at the same time.

3.5.3 Health, Wellbeing and Positive Family Relationships

The findings highlight that women’s centres have supported mothers to maintain good physical and mental health. Mothers reported that they have become less stressed and take time to relax. The flexible drop-in childcare provision enables

them to participate in health-related activities; they attend the gym, go walking and swimming.

“Mothers are able to access other community facilities, eg gym, dental and doctors appointments. This has helped to improve the family life of children and parents who are from disadvantaged areas and who without our free crèche would otherwise be unable to get motivated and improve their futures.” Childcare Coordinator

A few respondents indicated that the childcare and activities on offer has helped them deal with post natal depression, helping them to bond better with their child:

“It has helped with post-natal depression by getting me out of the house. I am around other mothers with something in common. There should be more promotion of this service in hospitals, GP centres etc.” Mother

Mothers stated that they learn more about taking time to play with their children and provide encouragement. They obtain ideas from the childcare staff and have begun doing arts and crafts at home:

“We went to the Jo-Jingles group. I wouldn't have got involved with things like this; and it helped to give me more confidence about singing and dancing with my daughter - and just to play with her.” Mother

The findings indicate that mothers can communicate better with their child and in turn has a positive effect on their behaviour. Women have more patience to be a mother and pass these positive feelings onto their children. In turn this helps keep families together and contributes to a more positive future and healthier communities.

3.5.4 Early Identification of Developmental Issues

Childcare workers are well trained and have the experience to support the child and their mothers. Mothers are welcome to preview the childcare facilities, meet the staff and feel part of their children's environment. Childcare workers stated that they ensure that parents feel able to talk with them about any issues to do with their children's development:

“We regularly work with children who have severe autism or AD/HD. On occasions we have been the first adults to pick up that a child has an undiagnosed disability. We have supported parents to seek support for themselves by facilitating their referral to an appropriate agency. Occasionally we have children with speech problems who need extra care and attention while in our care.”

Childcare Supervisor

Mothers who use the childcare service spoke positively of the centre staff. They reiterated that staff keep them informed of their child's progress and subtly inform them of any health or developmental issues that may need further professional opinion. This provides reassurance to the mother as they have more confidence identifying and supporting their child's needs:

“I have more confidence and awareness of issues that affect my child. I have developed the practical skills needed to support her. This is an excellent service and needs to continue.” Mother

It is evident that this early intervention and support from childcare workers builds firmer foundations for children and mothers, so that children are well supported at all stages of their development.

4.0 Conclusion

Women's centres have been providing community based childcare services in Northern Ireland since the early 1980's (*see case studies in appendix 1*). Most centres provide services for areas of high deprivation. One of the key barriers for development for women and children in disadvantaged communities is access to affordable childcare. This research report provides clear evidence of the uniqueness of the holistic approach of the women's centres community based childcare. Their high quality provision has impacted positively on women, children, family and the community. This has been essential in addressing social and economic exclusion for people in disadvantaged communities.

The centres make an important contribution to government policies focused on childcare, pre-school education, financial exclusion, social inclusion, anti-poverty, gender equality and family support. The service promotes equality of access for women and enables children from disadvantaged communities to participate in social, educational and support programmes. Services are accessible, many within 'pram pushing distance'. Women's centres early years childcare (0-4) enhances the learning and development of the child and develops skills that prepare them for school.

Community based childcare in women's centres addresses the issue of financial exclusion in disadvantaged areas as it is either free or affordable and enables access to capacity building for mothers. For many women, attending the women's centre is the first step to getting themselves and their children out of poverty. This contributes to building the economy through increasing qualifications, creating employment opportunities and subsequently helps to tackle financial exclusion and poverty.

The majority of funding received by women's centres for childcare service is ending in 2011. The high level of insecurity created with short term funding limits the number of childcare places that centres can accommodate. Every women's centre has a waiting list for the childcare service, but due to the lack of resources they cannot meet the growing demand. It is vital that funding continues in order to maintain the services already being provided and to meet the potential future demands. Therefore it is vital that the early years and childcare strategies ensure resources are available for the sustainability of community based childcare within women's centres.

5.0 Recommendations

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that the Women's Centre's make a major contribution to assisting the government to meet their policy priorities. It is also clear with forthcoming policy developments such as the Welfare Reform Act and Child Poverty Strategy that there will be an increasing demand for additional childcare places. It is therefore imperative that existing childcare places in the women's centres are sustained and protected.

There is a need for an overarching government Childcare Strategy co-ordinated by one lead department. WCRP also recommends that all government departments contribute to the implementation of a Childcare Strategy through the development of action plans, set specific priorities relating to childcare in the next Programme for Government and in Gender Action Plans. In addition to these general recommendations, there are a number of specific recommendations that relate to individual departments:

5.1 Department for Social Development (DSD)

The current fund which supports community based childcare provision in the women's centres, the Women's Centres Childcare Fund (WCCF), lies presently with the Voluntary and Community Unit of the Department for Social Development (DSD)

WCRP recommends continuation of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund. Whilst the childcare strategy is in development it is vital that funding of childcare provision continues to sustain the service. A gap in funding would be detrimental to childcare provision and the services women's centres provide. The childcare provision in the women's centres is essential to support vital frontline services provided by the women's centres for example, education, training, and advice and health promotion.

Liaise with other government departments by highlighting the contribution the WCCF has made to support women in disadvantaged areas. We recommend that DSD works to ensure that government department bids in the next Comprehensive Spending Review enables continuation of the Women's Centre's Childcare Fund.

5.2 OFMdfM

We urge timely publication of options for a childcare strategy that includes recognition of the women's centres.

Any childcare strategy must be supported by adequate financial resources to ensure that commitments can be implemented. OFMdfM must work with the Department of Finance and Personnel to ensure that funding is made available to support the implementation of a childcare strategy in future budgets including the WCCF.

Ensure there are linkages between other policies such as Child Poverty Strategy, Rural White Paper, the DE Early Years Strategy and the Gender Equality Strategy.

5.3 Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

Contribute to the improvement of childcare provision in rural areas by supporting community based childcare provision in women's centres, building on recommendations in the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Report and DARD's Rural Childcare Programme.

Disseminate findings and share Good Practice outcomes from the Rural Childcare Programme demonstration projects.

Work with other government departments to highlight and address the childcare issues specific to rural areas.

Ensure childcare issues are reflected and addressed in the forthcoming Rural White Paper.

Liaise with the Department of Regional Development (DRD) to ensure accessible, affordable transport in order to access childcare facilities

5.4 Department of Education (DE)

Recognise the contribution, quality and uniqueness of community based childcare in women's centres with regards to the education and development of pre-school children in final Early Years Strategy.

Ensure adequate resources, timescales and targets are included in the Early Years and Childcare Strategy.

5.5 Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)

Acknowledge in policies that women who attend women's centres are on a pathway to economic activity and therefore recognise and resource community based education delivered in the women centres.

Recognise childcare is a barrier to education and resources should be made available to fund childcare services.

Ensure adequate resources are allocated to childcare training in order to develop and retain childcare staff and to improve quality standards.

Ensure all community based training and education programmes promoted by the Department have childcare funding built into programmes.

5.6 Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)

Provide funding to assist women's centres to develop social economy models in childcare provision.

Ensure childcare provision is made available and resourced to support women from disadvantaged areas into enterprise.

5.7 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)

Recognise and resource community based childcare in women's centres by

supporting families in disadvantaged communities.

Continue to work with the women's centres to maintain excellence in quality standards in women's centre based childcare.

5.8 Department of Regional Development (DRD)

Ensure accessible, affordable transport options are in place to enable women - particularly those in rural areas - to access childcare provision.

5.9 Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)

Lack of accessible childcare remains a major barrier to women's participation in all aspects of women's lives including arts, culture and leisure pursuits.

This research has outlined the benefits of community based women's childcare in assisting women to participate in physical activities.

The Department must ensure that appropriate childcare resources are made available to enable women with families to have equal access to arts, culture and leisure activities.

5.10 Department of the Environment

Ensure accessible childcare options are considered in planning processes, thus increasing provision of local affordable childcare.

Any future developments in the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and community planning should be cognisant of childcare provision in women's centres, particularly in any future commissioning arrangements.

5.11 Department of Finance and Personnel

Ensure funding for childcare provision is ring fenced for families in disadvantaged areas in future budgets and Comprehensive Spending Reviews to ensure provision of affordable childcare provided by women's centres.

5.12 Department of Justice

Ensure policies focusing on women in the Criminal Justice System, especially from disadvantaged communities, include commitments to assist them to access affordable childcare options along with other services to help them reintegrate back into their communities.

Appendix 1 - Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1 - Elaine and Jake

“This story spans 17 years and is a shining example of the longer term impacts that childcare provided in a women’s centre setting has had for children and their mothers.”

Elaine spent her own childhood in care. At age 16 she had a baby boy Jake. At the time Elaine had an abusive boyfriend, lived on her own in a city and was struggling to cope. Her son was diagnosed hyper active and as a single mother with no family she had little support. Elaine had reached ‘burn out’ and had even considered placing her son in care.

In 1993 Elaine found out about the Women’s Centre and the courses they offered. For the first time she realised that she could register for a course as the centre offered free childcare and her son would be looked after while she attended. She saw this as an opportunity to gain qualifications but also to have time to herself and to give Jake the opportunity to interact with other adults and children.

Elaine was 17 and Jake was 1 when they first attended the Women’s Centre. It wasn’t long before the childcare co-ordinator identified that Elaine needed support with her parenting skills. Elaine believed Jake was a difficult child and this affected her approach towards him. She was quite negative about Jake. Elaine was vulnerable and her lack of confidence was transferring to Jake. Elaine was advised by a social worker that due to Jake’s speech and behavioural problems he would have to attend a Special Needs school. She was hesitant but agreed.

The childcare worker in the Women’s Centre helped Elaine realise that Jake was a very capable child. The worker felt that Jake should be given a chance to interact with other children as she felt he would have no problems learning. Jake was a bright child and there was a good chance that he would be able for mainstream school.

Elaine soon decided that she wanted Jake to attend mainstream education as he would have more opportunities. The staff at the Women’s Centre Crèche acted as advocates guiding her through the process, supporting her by writing letters and attending meetings. More importantly the Women’s Centre helped build her confidence to enable her to make her own decisions about her son’s future. Elaine and Jake eventually won the fight and Jake got into a mainstream school.

Elaine adopted a positive approach towards Jake and began to believe he had the ability to achieve his goals. By providing Jake with this encouragement his behaviour changed. He excelled in primary and secondary school. Now aged 17, he has achieved 8 GCSE’s and he is currently undertaking 4 A-level’s. Jake is currently a capable athlete, a runner for Ireland, is the school Prefect and is hoping to get into University to undertake a degree.

Not only has Jake’s life changed due to attending the Women’s Centre, Elaine completed a computer course, GCSE mathematics and other courses at the Women’s Centre. This enabled her entry into an access course for a Diploma in

Combined Social and Behavioural Studies. Elaine has now completed a Housing degree, a Masters degree in Housing, Public Administration and also a Masters in Rural Development. She gained employment as a Housing Officer when she was 24 years old. She was the regional manager for housing association and helped develop a franchise that provided services for the homeless. Elaine is now Head of Fundraising and Development. Additional to her career Elaine is setting up a Charity organisation to support those who lived in care. Elaine had stated that by placing Jake in the crèche at the Women's Centre it re-directed the path of Jakes life. The Women's Centres support has provided Jake and Elaine with a much better quality of life. They are achieving their goals and are contributing back into the community.

CASE STUDY 2 - Mary and Hannah

Mary aged 32 lives in a rural community with little access to public transport or services. She is married with two children aged 5 and 2 years. Mary did not know the Womens Centre existed until two years ago when she enquired about a course at the local college. She always thought about returning to education but it was not possible because of having children and living in a rural area. Her husband worked and she found it impossible to get childcare. The crèche facilities within the Womens Centre provided Mary with the opportunity to bring her 2 year daughter with her while she attended a course. She enrolled with the Womens Centre and registered her daughter Hannah in the crèche. It would not have been possible for Mary to begin the course otherwise. The childcare staff supported Mary, she felt comfortable because the crèche was within the same building so she could go to Hannah if she had to. Mary felt that the centre staff understood that many women like to be on site for their children.

Mary initially came to the Womens Centre for her own personal development but soon realised that her daughter Hannah was benefiting too. Hannah was born 11 weeks premature and always had eating problems. Mary was advised that the problems were psychological. When she first attended the crèche the staff supported her needs and always encouraged Hannah to eat at meal times along with the other children. At meal times Hannah saw the other children eating and she soon began to copy them. As she continued to attend the crèche her eating improved dramatically. The crèche staff encouraged and supported both Hannah and Mary. Mary has learned how to support Hannah and Hannah has learned basic skills such as washing hands, sharing, colours, and speech, she is becoming more independent. The meal times at home also became a lot easier and enjoyable.

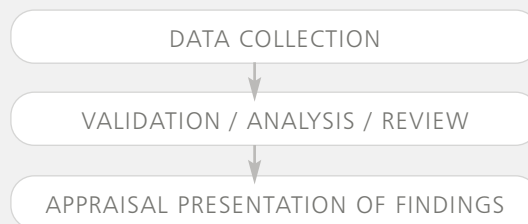
Because Hannah lives in a rural area she would not have had the opportunity to interact with other children outside the family until she attended primary school. By attending the crèche in the Womens Centre she has become a much happier and secure child. Because Hannah enjoys coming to the crèche Mary feels she can now return to the centre to complete another course. Mary wants to develop her skills to give her the confidence to go to University and provide a better life for her children and herself.

Appendix 2 - Methodology

The methodology adopted for this report meets the Women's Centres Regional Partnership terms of reference. These are as follows:

- To audit and map the childcare provision in the WCRP partner organisations by defining and describing the childcare service provided in each centre and assess where common provision exists and what unique provision is provided
- To review the policy and strategic context and examine the case for an integrated childcare strategy and the impact that this will have on the WCRP frontline services
- To engage in a consultation process with the WCRP women's organisations to develop research tools which will allow the description of a complex and varied service
- To take into account the views of all stakeholders, managers, key staff and service users on the provision of this service in identifying the necessity for the provision of other training and development needs for women living in disadvantaged communities
- To analyse to what extent the childcare provision is an integrated part of the services offered by the women's centres
- To examine to what extent the childcare provision meets the needs of women and children in disadvantaged areas
- To work in conjunction with the WCRP Childcare Sub-group which will assist with the collection of data, relevant information and the development of key case studies.

The three-fold overall approach was followed, as shown below:



At an initial meeting with members of the WCRP Childcare Sub-group where the approach to the task of Mapping and Audit was fine-tuned. A range of methodologies were employed to deliver the key tasks outlined in the terms of reference for the research.

The prospective research participants were informed of the procedures before they gave their consent to volunteer in this research. All participants were assured of confidentiality and that identifying information would not be made available to anyone who was not directly involved in the study.

The key stages in the methodology were:

- **Questionnaires:** The questionnaire was drafted by Education and Development in consultation with members of the WCRP Childcare Sub-Group. The questionnaires were sent to all member Women's Centres by the WCRP North West Outreach Worker, and were completed and returned. A total of 13 questionnaires from a possible 13 returns were received. The questionnaires provided quantitative and qualitative data; and influenced the questions to be asked during the focus groups and case studies. (See appendix 3)
- **Focus Groups and informal interviews with childcare staff from a representative sample of Women's Centres:** Feedback was gained through small focus groups and interviews with childcare supervisors, childcare workers, service users, NVQ Students on placement at two of the Centres, and one after schools group (involving 12 children) from eight Women's Centres, namely: Atlas, Chrysalis, Derry, Footprints, Greenway, Shankill, Strathfoyle, and Waterside. In addition a telephone interview took place with the Childcare Coordinator at Magherafelt Women's Centre. Throughout the Report quotes from childcare workers, service users, and children are given.
- **Documentation and Policy Review:** Review Policy and Strategic Context of Childcare in Northern Ireland.

Appendix 3- Questionnaire

WCRP: CHILDCARE MAPPING AND AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE - TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL CENTRES

WCRP has appointed Jane Turnbull from Education and Development to undertake an audit and mapping exercise of the Childcare Provision within all member Centres. The Report will be used to inform the consultation on integrated childcare across Northern Ireland, support funding applications, and to other stakeholders.

Part of the process requires each Centre Manager or Childcare Coordinator to complete this questionnaire. The focus of the questionnaire is on childcare provision - the additional questions provide an overview to the childcare provision in the Women's Centres.

You can complete and return the questionnaire via email or as a telephone interview.

Please email completed returns to jane@educationanddevelopment.co.uk or donnamccauley@womenscentre.co.uk

If you would prefer to go through the questionnaire over the phone please contact Jane on 93 373 559 to arrange a suitable date and time. Thank you.

Name:

Position:

Centre:

Please show in the table below the nature of Childcare provision delivered by your Centre.

Childcare Provision	Yes ✓	Age Range 0-4 ✓	Age Range 4-12 ✓	Children on Waiting List ✓
Free childcare for education and training access programmes				
Sessional day care (up to 4 hours)				
Full day care (4 hours +)				
Drop in childcare (flexible)				
Out of schools childcare *				
Sure Start childcare				
Summer Scheme childcare				
Respite childcare *				
Special needs childcare *				
Social Services Referrals *				

* Please see next page and provide additional information

Any other childcare provided that does not 'fit' within the table above?

* If 'Out of schools childcare' is provided please briefly describe:

.....

* If 'Respite childcare' is provided please briefly describe:

.....

* If 'Special needs childcare' is provided please briefly describe:.....

.....

* If Social Services referrals are provided with childcare please briefly describe:

.....

Which services do you offer Centre users; and is childcare available (please indicate in the last column)?

Service	Yes - offered regularly ✓	Yes - offered occasionally ✓	Is Childcare available ✓
Non-accredited training programmes			
Accredited training programmes			
Drop-in services			
✓ Counselling			
Young Mums programme			
Young Women's programme			
Minority ethnic targeted programmes			
Health related programmes			
Advice services			
Other (please list below)			
.....			
.....			

Does your Centre offer placements to students on NVQ courses?

Yes No

If 'yes' please complete the table below:

Estimated Number of Placements (per year)

Hours (per Week)

Number moved onto employment (if known)

Does the Centre deliver NVQ childcare courses?

Yes No

If 'yes' please provide brief details:

Number of students (per year)
the past two years

Number moved onto employment in

NVQ Level 2

NVQ Level 2

NVQ Level 3

NVQ Level 3

Any other comments about the Centre's NVQ courses?

.....

.....

.....

Please rate the following statements regarding childcare provision at your Centre in terms of the impact / benefits for service users:

Childcare provision enables service users -	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Social/Developmental benefits for the children				
To access Centre courses and services				
To work part-time or full-time				
To relax as they know their children are well looked after				
Equality of access				
Affordable childcare				
Other (please list)				

Please rate the following statements regarding childcare provision from a Centre viewpoint in terms of the impact / benefits for children:

Childcare provision enables children to -	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Spend time with other children				
Try out new activities				
Learn to socialise more with others				
Build relationships with other adults				
Have somewhere safe to go				
Gain new skills and knowledge				
Other (please list)				

Currently from which agencies and organisations do you receive funding towards the costs of childcare provision?

Agency / Funder	Yes ✓	Approx % of overall childcare costs	When does the funding cease?
DSD Women's Centre Childcare Fund			
Lottery funding			
Children in Need			
Sure Start			
Peace 3 funding			
Other (please list)			

Do you have any Service Level Agreements?

Yes No If 'yes'; please complete the table below:

<input type="text"/>	Organisation with whom you have the SLA
<input type="text"/>	Duration (eg one year, two years etc)
<input type="text"/>	No. of places
<input type="text"/>	Are all places currently filled? ✓

Any other comments about Service Level Agreements?

.....

.....

.....

Government and other funding programmes have continually placed emphasis on the need to build sustainability. In what ways has your Centre addressed this issue with regard to childcare provision?

.....

.....

Do you believe that the childcare provision you currently offer can be made available without some funding input from Government or other funding sources?

Yes Not Sure No

Please provide brief details

Are there any ways in which you would like to extend the childcare provision offered (eg accommodate more children, offer additional services ...)?

Yes Not Sure No If 'yes' or 'not sure' please provide brief details:

What are the greatest challenges when providing childcare provision?

Please give examples of achievements / good practice with regard to childcare provision at the Centre in relation to service users: eg what you feel works well for Service Users, services / programmes they have accessed because childcare provision was available, reliability and credibility of staff

Please give examples of achievements / good practice with regard to childcare provision at the Centre in relation to children:

Anything else you would like to say to contribute to the childcare audit and mapping?

Case Studies

As part of the Audit / Mapping process we are seeking case studies from service users. The case studies will all be anonymous, and may be used in full or in part in the final Report. We are seeking a comprehensive range of case studies (for example from service users of different ages, different cultures, accessing different services); ideally at least one case study from each Centre. We want the case studies to demonstrate the opportunities, impact and benefits that service users have gained from the childcare provision available and to record the benefits of the childcare provided for the children. A framework has been drafted for the case studies; which will be carried out by Jane, Donna or Tiziana (either face-to-face or on the phone). All case studies will remain completely anonymous.

Please indicate if there is a service user at your Centre who we could interview.

Focus Groups

As part of the process Jane would like to hold a small number of focus groups with childcare staff, with service users, and, if possible, with children attending after school care.

Please indicate whether you would be able to accommodate one or more focus groups; which will ideally be held in February at your Centre:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Focus Group with Childcare Staff | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Focus Group with service users | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Small group discussion with After Schools | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION,
WHICH IS MUCH APPRECIATED

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