



Womens Centres Childcare Fund (WCCF)

Sustainability

Analysis and Recommendations



November 2015

WCCF Analysis

The Department for Social Development (DSD) through the Womens Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF) provides funding to (14) Women's Centres across Northern Ireland. Currently this is an 'emergency fund' even though it has been in place since 2008. The WCCF provides an essential core funding resource for the provision of childcare in the (14) organisations. It enables access to high quality childcare for children from disadvantaged communities as part of a holistic model of family support and womens education services.

The WCCF supported (1434) individual children in the 2014/2015 year, investing approximately £880k per annum to provide over one hundred thousand childcare places each year.

Findings from a 2015 independent evaluation of the WCCF fund has identified that:

- WCCF contributes to reducing child poverty
- WCCF provides opportunities for parents to access opportunities for education and work
- WCCF enables women to contribute to their communities thereby tackling disadvantage
- WCCF provides a wide range of benefits for the investment each year and can be considered good value for money (*DSD, DARD (2015) RISP WCCF Evaluation, section 5.12*)

The fund is administered to 14 Women's Centres on a 'yearly' basis. The average age of children who benefit from the childcare services is 2.5 years, 55% of the children are between 0-1 years. This is in keeping with the pre-school nature of the provision (*DSD, DARD (2015) RISP WCCF Evaluation, section 5.3*).

The WCCF is in place until March 2016 and the future beyond this is unclear. Sustaining this funding for childcare services in community based women centres' is vital if we are to continue to tackle poverty, child poverty and deprivation. The WCCF plays a 'unique' role in addressing marginalisation and exclusion in rural and disadvantaged areas. It helps to tackle poverty and is integral to the full and effective implementation of the Executive's wider Delivering Social Change agenda.

Location of WCCF Childcare services

The WCCF Women’s Centres are located in areas of very high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The children who benefit are from some of the most deprived SOA’s in NI demonstrating that the fund has been successful in reaching into the most disadvantaged communities in the region. See Table 1 below.

Table 1: Location of WCCF Childcare services

Centre	Geographical Area	Overall SOA Ranking (NISRA, 2010)	Band
Shankill Women’s Centre	Greater Belfast	6	0-10%
Women’s Centre Derry	Derry	26	0-10%
Chrysalis Women’s Centre	Craigavon	55	0-10%
Windsor Women’s Centre	Greater Belfast	69	0-10%
Footprints Women’s Centre	Greater Belfast	72	0-10%
Waterside Women’s Centre	Derry	101	10 – 20%
Falls Women’s Centre	Greater Belfast	105	10 – 20%
Strathfoyle Women’s Centre	Derry	110	10 – 20%
Greenway Women’s Centre	Greater Belfast	201	20-30%
Ballybeen Women’s Centre	Greater Belfast	246	20-30%
Atlas Women’s Centre	Lisburn	299	20-30%
First Steps Women’s Centre	Dungannon	348	30-40%
Kilcooley Womens Centre	Bangor	415	40-50%
Magherafelt Women’s Centre	Magherafelt	484	50-60%

Children supported through WCCF/ Jobs created and sustained

Table 2 shows that in 2014/2015 WCCF supported 1434 individual children. To support these services (65) childcare posts are resourced through the fund. These childcare posts are a mixture of full time, part time and term time. This core funding resource for childcare has enabled the women’s centres to expand services and the Centre’s now employ an additional (64) childcare workers. Therefore currently (109) jobs are supported through the Women’s Centres in providing access to childcare for families in communities where the need is greatest. In addition, the childcare supports thousands of women to access employment, education, training and support programmes.

Table 2- Children supported through WCCF/ Jobs created and sustained

Women's Centre	No of children supported	No. of new families engaged	Children from BME communities and Traveller children supported	No. 2 hour places provided	DSD WCCF 100% funded posts	DSD WCCF part-funded posts
	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15
Atlas	150	124	16	4608	0	5
Ballybeen	102	24	11	22400	11	0
Falls	50	28	32	5136	4	1
Footprints	123	20	7	15984	0	4.3
Greenway	53	44	-	6336	3	2
Windsor	167	18	84	22780	7	2
Shankill	81	64	5	4752	3	1
First Steps	49	20	30	4032	1	4
Magherafelt	138	26	14	3120	0	5
Chrysalis	138	56	18	2112	0	1
TWC, Derry	100	22	10	2976	3	0
Strathfoyle	15	46	2	2592	0	1
Waterside	184	58	18	3504	3	0
Kilcooley	84	28	7	2880	3	0
Year total	1434	578	254	103212	38	26.3
Women's Centre	No of children supported	No. of new families engaged	Children from BME communities and Traveller children supported	No. 2 hour places provided	DSD WCCF 100% funded posts	DSD WCCF part-funded posts
	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15	2014/15

Benefits and Impacts of WCCF

Children using the childcare services are from high deprivation areas, low income families, families dependent on welfare. Women’s Centres childcare provision has direct benefits to the child in terms of early intervention; health and well-being including child development and learning intellectually, emotionally and socially. *(WCRP (2010), Childcare*



Mapping Report). <http://www.thewomenscentre.co.uk/index.php/part-time-teaching-facilitator-register-3?download=20:wcrp-childcare-mapping-report> .

The WCCF has particularly helped to support families and children from BME communities. Over the last three years approximately 17% of the children supported by the WCCF have been from minority ethnic backgrounds. *(DSD, DARD (2015), RISP WCCF evaluation section 5.3)*.

Women's Centres deliver services aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty. Parents who avail of WCCF supported childcare also access a wide range of programmes available in their communities. Many of the services involve support to parents including; parenting skills, back to work programmes, advice services and health programmes. Therefore WCCF enables the most excluded in our disadvantaged communities to access support and engage in community development activities.

The table below summaries a number of the benefits and impacts for children and families made possible through the WCCF support.

Table 3 - Benefits and Impacts of WCCF

	Benefits	Impacts
1.	Children have access to high quality childcare in their local communities.	Increased sense of independence and self-reliance. Improved confidence and ability to interact with other children.
2.	Children have access to high quality play and learning activities in their first months and years.	Improved opportunities to begin school as equals in social and intellectual development.

3.	Children have opportunities to interact, play, talk and learn alongside children from BME communities and different cultural backgrounds	Improved speech and language skills. Better English skills for starting nursery and primary school. Increased understanding and awareness of different cultural traditions.
4.	Children have access to healthy activities	Improved health and nutrition. Better awareness among parents about healthy eating in childhood.
5.	Access for women to community development, engagement and education programmes	Increased opportunities for learning and skills development. More women have access to paid employment. Fewer families depending on benefits. Improved quality of life for low income families. Increased confidence and life skills.
6.	Access to back to work programmes	Reduced reliance on income benefits and welfare. Contributes to breaking the cycle of generational poverty.
7.	Access to health programmes	Increase health awareness. Improved health in low income families.
8.	Access to drop-in services	Reduced levels of social exclusion.
9.	Counselling	Improved mental health for women and families.
10.	Minority ethnic targeted programmes	Increase social inclusion Better community relations. Improved social cohesion in disadvantaged communities.
11.	Advice services/ Information and signposting	Increased skills and ability to make informed choices. Improved information about services available. Improved capacity for self-help.
12.	Support for young mothers and their babies	Better life chances for young mothers and their children.
13.	Life skills	Women and families are better equipped to deal with life transitions. Increased skills and life opportunities for women and families.
14.	Support for parenting	Increased parenting skills and early intervention for children.
15.	Confidence Building	Increased participation in community life.
16.	Access for women to community development, engagement and education programmes	Increased opportunities for learning and skills development. More women have access to paid employment. Fewer families depending on benefits. Improved quality of life for low income families. Increased confidence and life skills.

WCCF comments and feedback from families who benefit.

“The crèche has been brilliant for Layla. She loves coming every week. For me, it has taken the stress away from returning to education, when trying to juggle a house and family. It relieves the pressure of trying to find childcare to complete the skills which will enable me to find employment. I do not worry about Layla when she is in the crèche. I know she is safe and secure and in the same building should I be needed.”

“The provision of childcare has been a real benefit for my child. She absolutely loves coming to ‘school’. She is more accepting of other children who are at a different stage to her and is becoming more aware of children from different cultural backgrounds. Her confidence and independence levels have greatly improved. She wants to do more things for herself, such as putting on her own shoes and coat.”

“I enrolled on the City and Guild basic maths course as I wanted to build up my employability skills. As a bonus, I have found that I am able to support my older children, who are in primary school, with their maths homework. This enhanced my confidence and self-esteem so much.”

“Grace’s language has developed since attending the crèche. She speaks clearly and is able to form full sentences. She really enjoys arts and crafts and has learnt new skills.”

“I am 19 years old with a baby. I want to continue my education and go to college when my baby is older. My local Womens Centre is enabling me to continue my education for now and my baby is very happy in their crèche. I cannot afford to pay for childcare, I have no family support.”

“My husband passed away when I was expecting my youngest child. Without the support of the crèche and the girls in the centre I can honestly say I wouldn't be where I am today. I have gained more qualifications from the centre than I ever got from school. It has given me the confidence to go back and study and make a better life for myself and my children. It has been vital for me.”

“My child is due to start nursery school in September and I feel confident that the crèche within the Women's Centre has prepared her well. She loves the routine, tidy's up without being asked, and is accepting of other children.”

“Without the support of staff at the centre I would have been unable to stay in work, as my eldest daughter who has ASD would not be able to attend any other setting and I have no other child minder available to me. It was through the observations of staff that issues with my child were first identified and this eventually went onto a formal diagnosis.”

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

After completing secondary school I attended the College, where I completed an Art and Design course. I then enrolled on a Fashion Textile course. During the last year of this course I became pregnant with my daughter. I had hoped to go to university in England to study Fashion but had to make alternative plans.

My tutor at the college recommended the Women's Centre for the course that the Centre ran and for the availability of childcare. I came to the centre in 2013 and have never looked back. I have now completed my Garment Making course and I am due to complete a Pattern Cutting and Design course, the last bit of experience and training that I need for a job in fashion design.

The provision of childcare was a life saver for me. It enabled me to continue on my chosen career path. It also took the stress out of relying on different family members for childcare and I would have been unable to pay privately.

Recommendations for the future sustainability of the WCCF programme

Recommendation 1

Feedback from the (14) Women's Centres and the recent WCCF evaluation demonstrates that it will be impossible to provide these childcare services in future years without support for 100% funded childcare places, to meet the needs of our most disadvantaged children. Currently, the NI Childcare Strategy is providing a grant scheme for school age children at an intervention rate of 25% towards the cost of each place. If this model is extended and used as the model to support childcare for 0-4 year olds it will have a disastrous consequence for children and families from our most disadvantaged communities. If this 25% model is used it will not be adequate to maintain and sustain the childcare services provided through the WCCF programme. If these 100% supported childcare places are not available, women will not have access to childcare and family support at a time in their lives were this support is essential.

Recommendation 1

WCCF must be sustained and must not be reduced. It is our recommendation that funding resources for this model for children's access and parent's access to family support should be further strengthened. The 2015 WCCF evaluation has evidenced that the fund is providing 'good value for money', has created 109 sustainable jobs, 'addresses child poverty', 'contributes to building better community relations', race relations and a shared future in NI.

Recommendation 2

To date OFMDFM has published the NI Childcare Strategy- Delivering Social Change through Childcare, A Ten Year Strategy for Affordable and Integrated Childcare 2015-2025. The WCCF supports the policy aims of the draft Childcare Strategy. The WCCF fund has demonstrated and evidenced that it provides positive outcomes for disadvantaged women, children, families and communities. It provides a better quality of life for children, addresses financial and social exclusion, supports the integration of ethnic minority children and families, builds relationships between children and families, supports cross community development and contributes to community cohesion (*DSD (2015), RISP WCCF evaluation, section 5.9*).

Recommendation 2

The WCCF is an essential core fund. It is our recommendation that this funding resource should be in place 'long term' either as an independent fund or a mainstreamed fund through the NI Childcare Strategy. Implementation of this recommendation is essential to sustain the crèche services and the holistic range of support services provided by Womens Centre's for women and families who live in the most disadvantaged communities in the region.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in the WCCF evaluation, the support offered through the WCCF at Women's Centres has enabled women to access a range of important opportunities including access to training and employment as well as providing social and well-being benefits e.g. increased confidence, ability to care for other dependents etc.

Within the evaluation parents were asked whether, in the absence of the WCCF supported childcare places, they would have been able to access any alternative childcare support (e.g. care by a relative, family friend, support via a fee paying registered childcare arrangement) in order to attend any of the activities provided by the Women's Centre's. **92.2% of respondents indicated that they would not be able to access alternative childcare arrangements. This indicates a high degree of additionality associated with the provision of WCCF funded places.**

In relation to the impacts of WCCF supported childcare places on the wider community, the majority of respondents through the evaluation 'agreed' that the WCCF funded childcare places helped contribute towards:

- **Providing a better quality of life for children in the community (99%)**
- **Addressing financial and social exclusion within the community (95%).**
- **The integration of ethnic minority children and families into the community (95%).**
- **Improved child welfare / child protection (97%).**
- **Building relationships between children and families on a cross community basis (94%).**
- **Keeping families together and related community cohesion (95%).**

The WCCF supported childcare places have contributed to a wide range of community benefits which also link into various policy areas such as the Programme for Government and other Government policies and strategies. These include *Together: Building a United Community* (given the extent to which WCCF contributes to building relations between children and families from different community backgrounds), *Delivering Social Change*, the evolving *Racial Equality Strategy*, the *Children and Young Peoples Strategy*; and *Bright Start: A Strategic Framework and Key First Actions* which sets out the framework, principles and a

range of key first actions to help deliver the Executive’s vision for childcare in NI. *(DSD, DARD(2015) RISP WCCF Evaluation).*

In conclusion, the WCCF Evaluation found that parents of children availing of WCCF childcare places have illustrated a wide range of positive impacts– both in relation to the development and well-being of children and also in supporting parents to access services and opportunities that would not otherwise be possible. The provision of such childcare places and associated support through the Women’s Centres is likely to have long term positive benefits to the child, the parents of the child and wider society both in terms of avoiding costs associated with dealing with issues later in the child’s life and also avoiding problems such as poorer health, educational, employment and criminal justice outcomes. *(DSD, DARD(2015) RISP WCCF Evaluation).*

This piece of research demonstrates that the WCCF is an effective intervention in addressing the high levels of poverty, including child poverty, still endemic in our most disadvantaged communities in NI.

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