

'Towards a model of Best Practice'

# The **Southside** Partnership

Community **Childcare** Research Project

2005





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# FOREWORD

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



Southside Partnership has been at the heart of promoting social inclusion, equality, and addressing poverty over the last ten years and during this time significant progress has been made in identifying strategies to address inequality more effectively.

Childcare has been a key strategy from the outset, and the Partnership, through the development and ongoing support of the Southside Childcare Action Network (SCAN), has initiated a range of activities in conjunction with a wide range of community and statutory service providers.

The benefits of good quality early childhood care and education for children have been well documented and it is widely accepted that the first five years are critical in human development, during which the foundations are laid for all later learning. A great deal of research evidence confirms the value of early intervention as a means of responding to the needs of vulnerable families living in socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

We in Southside Partnership believe that the provision of community childcare needs to be viewed primarily as a support service to children, families and communities and is about much more than a labour market initiative.

SCAN promotes and supports quality community based childcare services which offer care, education, and socialisation opportunities for the benefits of children, parents, employers, employees, and the wider community within the Southside partnership area.

This research was commissioned in response to community childcare providers ongoing struggle to provide a quality service. Community childcare providers and agencies participated in the research in a broad based participative process. Over 100 people were interviewed and a seminar was held with all those involved and feedback from this seminar informed the recommendations. In addition a multi agency expert steering group oversaw the research process.

This comprehensive report evidences much of our own experience and thinking. The recommendations arising from the research challenge us to respond in a more coherent way to the specific issues of staffing, funding, training, and premises within the services. The current location of childcare within multiple government departments has not assisted an integrated approach and it is imperative that some mechanism be found to address the fragmented approach to current policies in relation to childcare and that children are placed at the centre of an holistic response.

We see this as a work in progress, and the report recommendations will form the basis of an integrated action plan. We look forward to working collaboratively with the communities, service providers, and agencies towards the implementation of the recommendations.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved with this project, especially the research steering group.

Lastly, I would like to thank Ann Fitzgerald, the researcher, for all her hard work and commitment in researching and compiling this report.

**Marie Carroll**  
Manager Southside Partnership



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am deeply indebted to the members of the Southside Childcare Action Network (SCAN) who are responsible for the genesis of this local community childcare research project. SCAN members have collaborated and supported each other locally sharing knowledge and experiences and implementing appropriate local initiatives.

The catalyst for the research project was the appointment of the part-time SCAN development worker Angela Stenson who unstintingly has a passion, drive and commitment to achieve better quality community childcare services to meet the holistic needs of the vulnerable individual child. Angela fortunately has the backing of a pioneering SCAN committee, judiciously guided by the chairperson Sandra Campbell (Manager, Hillview Community Resource Centre).

In her role as the SCAN development worker Angela Stenson was able to leverage the knowledge, support and resources of the Southside Partnership (SSP) and the County Childcare Committee. Under the auspices of the SSP, the Education Co-ordinator Aileen O'Brien recognised the need for local data to provide a foundation for change and mobilised the initial team and resources to allow this research project to become a reality.

This research would not have been possible without the financial and resource commitment by the SSP and the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Childcare Committee (DL-R CCC). In addition, the collaborative support by the research steering committee including Michele Relihan (Co-ordinator, DL-R CCC), Sandra Campbell, Aileen O'Brien, Mary Cullen, (Manager, Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project), Marguerite Hanratty, Stephen Rourke, and Angela Stenson provided invaluable expertise and momentum to the research. Also thanks to Jakki Farrell for her contribution to the editing of the report. The successful outcome of their endeavour is the publication of this report which aims to provide baseline local quantitative and qualitative data and a better understanding of the issues which can inform a necessary process of change within community childcare in the SSP area.

We also received invaluable information from Tom Lavin Manager of the Leitrim Partnership and Aedamar Gillespie (Manager, Leitrim County Childcare Committee). Their experience gave us an opportunity to see how a more centralised model to CE staffing and training within a rural community childcare setting has worked for the CE participants, childcare workers, service providers and agencies in County Leitrim.

I would like to individually thank all of the community childcare managers, play leaders and workers interviewed as part of this research for their unwavering goodwill and co-operation. Without their candid and informative contributions this research would not have been possible. I would especially like to mention the team at Hillview Community Resource Centre who were our Pilot centre for the research. In addition, I am grateful for the opportunity to interview a number of CE Scheme Supervisors to better understand their role in the context of community childcare participants.

I would also like to thank senior representatives from a broad range of national and local stakeholder organisations who took the time to participate in the research, recognising the need and potential benefit of this piece of work.

All of the contributors mentioned above further came together in June 2005 for a seminar to review the research and discuss recommendations. The output of the industrious thematic working groups at the seminar was invaluable in finalising the report and informing a comprehensive set of recommendations.

This research project has been a very enlightening and rewarding experience, with children and childcare being of great personal interest to me as a mother, service user, researcher and trainee counselling psychologist. Finally on a personal note I would like to thank my family for their support and especially my daughter who has given me the personal experience and challenge of being a parent and a user of childcare services.

Ann D FitzGerald

# ABBREVIATIONS

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



ADM	Area Development Management
CDB	County Development Board
CDP	Community Development Projects
CE	Community Employment
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CSCI	Community Support Childcare Initiative
DED	District Electoral Division
DES	Department of Education and Science
DHC	Department of Health and Children
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
DL-R/CoCo	Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
DL-R/CCC	Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Child Care Committee
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EOCP	Equal Opportunity Childcare Programme
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair: Training & Employment Authority
FETAC	Further Education Training Awards Council
HSE	Health Services Executive
IPPA	Irish Pre-School Playgroup Association
JI	Jobs Initiative
NCA	National Childminding Association
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCCC	National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee
NCNA	National Children's Nurseries Association
NCS	National Children's Strategy
NCVA	National Council for Vocational Awards
NDP	National Development Plan
NFQ	National Framework for Quality
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NVCO	National Voluntary Childcare Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RAPID	Rapid Area
SCAN	Southside Childcare Action Network
SSP	Southside Partnership
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Background to Local Research

The Southside Partnership (SSP) is one of 38 Area Partnership Companies which have been set up to work within communities and with local groups to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and social exclusion. One of the strategic objectives of the SSP's Education and Youth Development Programme is "... to enhance the quality and availability of community based childcare provision" (SSP, 2003). To achieve this objective the Southside Childcare Action Network (SCAN) was established in 1997 to promote and implement a framework for community based childcare in the SSP area. The network is a dynamic group which comprises representation from statutory, voluntary and community sectors, as well as specific target groups including members from the travelling community, asylum and refugee seekers within the SSP area.

SCAN's mission is to initiate and support the development of a high quality, integrated childcare strategy, through a community based network, responding to the needs of the children and the families in the SSP area. An associated action to implement this objective is to promote 'successful models' of early developmental childcare, with a view to utilising these models within targeted community childcare services.

So what is the aim of community childcare, as understood by SCAN and the SSP? The aim of community childcare is threefold as follows:

- i To address equality for children so that all children have equal access to quality childcare services notwithstanding their socio-economic circumstances living in areas of disadvantage
- ii To address an important gap in the family support needs of families living in disadvantaged communities
- iii To support the childcare needs of parents living in disadvantaged circumstances who want to access employment, education and/or training opportunities.

The ethos of a quality childcare service provision is to be child centred in all aspects of the service, recognising the holistic needs of the child including social, emotional, physical and cognitive needs. In addition to these separate categories of needs, the holistic approach to childcare recognises that these attributes are complexly interconnected with the individual world and community of the child.

SCAN recognises that the childcare needs of children living in disadvantaged environments are likely to be more acute than the normative childcare needs. This can potentially put greater demands on the community childcare service providers in the day to day provision of quality services to support these accentuated needs. Interestingly, recent research has highlighted the pressures on childcare providers in general to provide an affordable, quality service, while dealing with challenges relating to space/premises, lack of trained staff and funding provision (ADM, 2000). All of these operational challenges and the holistic needs of the children are magnified for the community childcare service provider. As a consequence pragmatic reasoning would suggest that greater operational challenges combined with the greater needs of the children would result in greater supports. Anecdotal evidence from SCAN members suggests that the reality on the ground is probably the contrary. Providing quality community childcare services in the current climate is agonisingly problematic.

Despite the recent enhancements in childcare services nationally the gap appears to be widening between the overall development and quality of services available in the private sector compared to the community sector. The motivation for this research has come from the SCAN members drive to improve the situation by gaining a better understanding of the issues for the local community service providers, and to perhaps explore alternative ways of moving forward.

## Terms of Reference

The overall aim of this research is to explore the support, development, motivation and training needs of community childcare staff within the SSP area with a view to contributing to the development of an effective and practical model of community childcare service delivery, specifically focusing on quality staff provision.

One of the key instruments of 'quality' childcare is the qualification, training and motivation of the childcare staff. Local experience of SCAN members and anecdotal evidence suggests that the obstacles to achieving consistent quality staff are the limited availability of qualified staff, difficulties in attracting qualified staff to the sector and the ad hoc nature of selection, support, training and development of staff. Many service providers report a heavy reliance on Community Employment (CE)<sup>1</sup> schemes and to a lesser extent Jobs Initiative (JI)<sup>2</sup>, to maintain their staffing levels.

<sup>1</sup>Community Employment is a FAS scheme that aims to assist long-term unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine and the development of both technical and personal skills. The employer is expected to provide training/development for participants.

<sup>2</sup>Jobs Initiative is a FAS scheme designed to provide full-time work for individuals who have not had regular employment in the previous five years. This Initiative is currently being phased out by FAS.

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Quality staff provision in community childcare can best be understood in the context of the overall model of service provision. The following objectives outline the operational plan used to accomplish the aim of this research:

- To collate, document and review profile information on all the community childcare centres in the SSP area
- To collate, document and review relevant training and development information on all staff working in the community childcare centres
- To collate and review existing relevant reports, research and models at a local, county and national level
- To enter into a consultative process with key stakeholders including FÁS, Health Service Executive (Eastern Region, South Western Area), Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Childcare Committee (DL-R CCC), RAPID Programme, Barnardos, Southside Childcare Action Network (SCAN), Dun Laoghaire VEC and County Dublin VEC and the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
- To document the work, analyse the quantitative and qualitative information gathered and contribute to the development of a model to act as a practical framework for the selection, support, development and training of community childcare staff. This model should aim to facilitate a consistent, cohesive, measurable, quality childcare service to meet the holistic needs of children living in disadvantaged communities in the SSP area.

## Methodology

### Overview

- Questionnaire to profile 21 childcare centres completed during one to one interviews with Managers/Childcare Leaders
- One to one interviews with all childcare staff and CE Supervisors
- Pilot i and ii above in one centre (Hillview Playgroup/Preschool)
- Consultation with a range of personnel from the key stakeholders organisations
- Seminar which included focus groups with representatives from i, ii and iv above
- Urban/Rural comparison to include consultation with experience of a rural community in Leitrim.

### Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Leaders, Workers, CE Supervisors and one Facilitator using Interview Templates to gather quantitative and qualitative data (Appendix A - C). Research questions included a mixture of closed, open, descriptive and evaluative questions. Semi-structured interviews provided a structure and focus to the data collection process, but also encouraged the participant to talk and give an account of their individual experience in community childcare. Deductive and inductive content analysis was used to categorise the qualitative data collected from these interviews.

One of the specific objectives of this research was to enter into a consultative process with key community childcare stakeholders including FÁS, Health Service Executive (HSE) in the Eastern Region and South Western Area, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Childcare Committee (DL-R CCC), RAPID Programme, Barnardos, the Southside Childcare Action Network (SCAN), Dun Laoghaire VEC and County Dublin VEC and the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DL-R CoCo).

As part of this objective, eleven individual interviews were conducted (Table 1.0) using an interview template (Appendix D). This template was primarily used as a checklist to facilitate a semi-structured discussion rather than to provide a rigid interview tool. The interview was tailored to focus on both the organisation's role in community childcare and the specific role of the representative in this context.

Table 1.0 - Stakeholder Interview Summary

Organisation	No of Interviews
FÁS	2
Health Service Executive	5
i Child Care Manager x 2	
ii Childcare Inspector x 1	
iii Child Protection Trainer x 1	
iv Youth Programme x 1	
DL-R County Childcare Committee	1
VEC	2
DL-R County Council	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>

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## Grounded Theory Approach

The approach taken in this research was not to have a preconceived working model for community childcare, but to try and discover or retrieve a working model or framework from the reciprocally related stages of data collection, analysis and theory formulation. In accordance with the qualitative research principles of Grounded Theory<sup>2</sup>, the aim of this approach was to develop a framework that is close to the actual experiences of community childcare service providers and workers. In addition, the framework should be grounded in the localised accounts and experiences as collated from the interviews with leaders, workers, CE supervisors and stakeholders.

The framework also needs to be characterised by a certain 'fluidity' which accommodates change over time, heterogeneousness and the process involved in childcare service provision. The emerging framework needs to be a representation of ideas that will identify, provide insight to and improve understanding of the fundamental issues in community childcare, and elucidate the priority needs. Ultimately the framework should inform a process of change and evolution and enlighten a coordinated set of practical recommendations.

<sup>2</sup>Grounded Theory Approach is a qualitative research method used extensively in social sciences, which aims to develop an account of a phenomenon that identifies the major constructs or categories, their relationships, and the context and process, thus providing a theory of the phenomenon that is much more than a descriptive account (Becker, 1993).

# NATIONAL CONTEXT

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## Policy & Strategy Context - Childcare in Ireland

The first **National Children's Strategy (2000)** seeks to provide a clear direction to all those concerned with advancing the status and quality of life of children in Ireland. It provides a vision for the future by setting the following three National Goals for a more comprehensive and integrated approach:

- 1 Children will have a voice
- 2 Children's lives will be better understood through evaluation, research and information
- 3 Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development.

The strategy's third national goal has fourteen associated objectives. The first part of Objective A states that '*children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services....*'. It is further acknowledged in this objective that '*quality childcare and early childhood education services provide lasting cognitive, social and emotional benefits for children, particularly those with special needs or who are disadvantaged*'.

Interestingly, the first National Children's Strategy (2000) which is '*widely respected and supported as a blueprint for improving the lives of all children, especially those who experience disadvantage or have particular needs*' was preceded by the launch of the first National's Childcare Strategy (1999). An Expert Working Group on Childcare was convened by the DJELR comprising 70 stakeholders in the field who formulated 27 recommendations.

The **Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy** (OECD, 2002) identified the **National Childcare Strategy (1999)** as the '*first concerted attempt to develop a coherent and comprehensive government policy that specifically addressed childcare*'. However the OECD review points out that the childcare strategy is inextricably linked to labour market participation, since the terms of reference of the Expert Working Group was to consider the needs of children whose parent/s were attempting to access work through training and/or education. "*It was not conceptualised as a general move towards universal provision of early childhood education and care.*" (OECD, 2002).

Since the publication of these two national strategy documents in 1999/2000, there has been considerable momentum generated in the development of Childcare policies and supports at a National level. Some of the highlights include:

- **National Childcare Census Report 1999 - 2000** was published to provide the first national baseline data and to identify service gaps.
- The **City & County Childcare Committees** were established as a local mechanism to facilitate the National Childcare Programme. The aim of the CCC is to:
  - i improve the quality of childcare
  - ii increase the number of facilities and places and
  - iii introduce a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of childcare services.
- Rollout of the **Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (published 1999)**
- The **Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education (CECDE)** was established in 2002 to provide a National Framework for Quality Standards
- Publication of **A Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care & Education Sector (2002)** by the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC) to provide a dynamic structure and process for the standardisation of qualification and training for staff
- Publication of **Towards a Framework for Early Learning (2004)** by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) the first consultative document focusing specifically on learning throughout early childhood from birth to six years.

Perhaps the most notable impact on childcare in Ireland since 2000 has been the establishment of a stream of funding for the development of childcare, channelled through the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006. Under the two Regional Operation Programmes one of the four priorities is Social Inclusion and Childcare. Childcare is further linked with employment under this programme, where the primary objective of childcare is to overcome social disadvantage and promote equality by improving access to education, training and work. The Social Inclusion and Childcare priority includes a measure where European Structural Funds for capital, staffing and quality grants are available to childcare providers, distributed under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP). The total funding available to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) under EOCP is €499 million for the investment in childcare over the period 2000-2006.

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What is not readily recognised is that the department of DJELR is not just focused on law and order issues, but also has responsibility for a social agenda, which includes equality and childcare. Obligations in the area of equality, which derive from Ireland's membership of the EU include childcare, which is seen as a 'critical issue' in respect of equal opportunities between women and men (DJELR, 2002). The DJELR's involvement in childcare stems from this Equality brief. Furthermore, the Department has been given the lead co-ordination role in childcare provision by the Government, in addition to its responsibility for the EOCP programme. The Area Development Management Ltd (ADM) administers the day to day running of the EOCP programme on behalf of the DJELR.

Some of the relevant performance indicators defined by the DJELR (2002) to measure the objectives of the EOCP programme include:

- 1 Provision of childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age
- 2 Provision of childcare by 2010 to at least 33% of children under 3 years of age
- 3 Increase in the employment of qualified childcare personnel
- 4 Enhanced co-ordination and planning of childcare activity at local and at national level
- 5 A greater awareness among stakeholders of key issues which impact upon the childcare sector.

## Embedded Themes in Research

There are three key themes implicit in this research (Table 2.0), which are also reflected in the national and local childcare research which has informed this report.

Table 2.0 - Embedded Research Themes

Theme	Comment
1 Quality	Access to quality childcare service provision is the right of all children in Ireland.
2 Holistic Needs	Recognises the multi-dimensional aspect of children's development i.e. physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual etc. Identifies the capacity of children to shape their own lives while also being shaped and supported by the world around them.
3 Co-ordinated Approach	The need to have a co-ordinated approach regarding quality childcare service provision at a national and local level, including equality and ease of access.

Each of these themes is explored in more detail in the following three sections of this report.

## Understanding Quality

The recurring theme in all childcare reports and initiatives is 'Quality' childcare service provision. However understanding 'Quality' is not a simple case of presenting a definition. The CECDE has done extensive research in recent years on quality as part of the process to devise a **National Framework of Quality**. Taken from the consultative report *Talking About Quality (CECDE, 2004)*, Figure 1.0, illustrates the ten themes that gained consensus amongst participants in relation to defining quality. One pithy quote from this research sums up the challenge posed by a definition of '...quality which is a somewhat nebulous concept which changes and evolves as the early childhood care and education sector continues to develop...'

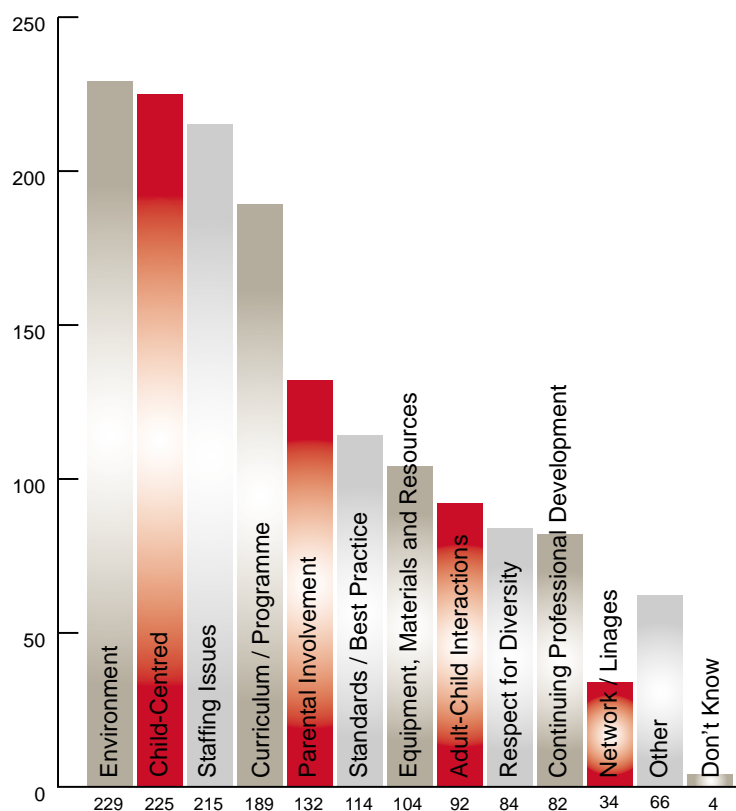
The explicit and implicit theme throughout this local community childcare research project is quality childcare service provision. The CECDE quality benchmark therefore provides a useful reference point and backdrop to that theme as the relevant data is presented and explored.

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Figure 1.0 - Defining Quality (CECDE, 2002)



## Understanding the Holistic Needs of Children

Meeting the holistic needs of the child is widely seen as a central element of quality childcare service provision. However, similar to the challenge of the 'Quality' theme in childcare, defining the concept of the 'holistic needs of the child' is also not straightforward.

Some insight into this concept can be gained from the **National Children's Strategy (2000)**, which draws on the most recent research and knowledge about children's development and the relationship between children and family, community and the wider society. Underpinning the strategy's three national goals is the explicit adoption of a 'Whole Child' perspective. This holistic perspective aims to reflect the context of children's lives today and anchors the strategy to a coherent and inclusive view of childhood. The strategy introduces and adopts a 'whole child' perspective which effectively elucidates this concept.

Figure 2.0 provides a visual illustration of the 'whole child' perspective, representing the dynamic interaction between the three aspects of the perspective which are:

- 1 Recognising children as active participants in their own development – The Active Developing Child
- 2 The nine interlinked childhood development dimensions being physical and mental wellbeing, emotional and behavioural wellbeing, intellectual capacity, spiritual and moral wellbeing, identity, self-care, family relationships, social and peer relationships and social presentation
- 3 The complex mix of dynamic informal and formal supports and relationships that children rely on for a satisfying and successful childhood ranging from family, community to formal support services provided by the State etc.

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Figure 2.0 - The 'Whole Child Perspective', National Children's Strategy (2000)



The 'Whole Child Perspective' as described in more detail in the National Children's strategy document is similarly integral to this research where it is assumed that the essential focus for quality in childcare at a local and national level must be to meet the holistic needs of the children. More specifically this research is about a targeted population of children, where it needs to be recognised that their 'Whole Child Perspective' and needs can be adversely affected by their disadvantaged circumstances.

## Understanding a Co-ordinated Approach

The **National Children's Strategy (2000)** introduces an 'Engine of Change' as the linchpin for the successful implementation of the goals and objectives by providing a robust pragmatic national and local framework for delivery. The need to improve co-ordination at a national and local level is an important theme identified in the proposed 'Engine of Change'. The strategy recognises that the practical implementation of complex issues needs a single agenda for action. Implicit in the delivery of this single agenda for action, are co-ordinated, coherent and uncomplicated service delivery mechanisms. The National Children's Office was nominated as the appropriate body to carry out further research on the framework for delivery. This Office is undertaking research to evaluate international experiences of the effectiveness of different models of managing child and family-related services and also to consider the effectiveness of the distribution of government responsibilities in Ireland.

Although the scope of this research is limited to community childcare service provision within the SSP area, the local experience cannot be understood in isolation but needs to be set in the national context. Seven Government Departments are directly and/or indirectly involved in childcare as illustrated in Figure 3.0.

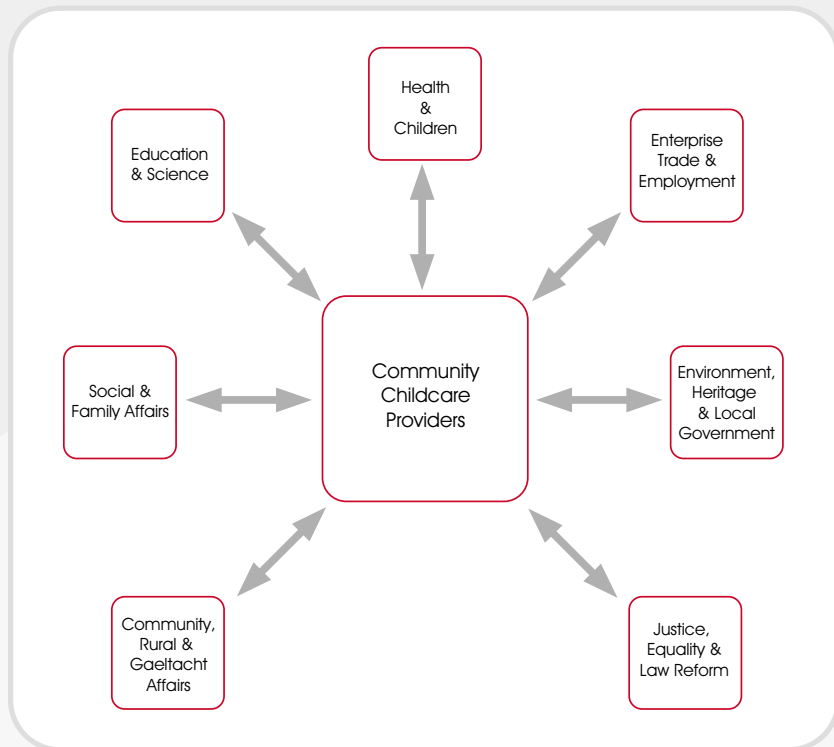
As a point of clarification, this diagram does not include the links and coordination that exist between departments.

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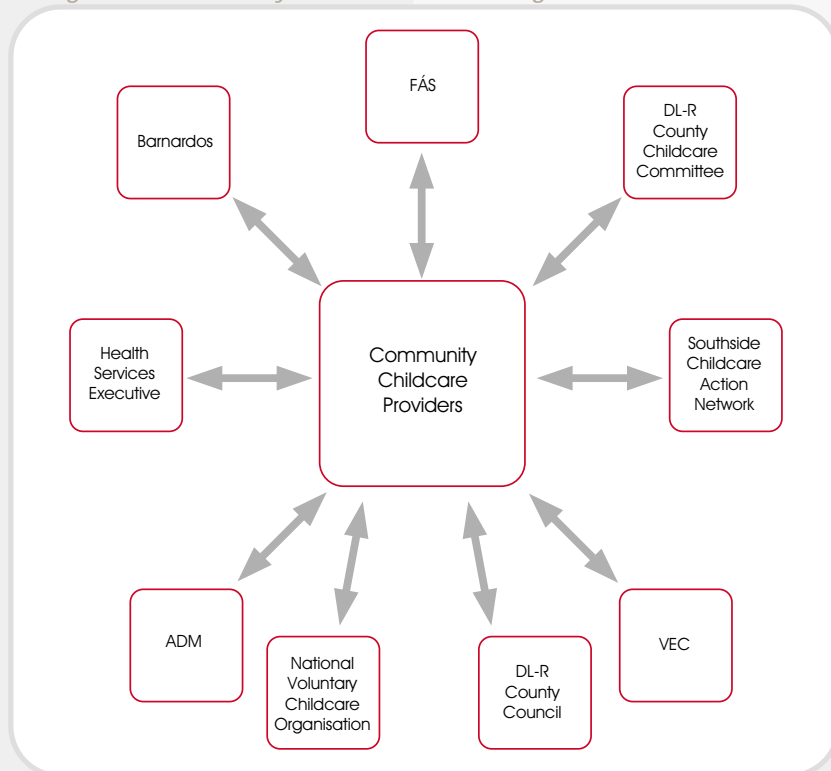


Figure 3.0 - Community Childcare and Government Departments



Similarly there is a local community childcare framework currently in operation as illustrated in Figure 4.0. In addition to the dynamic between the local organisations and the service providers there are also links between the local organisations. These links have been excluded to maintain the focus on the interactions of the local service provider.

Figure 4.0 - Community Childcare and Local Organisations



The role of the HSE at a local level is multifaceted, involving a number of departments. Similarly the National Voluntary Childcare Organisation (NVCO) refers to the main National Voluntary Organisations, excluding Barnardos who are considered separately and including the Irish Pre-School Playgroup Association (IPPA), National Children's Nursery Association (NCNA), the National Childminding Association (NCA), Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association, An Comhchoiste Reamhscolaíochta, and St. Nicholas Montessori Society.

# DUN LAOGHAIRE-RATHDOWN

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## Local Demographic Context

The target communities of the Southside Partnership are 21 districts/areas of socio-economic disadvantage within the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DL-R CoCo) and the South Dublin County Council Area. It is estimated that in 2004 the total target population is 76,000 (i.e. 46,000 living in the 21 districts/areas and 30,000 from target groups who do not live within the designated geographical areas/districts).

The total capacity of the community childcare sector in the SSP area is approximately 408 places provided by 16 separate centres. Although specific preschool children population statistics are not available for the SSP area, from the statistics available it is possible to extrapolate a guesstimate of the number of preschool children in this target population. The total population of eight (total nine) of the Full Electoral Divisions (DEDs) in the SSP area is 23,254, which includes 1,770 preschool children aged 0-5 years, (7.6% of this total population). It is therefore deduced that by applying this ratio of 7.6% to the overall target population of 76,000, there are approximately 5,776 preschool children.

Although SCAN represents the majority of community childcare service providers in the SSP area there are some providers that are not members of SCAN and are therefore not represented in this research.

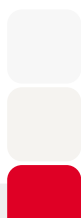
Finally' there are other services for children in the targeted population which are not within the scope of this research since the nature of the services, as defined by the provider Barnardos (Table 3.0), is different to mainstream childcare services and is specifically focused on delivering a therapeutic programme to meet the needs of the children and their parents who typically attend on a referral basis.

Table 3.0 - Barnardos Services in the SSP area

Service	Early Years	Pre-School	Total
Loughlinstown Family Centre	6	15	21
Cottage Childcare Project	8	8	16
Dun Laoghaire Family Centre	7	7	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>51</b>

Combining the capacity of Barnardos therapeutic services (51 places) and SCAN childcare services (408 places) the total number of children currently accessing services is approximately 459. Taking 5,776 as the best estimate available of the total targeted population of children (see above) and that 459 + non Scan member childcare places is representative of the total number of places available, it is reasonable to suggest that less than 10% of the targeted children are currently accessing community and therapeutic childcare services in the area.

The county of DL-R is one of the most affluent counties in Ireland. It has one of the lowest rates of unemployment, the largest percentage of people employed in managerial and professional occupations and one of the highest rates of participation in third level education. These positive indicators do not, however, reflect the levels of socio-economic disadvantage which exist within certain parts of the county. In some cases the disadvantaged communities are small and are surrounded by affluence. Similarly, almost 40% or 30,000 from target groups, do not live within the designated geographical areas/districts and are not able to access financially or logistically many of the private services available in their area.





## SCAN Community Childcare Providers

An inclusive grass roots approach was taken in this research project, whereby data was collated directly from fifteen community childcare centres, in the SSP area (Table 4.0). One of the providers runs five separate childcare services from a single facility. However for the purposes of this report these services are included as one provider. The fifteen centres running at full capacity can provide approximately 388 childcare places. The majority of the services are for preschool children, typically aged 3-5 years with a limited number of crèche facilities for babies and toddlers.

Table 4.0 - Community Childcare Provider Interview Summary

Community Childcare Centre	Child Capacity	CE Scheme Yes/No	Workers	Leader/ Management/ Facilitator	CE Supervisor
Hillview Resource Centre	33	Yes	10	2	1
Mountview Resource Centre	30	Yes	7	1	
Shanganagh Park House (x5)	75	Yes	15	1	1
Ballyogan Resource Centre	28	Yes	11	1	1
The Willows VEC	28	No	6	1	
Ladybirds Playgroup	14	Yes	6	1	1
Dominican Convent Montessori School	40	No	4	1	
Sallynoggin Community Playgroup	17	No	3	1	
Dalkey Community Playgroup	20	No	3	1	
Blackrock Community Playgroup	16	No	2	1	
Holy Child Community Playgroup	20	No	4	1	
Glasthule Community Playgroup	20	No	3	1	
St Louisa's Community Playgroup	14	Yes	3	1	
St Ann's Community Playgroup	13	Yes	3		
Butterfly Community Playgroup	20	Yes	7	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CE Scheme</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Non CE</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>

In total 107 individual interviews were conducted by one researcher at the community childcare centres, including 87 childcare workers, 14 playgroup leaders/managers, one facilitator and five CE supervisors. The role of the leader/manager varies a lot across centres. For example, in some of the resource centres there is a dedicated manager, with responsibility for the overall running of the centre and not just the childcare services. In one of the centres the dedicated manager is also the CE supervisor. In contrast, in most of the playgroups the manager is a play leader, directly involved with the children on a day to day basis, in addition to managing the overall running of the childcare service. Finally, in some playgroups the manager is only involved on a part-time voluntary basis and is part of the management committee.

It is also important to point out that the community childcare providers in the SSP area are a mixed group in terms of their origin, history and the current context of their childcare services. Most of the services fall into the category of sessional<sup>4</sup> childcare services with a small number of providers offering full-day care services. This is a key factor in the analysis and recommendations of this report since the primary objective of sessional childcare services, by its very definition, to support the Children and families rather than as a labour market initiative. Furthermore, the restricted hours of these sessional childcare services are in many cases combined with an alignment to school holidays (term time sessional services).

From a staffing perspective the centres have been divided into two main groups namely, centres with CE schemes and centres without CE (Table 4.0). This categorisation is appropriate since the support, development, motivation and training needs of the workers are directly influenced by their terms and basis of employment. Eight of the centres, which accounts for 58 percent of the childcare places, are centres with CE scheme workers. The balance of seven of the centres and 42 percent of the childcare places are in centres that do not have CE workers.

<sup>4</sup>Sessional care was defined as per the Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations (1996) as the provision of a service offering a planned programme to preschool children for up to 3.5 hours per session which generally catered for children in the 2-6 year age bracket

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Furthermore, from an origin, history and current context perspective the centres have been categorised into three relevant groupings namely, Family & Community Services Resource Centres, including Community Development Projects (CDPs), (Table 4.1), Playgroups (Table 4.2) and Education Support (Table 4.3).

Table 4.1 - Community Childcare Providers – Resource Centres

Community Childcare Centre	Child Capacity	CE Scheme Yes/No	Workers	Leader/ Management/ Facilitator	CE Supervisor
Hillview Resource Centre	33	Yes	10	2	1
Mountwood Resource Centre (CDP)	30	Yes	7	1	
Shanganagh Park House	75	Yes	15	1	1
Ballyogan Resource Centre	28	Yes	11	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CE Scheme</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>60%</b>

The Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme (FCSRCP) was introduced in 1994 to mark the International Year of the Family and to address the perceived gap in statutory support for community development activities focused on support for families and tackling child poverty. Under the initial pilot programme ten projects received funding. Both the external evaluation and the report of the Commission on the Family recommended that this funding be mainstreamed and was made available in the 1998 Budget to fund an additional 20-25 centres. The overall objective of this funding is to address social exclusion through assisting voluntary and community groups in disadvantaged areas in a process of development in order to achieve the potential of community action and to improve the quality of their lives.

In May 2001 the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs announced the establishment of a new statutory body - The Family Support Agency. The new agency brings together the main programmes designed to help prevent marital breakdown, support ongoing parenting relationships for children and develop local family support to include the running of the FCSRCP.

Table 4.2 - Community Childcare Providers – PlayGroups

Community Childcare Centre	Child Capacity	CE Scheme Yes/No	Workers	Leader/ Management/ Facilitator	CE Supervisor
Ladybirds Playgroup	14	Yes	6	1	1
Sallynoggin Community Playgroup	17	No	3	1	
Dalkey Community Playgroup	20	No	3	1	
Blackrock Community Playgroup	16	No	2	1	
Glasthule Community Playgroup	20	No	3	1	
St Louisa's Community Playgroup	14	Yes	3	1	
St Ann's Community Playgroup	13	Yes	3		
Butterfly Community Playgroup	20	Yes	7	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CE Scheme</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Non CE</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>40%</b>



Community playgroups have been active in Ireland for more than a generation. From the mid 60's to the present time, parents and interested community activists have come together to provide early childhood care and education, in response to the needs of the children and their own childcare needs. In some instances they are totally managed, operated and funded by parents. In others they receive support, financial or material (e.g. premises), from other local organisations such as Church, local authority, education or health providers and in some instances state funding is provided either in the form of direct grants or to representative or supporting organisations. Typically a community playgroup is a playgroup offering sessional care, managed by a voluntary committee, especially parents.

The committee appoints playleaders who are employed by the committee or in some cases work on a voluntary basis. The provision of play opportunities and materials suited to the child's stage of development is the main activity. In 2002 the number of community playgroups in Dublin was 53 which had declined significantly since 1998 when there were 77 (IPPA, 2003).

Table 4.3 - Community Childcare Providers - Education Support

Community Childcare Centre	Child Capacity	CE Scheme Yes/No	Workers	Leader/ Management/ Facilitator	CE Supervisor
The Willows VEC	28	No	6	1	
Dominican Convent Montessori School	40	No	4	1	
Holy Child Community Playgroup	20	No	4	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Non CE</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>0%</b>

Education Support includes providers that are specifically set up to support an education programme for young adults returning to education or are based in a school environment. The Willows is a purpose built crèche, funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES) to support the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), operated through the VEC. The courses provided under the scheme may be for up to two years in duration. They can lead to qualifications such as Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Post Leaving Certificate and FETAC Level 1 and 2.<sup>5</sup>

The main objectives of the scheme are:

- i to give unemployed people education and training opportunities which will develop their employability
- ii to prepare people to go to paid employment or to further educational opportunities leading to paid employment.

For participants in the Leaving Certificate Applied Adult programme in the Holy Child Community School, Sallynoggin, childcare facilities are available in the school. Places are available for preschool children of adult learners and the facility is fully subsidised.

Finally, the Dominican Convent primary school has a Montessori preschool facility which has a mix of private and community preschool places. Twenty of its forty places are private and charged at private pre-school rates with the balance available at subsidised rates for the local community children or children referred by the HSE.

## Model Formulation

### Overview

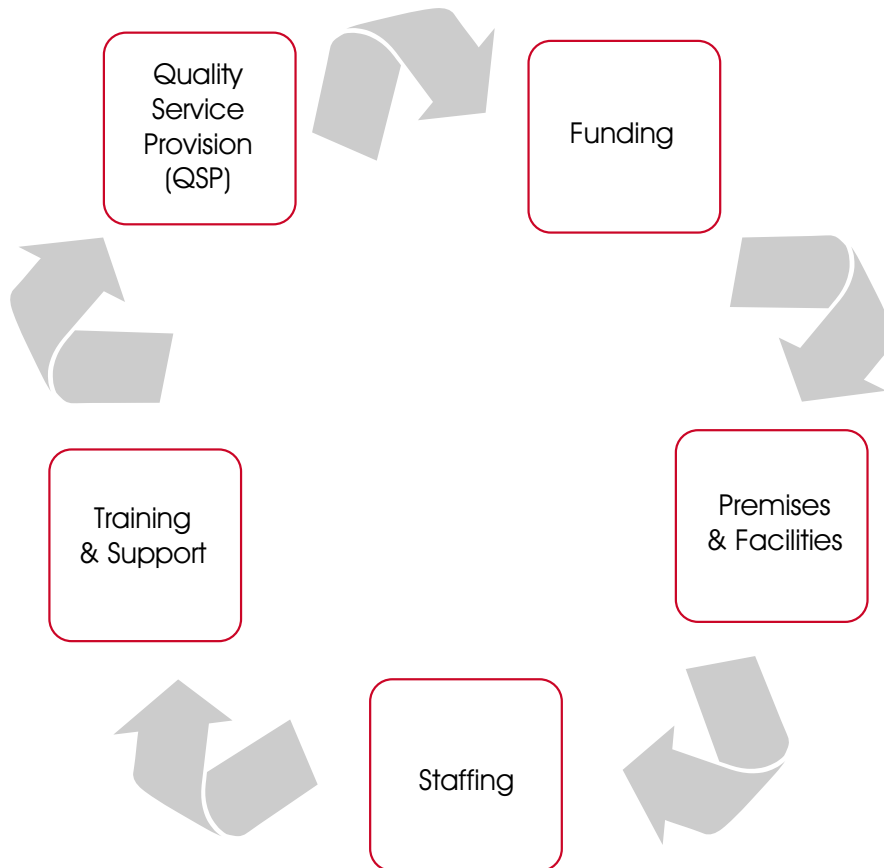
Using the Grounded Theory approach whereby data collection, analysis and theory formulation are reciprocally related, it is appropriate at this stage to introduce the operational framework or working model which emerged from the research. Although the community childcare service providers who contributed to this research were firmly united in their goal to provide affordable, quality childcare services to meet the holistic needs of the children and support the families in their local communities, there was a sense that this goal was an aspiration rather than a reality, as illustrated in the following model formulation.

### Service Provider Current 'Operating Loop'

The Service Providers 'Operating Loop' illustrated in Figure 5.0 represents the current operating conditions reported by the community childcare sector in the SSP area. The operating loop is intended to capture the cyclical, adhoc, repetitive, piecemeal and short term nature of the operational experience necessary to provide community childcare services in the current climate.



Figure 5.0 - Working Model - Service Providers Operating Loop



The treadmill dynamic represented by the *'Operating Loop'*, makes it hard for service providers to plan, develop and if necessary expand their childcare services, since many of the fundamentals necessary to make a plan i.e. funding, premises, staff and training, are surrounded by uncertainty and in many cases, are only negotiable on a short-term basis.

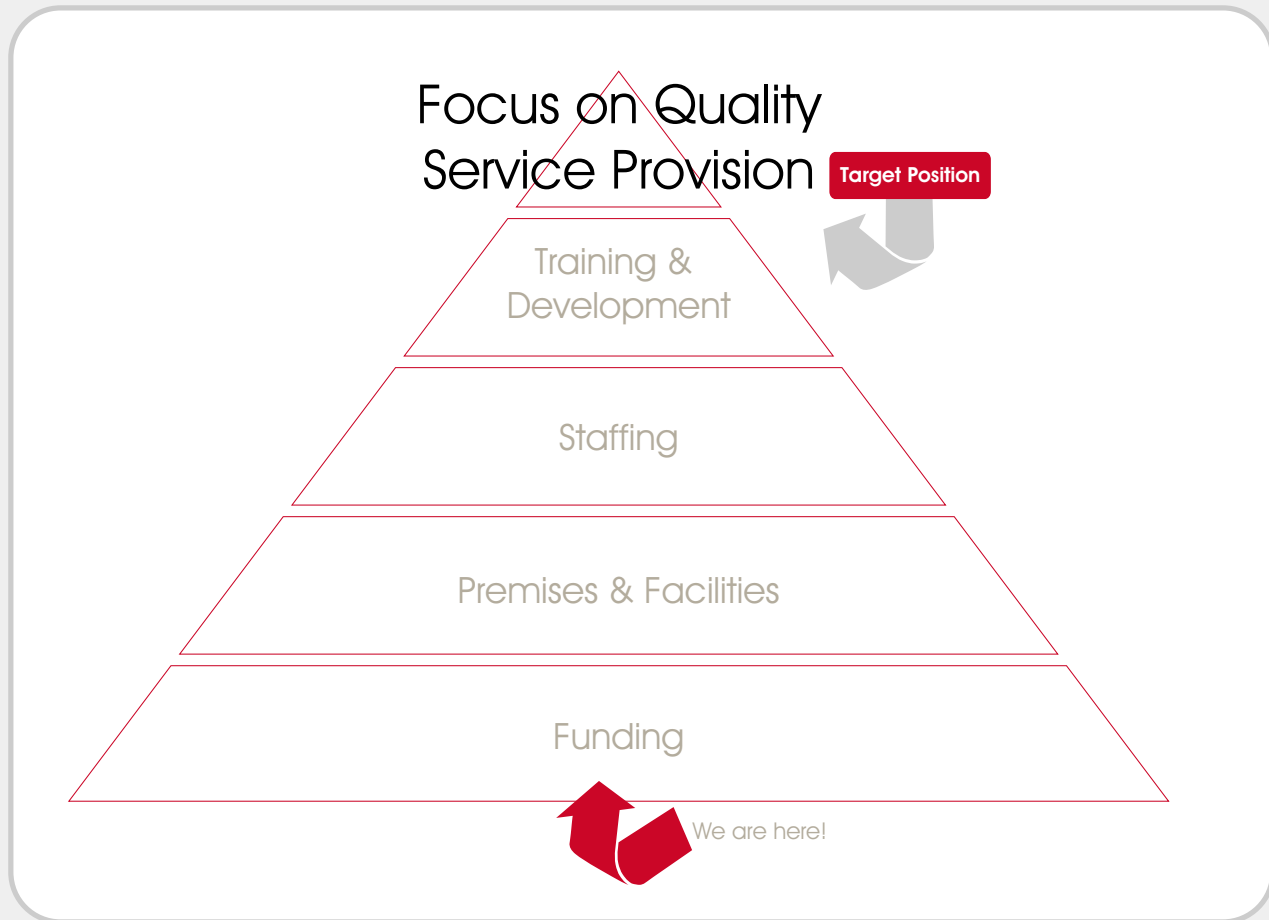
## Conclusion

The research aims to strip away some of the complexity and identify the key issues experienced by the service providers, workers and stakeholders in the SSP area. It is only by better understanding the reality of community childcare service provision that the inefficient *'Operating Loop'* model can be transformed, through a managed process of change, into a more secure long-term framework, which can firmly support the development and expansion of quality childcare in the sector.

Practically what needs to be addressed in this research report are the recommended changes necessary to enable a transition process, from the reported recurring *'Operating Loop'* or cycle of survival, to a more sustainable stable framework. The future working model should naturally lay down the incremental foundations necessary to allow the service providers and childcare workers to focus their attention on quality childcare service provision.



Figure 6.0 - Future Working Model - Service Providers Hierarchy of Needs



## Service Provider Future Working Model

The characteristics of a future working model for community childcare providers can be illustrated by taking inspiration from the distinguished Maslow 'Hierarchy of Needs'<sup>4</sup> theory. In the context of childcare the lower level needs, or the foundations of a quality service, include funding (taken in the broader context of strategy, policy and barriers), facilities, staff, training and development. If the service providers are motivated by the unsatisfied lower level needs, then the focus of attention cannot be directed towards higher needs (Figure 6.0). Fulfilling the lower level needs will release resources to focus on the provision and development of a quality service. However, if the fundamental needs are unsatisfied or threatened, the childcare service will remain under-developed with resources being consumed to satisfy these lower level needs.

<sup>4</sup>Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a Theory in psychology that Abraham Maslow proposed in his 1943 paper *A Theory of Human Motivation*. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is usually depicted as a pyramid consisting of five levels: the four lower levels are grouped together as *deficiency needs*, while the top level is termed *being needs*. The basic concept is that the higher needs in this hierarchy only come into focus once all the needs that are lower down in the pyramid are mainly or entirely satisfied. Growth forces create upward movement in the hierarchy.

# KEY ISSUES

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## Issue Profiles

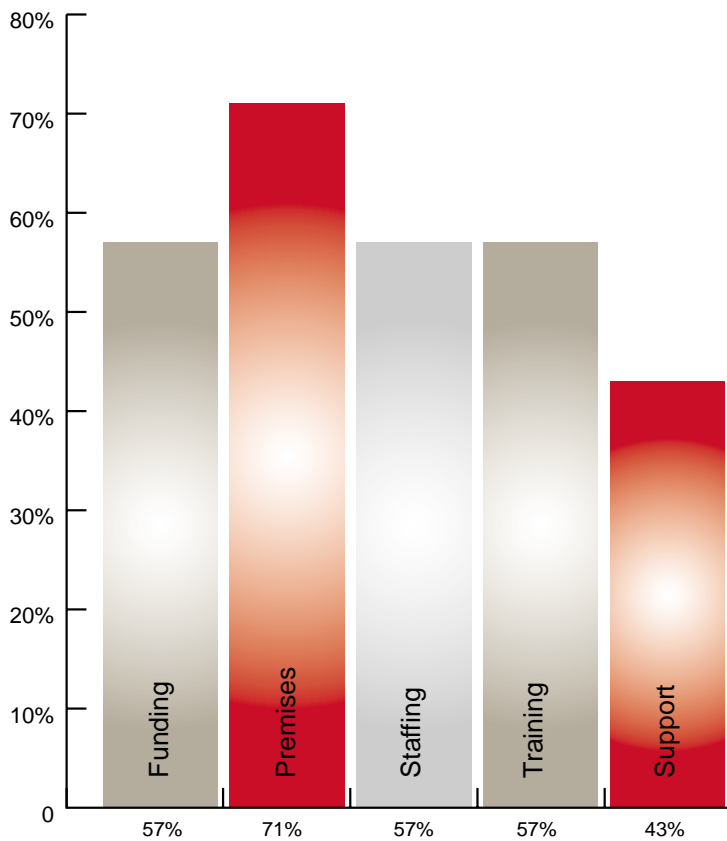
### Introduction

It is beneficial to consider the local data collated, coded and categorised in this research from a holistic perspective. Although the specific concerns and issues recorded in the research are important, it is also worth taking an overview of the data categories. As expected the issue profiles presented vary considerably depending on the role and circumstances of the respondent group i.e. leaders and workers. Similarly the issue profile of a subgroup, for example CE workers, can create a different story and set of priorities than the issue profile reported for all workers. The purpose of this section is to illustrate some of the data holistically, prior to the more reductionist approach taken in the subsequent thematic sections.

### Leaders

Based on the 14 Leader interviews conducted, Figure 7.0 is a summary of the issues reported in response to some of the interview questions (Appendix A). This was a deductive process whereby the leaders were specifically asked to comment on the issues they experience under the headings of funding, premises, staff, training, equipment, support and other. The equipment and other categories did not result in significant separate groupings and were therefore re-categorised under the five main themes that emerged as substantive. The responses to these key operational categories highlights the relative level of importance of a broad range of issues experienced in the running of their childcare services.

Figure 7.0 - Service providers Issue Summary



### Workers

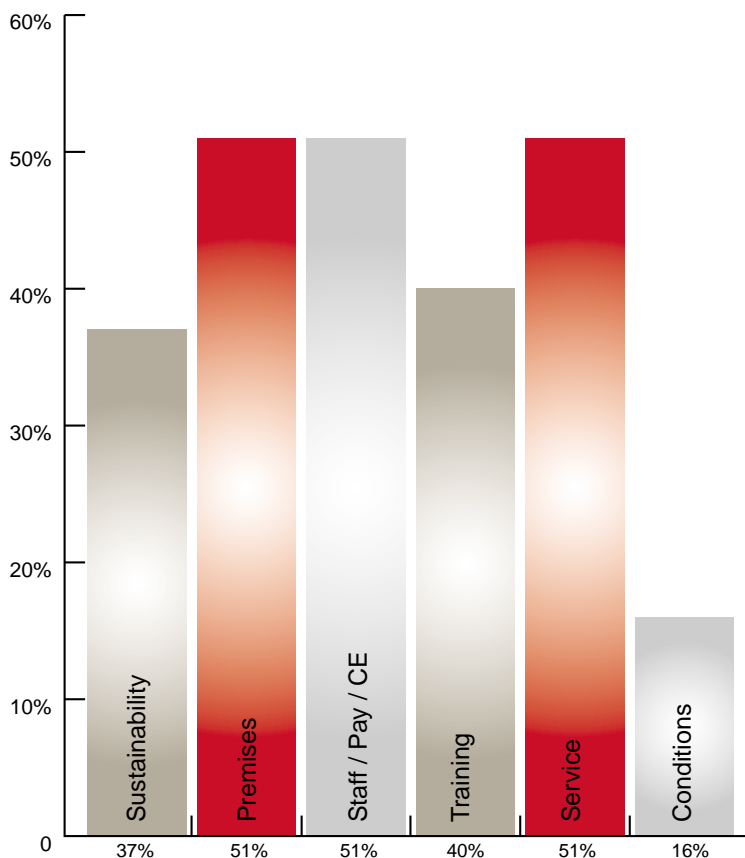
Based on the 87 worker interviews conducted Figures 8.0, 8.1 and 8.2 summarise the issue profiles identified by the individual childcare workers, in response to the range of interview questions (Appendix B) regarding their own personal career and current experience working in community childcare. The categorisation of issues from these interviews was effectively an inductive process, looking for patterns in the data collected and then developing tentative groupings to systematically present the qualitative data. On average each worker discussed issues in two to three different thematic groupings.

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Figure 8.0 - Workers Issue Summary - All

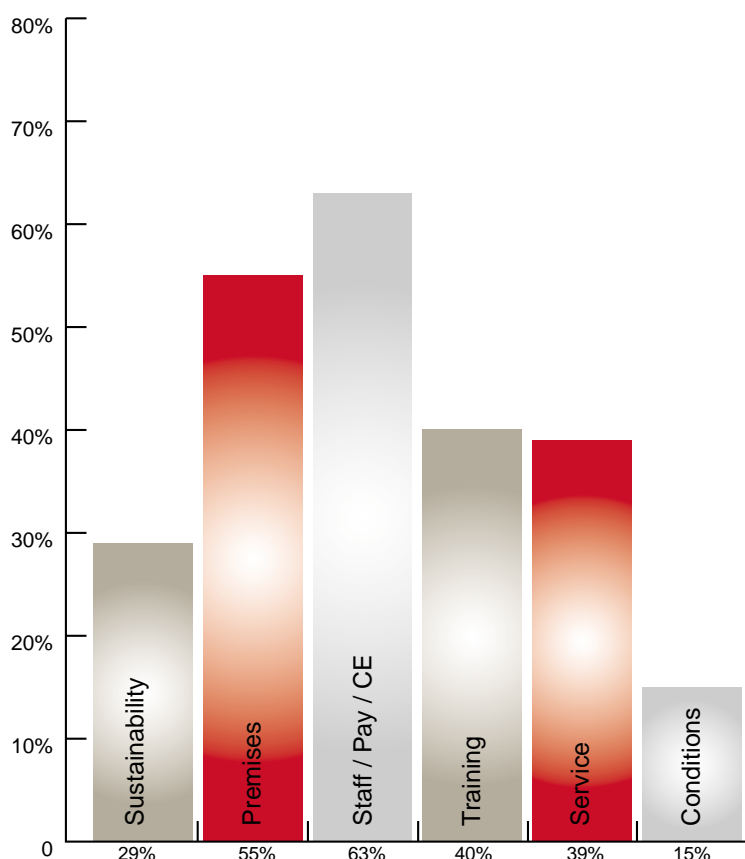


In total 213 individual comments were coded as issues from the 87 interviews conducted with the workers. Overall 37% of participants expressed concern regarding the sustainability of the service. Just over 50% of participants expressed issues which were categorised under the following three themes:

- i Premises and facilities used in the service provision
- ii Staffing situation, pay levels and CE Schemes
- iii Service provision.

Training issues were expressed by 40% of participants and finally, 16% had concerns regarding their working conditions.

Figure 8.1 - Workers Issue Summary -CE



### Workers in Centres with CE Schemes

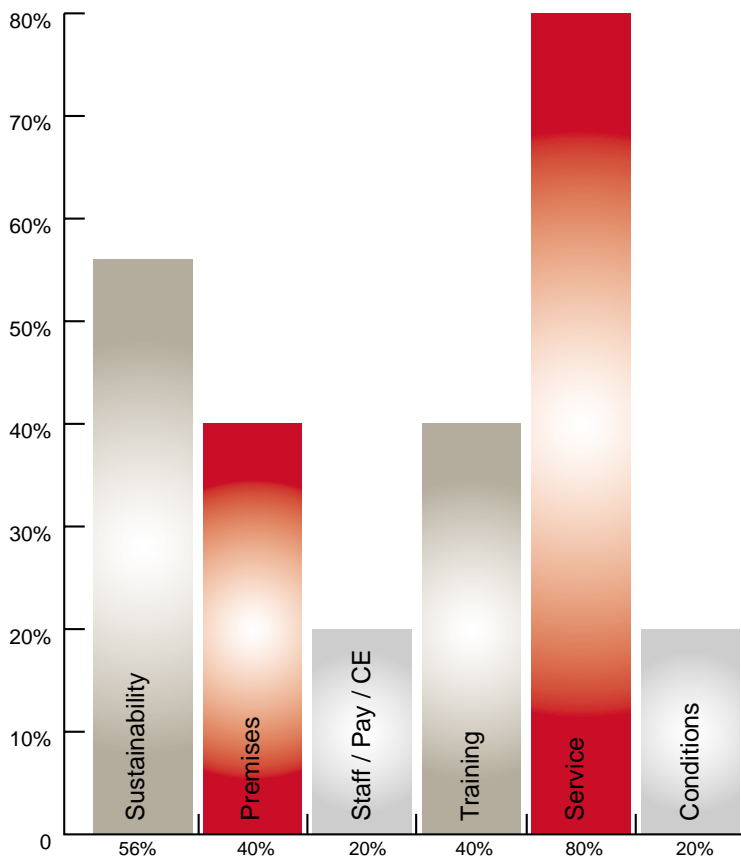
The issue profile for the subgroup of 62 workers interviewed in centres with CE schemes (Figure 8.1) is characterised by 63% of workers having staffing related concerns. This dimension is closely followed by 55% of workers identifying issues with the premises and facilities. Training and service provision were also topics of concern with issues discussed by 40% and 39% of workers respectively. Sustainability issues featured less strongly with 29% of participants expressing concern. Finally, 15% mentioned issues relating to their working conditions.

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Figure 8.2 - Workers Issue Summary - Non CE



## Workers in Centres without CE Schemes

The issue profile for the subgroup of 25 workers interviewed in centres without CE schemes (Figure 8.2) is characterised by 80% of participants expressing concern regarding the service provision. Sustainability issues were identified by 56% of participants. Premises and training issues were of concern to 40% of these workers. Finally, 20% of participants mentioned staffing issues and conditions at work.

## CE Supervisors

The purpose of the CE supervisor interview (Appendix C) was to understand the supervisor's role in the context of the CE scheme, the service provider, the childcare service and the participant. The qualitative data collated is included in the relevant staffing and training sections of the report.

## Stakeholders

It is not appropriate to present a graphical issue profile of the data from the stakeholder interviews (Appendix D). Each discussion was specific to the elements of childcare that were within the remit of the role and the organisation represented. The stakeholder responses are therefore incorporated under the specific headings (relating to the contributions).

## Conclusion

Although the graphical issue profiles are a useful technique to access the data systematically, this is not the complete story. It is important to recognise that there are significant overlaps, dependencies and inter-relationships between the data categories and the underlying issues. Categorisation can create the illusion of structure and detachment. However, the reality is that none of the issues can be fully understood in isolation, but are part of a complex web of interdependencies.

As a further point of caution with regard to the interpretation of the issue profiles: although issue profiles help to illustrate the level of concern regarding specific elements of the childcare service provision, they do not identify the magnitude or nature of the concern.

Notwithstanding these caveats, the 'Operating Loop' as described and illustrated (Figure 5.0) is used as a working model to explore the issue profile data dimensions, by putting the spotlight on each element of the loop in the following sections. Although working conditions feature as a separate category in the workers issue profile, it is not discussed separately in this report since most of the issues arise from problems identified in other categories i.e. premises and facilities, reliance on CE etc.



## Funding

### Introduction - The Funding Challenge

One of the key measures of sustainability for a community childcare service is its financial viability and stability. Funding is the cornerstone for the development of quality childcare services, both from a capital and operational perspective. The funding challenge, as reported by community providers, has three main features, namely multiple sources of funding, a finance model, and funding process attributes.

Figure 9.0 illustrates the main sources of funding available to the community sector. In addition to the multiple funding sources, the following attributes of the Finance Model and Funding Process provide an ongoing challenge for community childcare service providers:

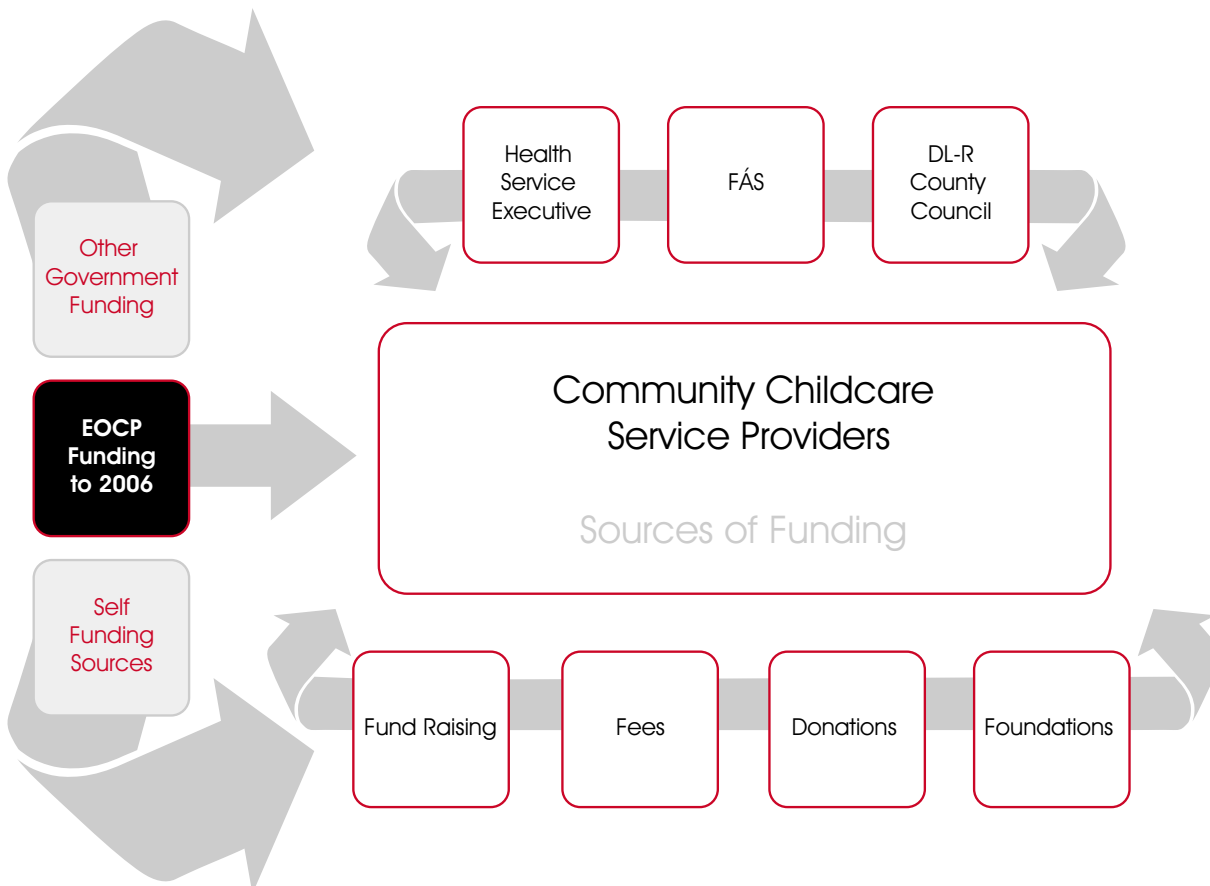
#### The Finance Model

- i **Affordable** quality childcare in the community sector means that nominal parental fees (average of 15 - 25/wk, max 40 per week) are chargeable
- ii **Cashflow** from Parental Fees is unreliable in areas of disadvantage
- iii **Finance Gap** being the GAP identified in the *Childcare Census Report (2000)* with 36.4% of income coming from parental fees, leaving over 60% to come from other sources, including grants
- iv **No Surplus** for reinvestment or development of Premises, Facilities, Service.

#### The Funding Process

- i The above Finance Model is unlikely to change and is a **certainty** within the community sector
- ii Ongoing and repetitive (often annual) negotiation with **multiple sources** of funding (Figure 9.0)
- iii **Self Reliance** which is implicit in the current time-bound EOCP funding programme is not a reality for the community sector and is not part of the current vision. There will always be a need for capital, staffing and support funding.
- iv Smaller providers especially (playgroups) have limited **resources and capacity** to engage in public funding grant applications or to avail of the funding supports
- v Ambiguity regarding eligibility of **sessional versus full-day care** services for EOCP funding.

Figure 9.0 - Sources of Funding



# KEY ISSUES



## EOCP Funding

EOCP is the main source of public funding for childcare in Ireland. As already mentioned ADM administers the day to day running of EOCP on behalf of the DJELR and ultimately the state. It is therefore appropriate at the outset to explore the performance and impact of EOCP funding in the context of the SCAN members.

Funding under EOCP consists of capital and staffing grants, the latter only available for community based/not-for-profit childcare facilities. The total EOCP grants approved for the DL-R area to 30 April 2005 is approximately 9 million, with almost 2.43 million, or 27% of this total funding approved for SCAN members providing community childcare services. Six of the total sixteen centres are approved for capital grants (37.5% of centres, 50% of childcare places) and nine of the sixteen centres are approved for staffing grants (56% of centres and 70% of childcare places).

The percentage of total grants approved for childcare providers operating in Resource Centres is 78% (Table 5.0). Playgroups are approved for 5% of total grants, with 17% of the total grants approved for the Education Support category. Overall six of the eight playgroup childcare providers have not been approved for capital or staffing grants to date, which would indicate that the majority of playgroups have not applied for EOCP funding.

Table 5.0 - EOCP Grants Approved to 30 April 2005 by Category

Category of Childcare Provider	Capital	Staffing	Total	% of Total
Resource Centres	1,090,000	799,843	1,889,843	78%
Playgroups	35,610	75,982	111,592	5%
Education Support	160,177	270,386	430,563	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,285,787</b>	<b>1,146,211</b>	<b>2,431,998</b>	<b>100%</b>

In respect of the overall capital grants programme, the data collated by the **EOCP Evaluation Report (2003)** shows that the effectiveness of this measure is well behind projections, with the national increase in childcare places running at 30.9% of the mid-term target. Accordingly, given the slow rate of physical progress, the EOCP Evaluation report recommends that the final targets should be reviewed. Furthermore, in respect of the community element of the measure, it is also recommended in this report that targets should be established in terms of the creation of full-time and sessional childcare places.

### EOCP Sub-Measure 2 – Support for Staffing Costs

Nine service providers have been approved for staffing grants, however again under this sub-measure there is significant variation in the amount received by individual centres. For example, 70% of the total staffing grants have been approved for Resource Centres (43% of childcare places), all of whom also avail of CE scheme staff. Furthermore, 23% of the total staffing grants are approved for the Education Support group (23% of childcare places). Finally, 7% of the total staffing grant is approved for three out of eight service providers in the Playgroup category (35% of childcare places).

The **EOCP Evaluation Report (2003)** states that the staffing costs grant is a “somewhat blunt mechanism...” which “assists in meeting the social inclusion/affordability objective of the programme”. The report however goes on to highlight the short-term nature of this approach, pointing out that there are “concerns around its effectiveness as a targeting instrument and the sustainability of the approach beyond the end of the current programme in 2006” (DJELF,2003). Finally, the EOCP Evaluation Report recommends that consideration is given to alternative approaches to subsidise the costs of childcare, including the exploration of a system of capitation fees and more appropriate fee structures.

### Non EOCP Funding

The **Childcare Census Report (2000)** findings help to appreciate the importance of funding for community childcare service providers reporting that community childcare facilities only got 36.4% of their income from parental fees. This suggests that over 60% of the costs need to be covered by other sources including grants, fundraising etc. Furthermore results from the evaluation of the Community Support Childcare Initiative (CSCI) Projects 2000, (ADM, 2002) stated that 20% of income came from Parental Fees, revealing a very high dependency on both CSCI funding and CE/JI support to sustain childcare services.

Exploring non EOCP funding specifically in the context of the SSP area, a theoretical calculation (Table 6.0) of the finance gap helps to quantify the current dependence on other sources of funding. For the purposes of this calculation the actual EOCP approved staffing grants of 1,146,211 and estimated fees chargeable to parents are the key sources of income. It is useful to consider this income in the context of the overall costs incurred in running childcare facilities to cater for 408 children. Most of the community based services participating in this research project are sessional. A conservative guesstimate therefore of the weekly cost is taken at 60% (rather than 50% since some of the costs are fixed) of the average weekly full-daycare cost per child, being 103.63 (Canal Communities Partnership, 2004).

# KEY ISSUES



## The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project

There are 408 childcare places available in the SSP area, with the childcare services open approximately 32 weeks of the year (closed for three months similar to school term time). The total cost of providing these childcare places, over the 4.33 year period of the EOCP grants approved to date (Jan 2001- April 2005, since there were no staffing grants approved in 2000) is deducted from the total income of parental fees and staffing grants over this period. Based on this theoretical conservative calculation the potential funding shortfall could be in the region of 35% of costs.

Table 6.0 - Theoretical Calculation of Overall Finance Gap

<p><b>Income Fees</b> 1,130,650 ( <math>20 \times 32 \times 408 \times 4.33</math> )            (32% of costs) + Staff Grants 1,146,211            (33% of costs) =</p>	<p><b>2,276,861</b>  <b>(65% of costs)</b></p>
<p><b>Costs</b> <math>103.63 \times 0.6 \times 32 \times 408 \times 4.33 =</math></p>	<p><b>3,515,077 (100%)</b></p>
<p><b>Finance GAP</b></p>	<p><b>1,238,216</b>  <b>(35% of costs)</b></p>

Based on this local calculation, corroborated by the National Childcare Census data, a guestimate of the finance gap for individual service providers ranges from 35-60% of costs depending on whether the provider is in receipt of an EOCP staffing grant or not.

The reality of a finance gap has to be addressed as a priority by the service providers each year. The individual service providers try to bridge this gap by accessing a variety of other sources of income, depending on their circumstances (Figure 9.0). The DES currently fund the Willows (VEC), however this funding has been reduced and is uncertain for the future. A limited number of providers receive staffing grants from the HSE. FÁS employment schemes are used extensively by many childcare providers. Small grants are available from the DL-R CoCo to cover some basic overheads and activity costs. Most of the providers have ongoing fundraising activities (mainly used for outings and equipment), get donations and apply to a limited number of foundations and trusts for philanthropic contributions.

### Leaders

Funding is constantly on the agenda for community childcare providers who have to deal with the complexity of multiple sources of funding. Eight of the fourteen leaders interviewed expressed specific concern regarding their current funding status. Although the other six leaders did not identify funding as a current issue, all service providers outlined that they are negotiating, on at least an annual basis with multiple sources of income, including regular fundraising.

Most of the leaders emphasised that they would always support parents who are having difficulty paying the nominal fees charged. The child's need to access the service is the main priority and every effort is made to support parents who are experiencing financial difficulties. From a cashflow perspective, community childcare providers cannot therefore depend on parental fees as a reliable and consistent source of income, and approach non-payment of fees in a conciliatory, flexible and supportive manner.

Some of the specific funding issues raised by leaders:

- i "Want to employ more core staff. Core staff members are now partially funded through fund raising activities. Applied to ADM for a staffing grant, waiting for approval, but ultimately ADM promote self reliance."
- ii "Mainstream public funding is available until 2006, but there is a lot of uncertainty after that. In addition, mainstream public funding has been curtailed significantly making it difficult to attract qualified staff. Younger staff members especially leave due to the uncertainty of their contract of employment."
- iii "Did not apply for ADM funding due to complexity regarding the ownership of the premises. Main sources of income are the fees and the CE scheme."
- iv "Set up a fundraising committee and need to raise funds as a matter of urgency to stay open. ADM funding requires you to stay open 46 weeks to support parents at work, this requirement conflicts with the purpose of the service."
- v "Run on nominal fees and fundraising, no EOCP funding."
- vi "Applied for an ADM staffing grant and get staffing support from the HSE, mainly pay everything from fees, donations and lots of fundraising."
- vii "Can't apply for ADM funding until premises issue is resolved."
- viii "Core workers get paid expenses only and they use the weekly fees and fundraising to cover the rest of the costs. If you develop through grants then your service is exposed if the grants stop."

# KEY ISSUES

## The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



### Workers

One of the main components of the sustainability category, expressed by 37% of the workers, is funding. In general the workers are aware of the limited funds available to the community childcare service providers, however only a small number of them have direct involvement. Funding is not a straightforward differential category since there is a lot of overlap with data categorised as premises, staff and training issues, notwithstanding the funding implications. Workers however expressed concerns from their own personal experience in a specific childcare setting, which generally did not include direct funding responsibilities. Further analysis of the issues in the sustainability category identifies the following themes from the workers perspective:

- 16% felt that there should be more recognition of the importance of childcare *"which is the foundation of life's education"*
- 68% wanted more funding for staff, training, improved pay, equipment, and support for parents who cannot afford to pay
- 16% discussed the extension of the service to meet the needs of the community including more flexibility, space for more children and longer hours.

### Discussion

The establishment of EOCP has been a very positive and welcomed development for childcare in Ireland in recent years. Since the beginning of 2001 there have been substantial EOCP grants approved (almost 2.43 million) for the community childcare sector in the SSP area. Although a specific evaluation of the benefits of these grants is outside the scope of this research, it is reasonable to assume that tangible improvements have been made regarding the availability of childcare places, the quality of the premises and facilities, the quality of staff employed and the development of a quality service. Notwithstanding these positive developments, funding and sustainability continues to be a major issue in the community sector and permeates all the critical operational aspects of running a quality childcare service. As one leader poignantly described it *"Money is our main issue and all the other problems could be solved with more money....."*

The main theme that emerged from the leader interviews in relation to community childcare funding is that funding is an ongoing concern and worry for them and is a time-consuming juggling act which is never far from the top of their agenda. Many providers appear to be operating on a minimum budget that does not allow for the development or expansion of the service, but just allows them to subsist. In general there was a sense of dissatisfaction with the prevailing funding situation. However, leaders take a parsimonious approach to their operation and demonstrate persistence, tenacity and ingenuity in their ability to survive.

In consideration of the funding challenge as outlined above, which was consistently reported by community service providers, it is somewhat surprising that all centres have not applied for EOCP funding. However evidence would suggest that the community providers are experiencing barriers to accessing the main source of public funding. Although EOCP and community providers concur that the benefits of quality childcare are innumerable, one of the potential barriers is a perceived conflict regarding the reasons why childcare is such an important service. Under EOCP childcare is seen as important because it is firmly rooted in the equality agenda of female participation in employment and the economy. In contrast, the ethos of community childcare from the provider's perspective is primarily focused on meeting the holistic needs of children and providing support for families living in disadvantaged communities. Under EOCP childcare is far too infrequently represented as an important subject, and a policy priority, primarily because of its effects on the lives of children, their families and the wider community.

To exacerbate this potential conflict, EOCP is perceived to be veiled in a shroud of ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the eligibility for funding of a sessional term based childcare service, which is predominant in the community sector. For example one of the key findings from the CSCI evaluation (ADM, 2002) is that *"...the new Childcare Programme should therefore focus specifically on providing the type of supports required to increase the availability of full-time care, while at the same time ensuring that such projects remain accessible to their target groups, the local community in disadvantaged areas."* This is a current reality for the community providers who express the general understanding that EOCP funding is primarily available to promote full-day care services that are open for at least 46 weeks of the year. Perhaps again this is purely a perception issue, however it is currently having a restraining influence on service providers in the SSP area embarking on the application process through ADM.

For the community service providers who are accessing EOCP funding the reported experience is that the *'Developmental Model'*<sup>7</sup> of childcare service provision is inherent in the funding process. Under this model a more professional service includes extending the hours of the sessional service and fee increments to achieve *'realistic prices'*, moving the service closer to a self-reliant full-day care model, which is seen as developmentally more advanced in terms of childcare service provision. A number of leaders felt that the EOCP timeframe of 2000-2006 further implied that community childcare providers are expected to become financially self-reliant. None of the leaders interviewed expressed a plan or vision that would indicate that they have a real opportunity to become independent.

As expected, there is a rigorous process to gain and maintain access to public funding under EOCP including a detailed application procedure, compliance with the contract to draw down approved funds and, finally, the recipient has ongoing accountability. The process assumes that the individual service provider has access to the resources and capacity to engage in this process. The main designated local support is the DL-R CCC, however there is still a significant encumbrance on the service provider throughout the process.

The *EOCP Evaluation Report (2003)* states that support is crucial to the effective delivery of the programme and that *"...in practice there appear to be gaps in the availability of supports"*. The general perception expressed by local leaders is that they are *'paddling their own canoe'* regarding access to EOCP funding. In practice there is scope for the service providers to better engage with the range of support mechanisms that are available.

<sup>7</sup>The childcare approach adopted under the CSCI reflected a developmental rather than an administrative model. This developmental model was appropriate to the aims of the Strand which were to build on existing community-based childcare services and to facilitate such providers to develop into more professional organisations that could offer an increasing range of choice to parents (and their children) that wished to avail of community-based childcare services in their local areas. (ADM, 2002)

# KEY ISSUES



## The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project

Locally six childcare providers in the playgroup category have not applied for any EOCP funding. The funding statistics to date would suggest that the smaller service providers are experiencing the above and perhaps additional barriers to accessing funding under EOCP. This does need to be better understood and tackled if this type of service is to survive and develop in the future.

The EOCP staffing grant measure does not include funding for a manager, co-ordinator or administration staff who are not working directly with the children. The general view expressed in this research is that these are essential resources for the provision of quality childcare. The current funding programme does not recognise the funding need for these skilled support resources which is a constraint for community providers realistically working towards the aim of quality childcare service provision.

At a more strategic level, the approach taken by EOCP to tackle the needs of the community childcare sector is primarily a reactive process, which does not specifically target groups or areas of disadvantage where services need to be improved, expanded or new services established. Based on a review of the programme documentation, the *EOCP Evaluation Report (2003)* pointed out that the programme is not informed by any systemic analysis of groups that experience social exclusion and their childcare needs. Notwithstanding its strong general focus on social inclusion it is further pointed out in this report that *"..the programme is not specifically targeted at groups identified as disadvantaged in childcare terms."* This reactive funding process, combined with the lack of comprehensive information on targeted groups, suggests that the programme is likely to be less effective in making a definite impact on social exclusion.

Staying at this strategic level a key objective of the DJELR is to significantly increase the number of quality, affordable childcare places available to all children. The department have quantified this objective with performance indicators for 2010 of childcare provision for 33% of children 3 years and under and 90% of children 3-5 years. From a capital perspective therefore there is a definite need to uplift the number of new quality affordable childcare places in the SSP area. The estimate that less than 10% of the targeted children currently access services would indicate that there is a lot yet to be achieved in the local area with regard to new community childcare facilities and the expansion of existing centres.

What is not clear from the current policy and funding programme however, is where the ownership, responsibility and drive for the setting up of new community childcare places resides and from whom the initiative should come. Is it solely through a response from existing centres or should other agencies, voluntary or community groups initiate or co-ordinate the setting up of new facilities?

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Addressing the funding and sustainability issues identified in this report, although not a panacea, could dramatically improve the operational circumstances of community childcare service providers. However it is not purely a case of providing more money, new funding initiatives need to be implanted in an overall community childcare policy framework. This includes addressing the fundamental characteristics identified in the *'Finance Model'* and *'Funding Process'* and providing the relevant supports to ensure that there is equality in funding. Funding equality means that service providers have equal opportunities to access funding to meet their childcare needs. One of the primary funding equality factors identified is the availability of resources and capacity at the individual service provider level to both access funding and to use the funding effectively to achieve quality childcare services.

- Acceptance and recognition that community childcare in disadvantaged areas is not sustainable on a self-financing basis. Ongoing mainstream public funding is essential.
- Recognition of the value of sessional and drop-in services as a separate and necessary service within disadvantaged communities.
- Establish a centralised, targeted, tailored mainstream funding strand for the community childcare sector.
- Clarification of EOCP Programme funding beyond 2006/7.
- Extend current staffing grants to include childcare manager and co-ordinator roles.
- Proactive grant application supports made available to the community sector to address the resource and capacity constraint in meeting public funding requirements.
- Improve supports after a grant approval for the contract and accountability process, including quarterly returns.
- Improve communication and coordination between departments regarding individual service providers e.g. centralised database etc.
- Set specific county targets for the community sector around places, type of service (crèche, preschool etc.), new or expanded existing service, staff levels etc. Undertake a Gap analysis on existing services versus target.
- Interim step to 1 & 2 to explore with CCC, ADM, DJELR, HSE, CDBs, Family Support Agency and DES options around accessing funding that will help each of these groups to deliver a better service to communities in areas of disadvantage in line with their department/agency brief.
- Improve communication and information flow around EOCP application process to include ADM, CCC and service providers.
- Improve status and recognition of childcare as a valuable career and profession, including better rates of pay.



## Premises & Facilities

### Introduction

The CECDE consultative research *Talking About Quality* reported that sixty-six percent of responses, which was the largest response dimension (Figure 2), referred to the environment when defining quality. The majority of responses under this heading referred to the immediate environment where the child is present including physical space, layout, design, comfort, safety and hygiene, both indoor and outdoor. Furthermore:

*“It was agreed that the environment should be aesthetically pleasing, welcoming, and balance the need for safety and hygiene with the opportunity for children to experience ‘safe risk’ in support of their optimal development” (CECDE, 2004)*

The environment is a critical instrument in the development of the child and can effectively support early learning. The consultative document, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning*, published by the NCCA proposes that *“the play environment whether outdoor or indoor warrants careful consideration to support both relationships and play as key contexts for learning” (NCCA, 2004)*

Some of the funding section above is also relevant to the environment, especially EOCP capital funding, which is the main available source of capital grants. Reiterating some of these points, almost 1.3m capital funding has been approved for the community childcare providers in the SSP area since the start of EOCP. Ninety seven percent of overall funding approved is for two Resource Centres and two Education Support service providers. Three percent has been approved for two playgroups. Ten service providers have not been approved and may not have applied for EOCP capital funding.

The *Childcare Census (2000)* reported that *“although there was a wide variety in the accommodation of childcare services, certain trends emerged”*. Similarly in the SSP area (Table 7.0) a wide variety of facilities are used in the provision of community childcare services.

Table 7.0 - Type of Community Premises Comparison

Type of Premises	SSP Area %	SSP Area No.	Census Community
Purpose built/renovated buildings	20%	3	28.1%
Community Resource Centre or part of Community Rooms	40%	6	27.3%
School classrooms	20%	3	14.2%
Parochial/Church Hall	6.7%	1	9.8%
Council Building	6.7%	1	6.3%
Other	6.7%	1	14.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

The SSP area statistics include five playgroups renting rooms in a variety of facilities including a community centre, a local authority building, a parochial premises and a Scouts den.

In the *Childcare Census Report (2000)* the percentage of community childcare providers who own the premises in which their services were housed was described as *“very small at 14.4%”*. This was compared to 63.4% of private providers owning their premises. The *Childcare Census* also reported that three quarters of community providers either rented (50.7%) or did not pay for the use of their premises (24.3%). In the SSP area none of the service providers own their premises, most pay rent, some paying a nominal amount and a few do not pay any rent.

Recent research suggests that the play experiences of children are significantly different in indoor and outdoor environments (DJELR, 2000), indicating that an appropriate outdoor play space is a necessary part of quality childcare service provision. Under the *Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations (1996)* a provider operating a preschool service *“shall ensure that adequate and suitable facilities for a preschool child to play indoors and outdoors during the day are provided”*. Nationally, more than three-quarters being 77.5% of all childcare facilities have access to an outdoor play space (DJELR, 2000).

In this research all of the service providers have access to an outdoor space, however there is wide variety in the type of spaces available. One of the facilities has a customised secure outdoor space and one has just received grant approval for the conversion of their outdoor space into a secure playground. Other spaces include yards (some in schools), green spaces adjacent to premises and adapted residential back gardens.

# KEY ISSUES



## The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project

### Leaders

The environment including indoor and outdoor space is of immediate concern to ten of the fourteen leaders interviewed (71%). They discussed a broad range of issues and the magnitude of these issues varied.

The critical issues discussed included:

- i Space and Premises is the main priority for the centre with ongoing delays
- ii Total uncertainty with regard to future of playgroup due to sale of premises by council.

The non-critical issues discussed included:

- i Need more space in existing room and to expand the service
- ii Need to improve premises and outdoor space
- iii Prefer a dedicated purpose built indoor space, currently preschool room is used by other groups
- iv Need a dedicated outdoor space
- v Proper outside play facility would be beneficial
- vi Need funds for soft surface on outdoor space and refurbishment of premises indoors.

### Workers

Overall 51% of the workers expressed concern in relation to Premises and Facilities. The dimension is one of the top three categories of concern for workers along with Staff/Pay/CE and Service Provision. For centres with CE, 55% of workers discussed issues with their environment, making it the second highest dimension to Staff/Pay/CE. For non CE centres this dimension is ranked third, with Service Provision and Sustainability taking priority. Further analysis of the issues identifies the following from the individual worker's perspective:

- 12% felt new premises were required
- 13% wanted the expansion of existing premises to cater for more children
- 32% wanted more space and dedicated space to improve environment for existing children
- 26% wanted improved outdoor play areas
- 11% highlighted maintenance of existing facilities as an issue.

### Discussion

The community childcare leaders and workers interviewed demonstrated a very clear and definite awareness of the importance of the environment in promoting the wellbeing of the children and to facilitate the provision of a quality childcare service. The following quote succinctly encapsulates this view "...a quality environment will ensure that all children can have a sense of belonging and feel that their identity and background is valued" (CECDE, 2004).

Most of the environment issues expressed by the leaders and workers are from a physical static point of view. However, a broader atmospheric perspective of the environment was inherent in many of the interviews. The static issues as opposed to the more subjective, dynamic and atmospheric issues are regulated by the Department of Health and Children (DHC) through the Preschool Inspection services under the **Preschool Services Regulations (1996)**. The regulation of childcare service provision is a relatively recent phenomenon in Ireland. Although the regulations are presently under review, it is important to appreciate that these Regulations set a minimum standard. The annual visit by the HSE inspector ensures that the community childcare premises and facilities at least comply with a minimum standard. Non-compliant aspects are dealt with in a practical and supportive manner by the inspectors.

It is not only the Regulations that work from a minimum standard perspective, many of the leaders and workers interviewed appear to have relatively modest expectations regarding the quality of the environment. For example, rooms and gardens in residential housing are small but are considered adequate. In addition to small rooms many childcare services share the same space with other community groups and are required to pack and store away all of the equipment, toys and materials at the end of each day. Similarly outdoor space was mentioned extensively by leaders and workers. However a lot of respondents felt that the requirement of a customised outdoor space was closer to a 'wish list' for an ideal environment rather than part of a standard facility specification.

With low parental fees the primary source of capital funding to improve the environment for community service providers is EOCP. Although EOCP capital funding of 1.3m has been approved for the SSP area, at the time of the research 86% of this funding had not been invested in tangible capital improvements. With less than 200k spent on capital funded projects in recent years the benefit of this funding stream to the service providers in the SSP area was therefore not very evident at the time of the research.

As outlined above the service providers are operating in a wide variety of facilities. At one end of the scale there are three purpose built facilities, however only one of these has effective maintenance support in place for the premises and outdoor area. The other two centres in this category have attractive facilities but experience ongoing maintenance issues due to limited available funding and resources.

At the other end of the scale two of the service providers operate in very unsatisfactory premises and facilities. One of these has a long term solution negotiated and funding secured, but is experiencing ongoing delays in realising their plan. The other provider is operating under a dark cloud of uncertainty with no apparent support from relevant stakeholders.



In between these two extremes are ten service providers whose premises and facilities have a broad range of issues which affect the quality of service that can be provided for the children. Funding would resolve many of the environment issues discussed. However providers would also benefit from more support and expertise to help them tackle the operational maintenance issues including a preventative maintenance programme. Finally providers would benefit from support to help with the design and layout of existing space and to expand their vision for perhaps more ambitious capital projects in the future.

Although four leaders interviewed did not have issues with their premises and facilities, three of these were approved for capital funding in recent years and acknowledged that they had good maintenance support in place. This would suggest that an adequate level of capital funding and maintenance support could alleviate many of the physical environment problems thus allowing providers to transfer their focus to the more intangible atmospheric aspects of their facilities.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The current national impetus in childcare under EOCP comes from the employment equality brief, to provide equal opportunities for both women and men to engage in work, education and training. **However equality for children also needs to be acknowledged and addressed in parallel with the equality initiative for parents.** The variation in the standard of premises and facilities available to community based services is an equality issue for children living in disadvantaged circumstances. It needs to be recognised and acknowledged that quality childcare essentially requires a quality physical environment, both indoors and outdoors. In terms of equality for children this is a basic right and priority which needs to be addressed in areas of disadvantage.

### Recommendations on Premises

- Explore options with DL-R CoCo to extend the service currently available within some community childcare centres, to access appropriate premises that will be maintained and developed as part of the community development brief within their service.
- SCAN and the DL-R CCC to work to meet with the DL-R CoCo to evaluate what is currently happening for existing and new community childcare premises, with a view to developing a co-operative relationship, including linking in on plans for community centres in new housing developments.
- Consider the impact of the *Childcare Facilities, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)* on community childcare development in the SSP area where pockets of disadvantage can be relatively small. For new housing areas the recommendation under these guidelines is that *“an average of one childcare facility for each 75 dwellings would be appropriate”*.
- Develop a better understanding of the providers current maintenance needs, plans and approach to maintenance. Clarify role and responsibility of community providers and DL-R CoCo with regard to maintenance.
- Enforce the regulations on minimum standards for Premises & Facilities.
- Develop better communication systems during the EOCP Capital Grant application process between the DJELR/ADM and the DL-R CCC.
- Set specific county targets for the community sector around capital grant needs for existing and new premises.
- Improve demographics and socio-economic data on targeted children in the local area, including age profile and number of children currently accessing all childcare services including community, therapeutic, private and childminding.
- Set local targets to address the current lack of community crèche facilities available for babies/toddlers 3-18 months.
- Develop more and better outdoor play facilities in the communities generally which can be accessed by community childcare services including design, supervision, management and operational requirements.



## Staffing

### Introduction

As an indispensable dimension of quality, the personnel working with children in the early years are of paramount importance in ensuring the provision of quality education and care services (CECDE, 2003). The important contribution of staff to quality cannot be overstated when *“the crux of quality within Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) lies in the nature of the adult-child interactions on a daily basis”* (CECDE, 2004).

The largest single expense incurred by childcare providers, according to the *Childcare Census (2000)*, was staff salaries. In a breakdown of estimated expenditure, salaries accounted for 58.9% of total estimated expenditure. Salaries represented a greater proportion of expenditure in community based (71.8%) than privately run facilities (52.8%). This proportional data was explained by findings that community based facilities were more likely than their private counterparts to have their premises free of charge, and to pay higher salaries. The explanation proposed in the Census report was that the higher level of dependence on CE/JI workers and on volunteers meant that fewer staff were paid, which may have resulted in a higher level of pay for those staff actually drawing salaries from community based facilities.

One of the most important Government agencies involved in community childcare staffing is FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority established in 1988 to provide a wide range of services to the labour market. In the specific context of childcare, FÁS provides the following range of services including policy development, employment services and training supports:

- i **Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Unit** - Representative on the NCCC
- ii **Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Unit** - Representative linked with the CECDE
- iii **Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Unit** - Part of remit includes Childcare - Coordinate work of local FÁS County Childcare Committee representatives
- iv **Services to Business** - Competency Development Programme - Training Support for Private Childcare Sector
- v CE and JI Schemes (JI currently being phased out)
- vi Social Economy Programme
- vii Traineeship Courses in Childcare
- viii Childcare Allowance for FÁS Vocational Training Programmes

In the SSP area the main role of FÁS within community childcare is to provide staff under the CE/JI schemes. Eight of the centres use CE schemes as a fundamental element of their staffing model, with over half (52%) of the 87 staff interviewed being CE workers.

CE started in the late 80's and grew to approximately 40,000 participants nationally in the mid 90's. The focus of the scheme was to tackle the high levels of unemployment at that time with around 300,000 on the live register. In response to the employment market upturn in the late 90's and the arrival of the *'Celtic Tiger'*, CE schemes were rationalised and gradually phased down to reflect the more vibrant employment market. CE schemes currently have approximately 20,000 participants nationally which reflects the current reduced unemployment figure, with around 150,000 on the live register.

There was significant concern during the rationalisation of CE about the security of CE schemes involved in community childcare services. To alleviate this concern and reduce uncertainty in the community childcare sector the Government, through FÁS introduced the concept of *'ring fencing'*, whereby around 1,700 places on CE were secured exclusively for community childcare participants.

For the purposes of this research, staff training and development is discussed under the next separate section. This section is dedicated to look at the staffing profile, staffing levels, pay and basis of employment for those currently working in community childcare in the SSP area.

### Leaders

As a group, 57% or eight of the fourteen leaders discussed issues regarding their staffing situation as follows:

- i *“Would like more core staff, the majority of staff are on CE and you can't be sure that CE is not going to change, it is not a secure base.”*
- ii *“CE workers are an issue some times especially when they don't have sufficient interest in childcare and can come and go. As a long term unemployment scheme they don't always have the discipline of coming to work everyday.”*
- iii *“Problems with funding have meant a higher turnover of staff and it is hard to employ quality staff with only 9-11 month contracts available. Short-term contracts resulted in the loss of a number of the younger staff members. Need to reduce staff turnover to allow the service to move forward.”*
- iv *“Dependent on CE to have adequate staffing levels. Would like CE schemes to start in the summer to allow for in-house training and team building and then be ready for the children in September and have them stay for the full year. They currently can join and leave throughout the year.”*
- v *“Can be hard to keep staff with the short hours available in a sessional service. Younger staff have a tendency to leave and older staff tend to stay longer. Children and parents do not like changes in staff.”*
- vi *“Running with a core staff of three who are a very close team. Issue if someone is out sick - they have to try and call in a parent. Would really like to have a part-time staff member to allow core staff some flexibility. Also most importantly they need to be planning staffing levels and how the playgroup will afford to pay for qualified staff in the future. Mature team currently who are not going to stay on forever and work can be very tiring.”*
- vii *“Since the start of the CE scheme have had 16 workers and only one of them did not work out. Main issue with CE is continuity - one year is too short. Would like the CE contract year to start in September rather than in the middle of the childcare year.”*
- viii *“Would like an overall childcare project coordinator but feel that this is probably not realistic. Having a fully trained permanent staff member to work with the children is a definite need.”*

# KEY ISSUES

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



## Workers

From the workers issue profile, 51% of participants have staff related concerns. Further analysis of these issues identifies the following three specific topics of concern from the workers perspective:

- 64% concerned about the role of CE Schemes within Community Childcare
- 26% want more trained permanent/core staff members
- 10% want better pay

None of the centres employed male childcare workers. The basis of employment for 52% (Figure 10.0) of all staff working in the community childcare centres was either CE/JI schemes.

Figure 10.0 - Employment Status Profile

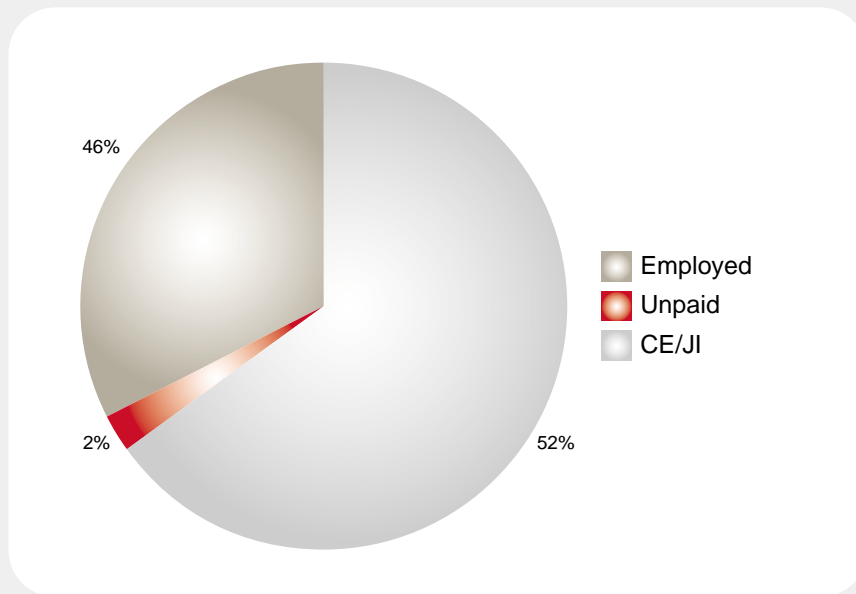
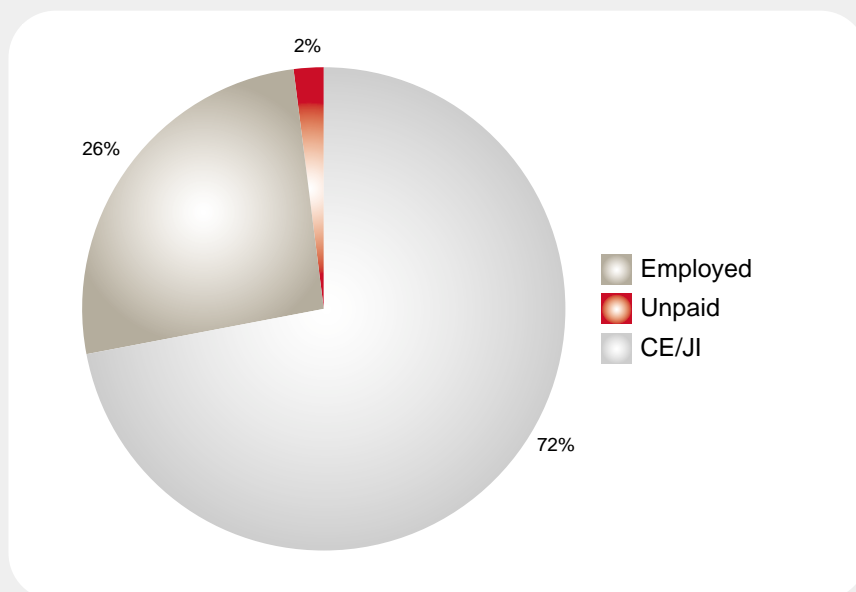


Figure 11.0 - Employment Status Profile with CE



Taking the subgroup of eight community childcare centres that have CE schemes, 72% (Figure 11.0) of the staff are CE/JI participants.



### Discussion

The picture that has emerged in this community based local research is consistent with the findings of the *Childcare Census (2000)*. Childcare, as a female dominated sector (SCAN 100% female) is significantly dependant on CE and to a lesser extent JI schemes. The *National Childcare Strategy (1999)* states that children should have contact with both men and women in childcare services, and adopts the aim that 20% of staff employed in collective services should be male. The National Flexi-work Partnership is currently piloting a project, in collaboration with FAS, to recruit more men into childcare and a small number of childcare providers, including the community sector, are co-operating nationally. However no apparent mainstreaming or local community progress in the SSP area has yet been made towards the 20% target set in the childcare strategy. In addition to concerns around exclusive female role models in childcare the childcare strategy and many subsequent reports highlight concerns surrounding the employment of CE workers in childcare.

Although six leaders did not identify specific staffing issues, this does not categorically indicate that they do not have staffing problems, but is more a reflection that, in the overall scheme of things, staffing issues were not an immediate priority for them. For example, two of these six leaders included the CE Scheme as a central part of their staffing model. Although these two leaders did not express specific staffing concerns, they did recognise the overall issues surrounding CE as a basis for employing childcare staff, but were comfortable with their own performance under the scheme, at the time of the research. Another leader was satisfied with the level of staff currently employed through their EOCP staffing grant, but acknowledged that there was uncertainty beyond 2006. Finally the other three leaders from this group of six were non CE playgroups who overall were satisfied with their current staffing situation. They did however acknowledge that pay did not include preparation and planning time. Many of the workers were mature and acknowledged that the service had limited prospect of attracting younger qualified staff members. Furthermore, getting suitable staff to cover for illness, training or attending support meetings etc. was generally problematic.

Under the staffing heading the following two main themes have emerged in this research, which need further exploration to understand some of the underlying factors. All of the issues discussed by leaders and workers can be broadly categorised and discussed under the following two headings:

- i Reliance on staff employed on CE/JI schemes
- ii A shortage of trained permanent/core staff.

### Reliance on CE schemes for staff

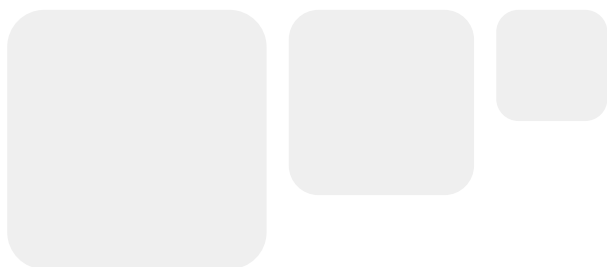
CE is an employment initiative first and foremost, focusing on the needs of the individual participant. It was not designed with childcare provision in mind and it was never intended that there would be such a heavy reliance on the scheme as a key resource for childcare workers. Although the mechanism of ring-fencing CE for childcare has reduced some of the recent uncertainties surrounding the sustainability of community childcare CE schemes, it has not eliminated uncertainty or reduced the problematic nature of CE as a staffing model within community childcare.

When a comparison is made between the subgroups of centres with and without CE, there is a marked contrast in the significance of the staffing issues. Staff related issues, including pay and CE is the biggest dimension for CE centres with 63% of respondents expressing concerns. In contrast, it is the lowest rated dimension for non CE centres with 20% of respondents expressing concerns. Furthermore, the magnitude of CE issues for the workers in CE centres is apparent with 72% of the staffing issues specifically relating to CE.

It is well documented that an over reliance on staff from these schemes is inappropriate and can impede the provision of a quality childcare service (OECD, 2002 & Childcare Census Report, 2000). Furthermore, the *Childcare Census Report (2000)* provides baseline community childcare data which is useful for comparison purposes. The census reported that 17% of all staff working in childcare facilities were either CE or JI participants. There was also a large difference between the proportions of CE/JI participants in community versus privately run centres, being 37.9% and 16% respectively.

The SSP area statistic of 52% of all staff are CE/JI participants is well ahead of the census baseline data. However, a more dramatic, perhaps shocking, statistic is evident when the subgroup of eight centres with CE is considered separately. Where the statistic rises: 72% of all employees are CE/JI participants.

The concerns expressed by leaders, workers and stakeholders regarding the employment of CE workers within community childcare service provision are outlined below: (Most of these concerns have been previously reported in a wide range of childcare research published since the *Childcare Census Report (2000)*).





- i CE & JI schemes were not specifically designed or have not been tailored to cater for the specific needs of childcare.
- ii The primary focus of the CE scheme is on the needs of the participant and the aim of the scheme is to support the participant to get the necessary skills to demonstrate progression and access future employment.
- iii CE is a one year contract. Under 35's can get a second year extension and over 35's can get extensions up to a maximum of three years. Extensions are obtainable on an individual case by case basis, within certain guidelines for the overall scheme. Extensions are generally sought and confirmed at the last minute, thus leading to significant uncertainty for the participant, leaders, children and the childcare service provision generally.
- iv Although it is an annual scheme it does **not** coincide with the typical community childcare service provision year of September to June.
- v There can be a time gap between one CE participant finishing and a replacement participant starting.
- vi Eligibility for CE/JI is not, in any way aligned to suitability for childcare work.
- vii Many of the participants do not specifically choose a childcare scheme or are not planning a future career in childcare.
- viii Only a small proportion of CE/JI workers have specific or relevant training in childcare prior to their involvement.
- ix CE is a training programme and is not a job. Therefore participants should not be relied on as key staff members, but should be supplementary to the employed trained staff members.
- x What is CE? There is an inconsistent understanding or perception of the answer. Is CE a training scheme or an employment scheme, or both? Perhaps the name '*Community Employment*' adds to this apparent ambiguity.
- xi Although based in the centres and reporting to the centre's management on a day to day basis, the participant is also accountable to FAS as their employer. The CE supervisor needs to ensure that the participant fulfils the CE training plan, which is not always specifically relevant to childcare.
- xii Participants are required to complete an agreed training plan. The basis of the scheme is a 19.5 hour week to include training time and work experience. In many cases participants completing formal childcare training have extended hours per week. This extended training time is subsequently recouped from working time spent with the children in the childcare setting.
- xiii As the unemployment numbers diminish, some of the people that are now eligible for the scheme are themselves in need of support and education. It could be argued that quite the opposite should happen, with only qualified staff employed to work with some of the most needy children, from areas of disadvantage, attending community childcare services.
- xiv Notwithstanding the training plan, some of the CE workers may have difficulty accessing relevant training due to their own experience in formal education, which in some cases results in literacy problems.
- xv Restricted hours of 19.5 per week on CE means that many of the participants are not flexible around planning time and group meetings. This means these can be difficult to arrange, resulting in less time to develop working relations and team morale with infrequent feedback, facilitation and planning sessions.
- xvi The ratio of core workers to CE workers means that a lot of the core workers time and attention goes to monitoring the work and development of the CE participant instead of focusing on the needs of the children.

### Shortage of Trained Core Permanent Staff

It was generally acknowledged by the diverse contributors to this research that trained core permanent staff members are necessary to provide a secure base for the children, parents and providers. There is however an almost vocational expectation of those working in the community sector which contributes to the ubiquitous experience of low status, limited recognition and poor rates of pay. In addition, the core workers are acutely aware of the funding issues surrounding their employment and many are dealing with ongoing uncertainty, especially where they only had short-term contracts.

Some of the core workers have limited formal qualifications and are unclear with regard to the future recognition of their extensive childcare work experience. The ambiguity and lack of consistency and standardisation within the career generally has also contributed to the diminished status of childcare personnel, with consequent effects on their social standing, pay and conditions and continuity of service (CECDE, 2003).

In the centres with CE schemes the ratio of CE workers to core workers can be as high as three or four to one. This creates an additional workload and heightens the pressure on the core workers. In addition to leading the activities with the children, the core worker is also constantly monitoring the CE staff in their interactions with the children. Many felt frustrated with this situation and were concerned that their own focus on the children's needs was diminished as a result.

All of these issues created a sense of preoccupation that appeared to consume much of the workers physical and emotional resources. This preoccupation with staffing issues could compromise the ability of core childcare workers to focus on the quality of the childcare service.

Keeping core staff members is one aspect of the core staffing issue category. However, attracting qualified and experienced workers, especially younger age groups was also an important concern. With the increase in demand and supply of childcare, many of the young qualified workers find more attractive employment opportunities, especially in the private sector. This difficulty is further compounded in the community sector by the reduced income which can be earned by workers providing a sessional service, which is typically linked to school term time, with no pay during holidays. In contrast to data from the **Childcare Census (2000)**, where higher levels of pay were reported for staff in community-based facilities, the experience expressed by the workers in this report was that community childcare rates of pay are below market rates.



### Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidence from this research would indicate that many of the general issues affecting staff working in the childcare sector, such as the status of the profession, standardisation of qualifications and rates of pay are probably accentuated in the community sector, especially when the focus of the service is sessional. In an effort to sustain their service many community service providers have inevitably become dependent on CE and some JI participants. Service providers who have not availed of CE have other challenges, including support for a very dedicated team who are underpaid, under resourced and unable to attract young qualified staff, resulting in an uncertain future.

The staffing model currently operating in community childcare is a response to the lack of funding and the availability of employment schemes. To bridge the operational finance gap in community childcare many service providers have availed of staff resources from FÁS employment schemes. However this is a short-term, less than ideal, quick fix which has allowed many childcare services to keep the doors open. All of the evidence from this research clearly indicates that a more effective, secure, longer term staffing model is required. Although community childcare centres could continue to provide work experience and training opportunities for staff on FÁS employment schemes, this should only be supplementary to the permanent qualified staff.

### Recommendations on Staffing

- Beyond CE - Devise a new staffing model for community childcare to include a transitional process to reduce the current over reliance on CE/JI. All new community childcare facilities to be based on this new staffing model.
- Recognise that CE funded posts in the community childcare centres are training positions, supplementary to and supported by mainstream funded qualified childcare workers.
- Acknowledge that CE **cannot be a key** part of a sustainability model for community childcare service providers going forward.
- In the transition period, CE posts in community childcare should be extended to three years.
- Explore the possibility of developing a three year community based childcare apprenticeship programme with all relevant agencies.
- Recognise the need for core public funding that includes co-ordinator, manager and administrative/support staff roles.
- Develop an innovative model of employing locally based Childcare link workers to support groups of smaller based community providers.
- Establish a coordinated approach to provide flexible qualified staff cover for core staff members to include sick leave, training, professional development and holidays.
- Set specific county targets for the community sector around ongoing staffing requirements for existing and new facilities.



## Training & Development

### Introduction

One of the key dimensions of quality in childcare provision is the training, qualification and continuous professional development of staff working with the children. *"Quality in childcare is very dependant on the quality of the staff"* (CECDE, 2004). **The Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland Report (CECDE, 2003)** explains the background and current status of training and qualifications in childcare as follows:

*"In Ireland, courses in early childhood care and education have grown on a somewhat ad hoc basis. The Child Care Act 1991 (DoH, 1991) and the Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations 1996 (DoH, 1996a) make no references to the qualifications necessary to work in early years settings. The Regulations recommend "appropriate" training and qualifications but fail to define what level is considered congruous to the role. This lack of clarification has led to frustration within the sector for both employers and employees (DJELR, 1999c). The ambiguity has also led to the employment of personnel with a diverse range of qualifications, skills and knowledge in the sector as well as a sizeable proportion with no formal training (ADM, 2002)"*

The danger persists in Ireland that market forces continue to skew the evolution of education and training provision to meet immediate needs, without taking account of the long-term vision of quality provision of services for children (DJELR, 2002). The Report of the Expert Working Group on Childcare highlights the *"bewildering diversity of training courses and qualifications"* available in the absence of regulations (DJELR, 2002). While diversity in provision can facilitate choice and competition, it has the adverse effect of producing inconsistency in standards (DJELR, 2002).

The **National Childcare Census (2000)** provides some baseline data on the wide diversity in the type and level of qualifications held by staff employed in childcare facilities. In that report 23.1% of all staff employed in childcare facilities had no formal qualifications and more specifically 36.8% of CE workers had no formal qualifications.

Since 2000 there has been significant progress made at a national level to address the recognised problematic diversity of childcare qualifications in Ireland. The DJELR on behalf of the NCCC published a **Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Sector** in 2002 which aims to provide a structure and process for standardisation. As the report states:

*"The assurance of quality provision of ECCE services should be the right of all children in Ireland. The education, training and professional development of ECCE practitioners will play a key role in making such an assurance a real and practical possibility."*

In addition to promoting the importance of lifelong learning the model framework addresses the following key issues which should inform the development of relevant education and training programmes for practitioners in the ECCE sector.

- i Occupational Profiles for each stage of professional development from a Basic to an Expert Practitioner
- ii Core skills for each stage of professional development
- iii Issues which relate to the facilitation of access, transfer (a credit system) for prior formal or informal learning and progression
- iv Quality assurance.

The early childhood care and education sector, through this Model Framework is well placed to contribute to the work of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) established to develop the National Framework for all qualifications in the state. NQAI recently established a ten level National Framework.

The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was established as a statutory body in June 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. The vision of FETAC is to facilitate learners in a lifelong learning process through new and comprehensive opportunities for access, transfer and progression in education and training. FETAC has particular responsibilities at Levels 1 - 6 of the National Framework. As the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, FETAC gives people the opportunity to gain recognition for learning in education or training centres, in the work place and in the community. FETAC has the responsibility for standardising further education childcare awards, superseding awards previously issued by FÁS, City & Guilds and the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA).

In addition to the standardisation of childcare qualifications it is generally recognised that there is an ongoing need for professional development for childcare workers. Professional development encompasses a broad range of training; for example, refresher courses e.g. Paediatric First Aid, discussion groups/workshops/networks/seminars on new practices or approaches, updates on regulations and legislation, lectures from experts in the field, training on more specialist topics including cultural diversity, challenging behaviour, special needs etc. Another important topic under this heading is Child Protection and the implementation of the Child First Guidelines by the HSE.

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Accredited qualifications and professional development training are coordinated and provided by the following range of organisations:

- i **FAS** run a Childcare Traineeship Programme and also provide a training grant to support the training plan for CE workers
- ii **VEC** are an accredited FETAC training organisation and run childcare courses in their colleges. They also provide some local based training on request.
- iii **DL-R CCC** - Co-ordinate training research to identify and understand the local training needs. Coordinate the provision of FETAC training and professional development workshops and seminars in response to needs and local demand from providers.
- iv **HSE** - Rollout of "Children First" the national child protection guidelines
- v **Barnardos** - Provide training specialists and run workshops in cooperation with DL-R CCC e.g. Highscope. Provide training supports through the regional development worker.
- vi **NVCOs** - Provide training directly to providers or in cooperation with CCC. Community childcare providers can access training directly, however the courses can be expensive with no cost concessions available.
- vii **Service Providers** - organise their own on site training.

### Leaders

Eight of the fourteen managers (57%) interviewed identified specific issues with training.

Accredited qualification issues discussed include:

- i *The need for local provision of FETAC training especially for CE workers*
- ii *CE workers entitled to time off in lieu for any training accessed outside their 19.5 hour week*
- iii *FETAC Level 3 training was not available in the DL-R area in 2004*
- iv *It can be difficult for staff to make time for training*
- v *CE workers sometimes want to access other training in preference to specific childcare training.*
- vi *FETAC needs to be consistently delivered with trainers linked into childcare work practices on the ground. Also a better link of policies and procedures, observation and record keeping training to the practical work situation and time management.*
- vii *Staff cover to facilitate access to training especially for core staff*
- viii *Standardisation of training levels, especially when a worker has no background in childcare. Fetac Level 1 as an introduction to childcare gives the worker a good start and confirms if they have a genuine interest in childcare before progressing to Level 2 which is eight modules normally completed over two years. Currently a worker can access Level 2 directly without completing Level 1, which can lead to staff struggling with the training and contribute to a higher drop out rate.*
- ix *In some cases core staff with extensive experience have to pay up to 50% of the training costs out of their low net incomes*
- x *Workers, especially CE staff, should have some sort of introductory training before they are allowed to work with children in a childcare setting*
- xi *Need to be supportive and flexible with CE workers who are training e.g. time off to do assignments etc.*

Professional development training issues discussed include:

- i *Need to buy-in more day courses for professional development including special needs, difficult behaviour, observations, age appropriate activities, using equipment etc.*
- ii *There is a lot of training available, however it is not always availed of. It is unclear if the most needy workers are accessing the training.*
- iii *Only one staff member trained in Highscope, however to implement a new approach properly it is preferable to get all staff members trained up*
- iv *Better coordination of training courses in the SSP area*
- v *Quality of trainers for day courses: if workers are taking time out for training the quality and experience of the trainer is very important especially when incorporating practical practice examples as part of the training.*

### Workers

The topic of training was covered extensively in the workers interviews both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Workers were asked about the childcare qualifications they had completed to date, training that they were currently attending and future plans for training. From a qualitative perspective workers were asked if childcare training was meeting their needs and were encouraged to elaborate in response to this question.

From a formal qualifications perspective the local quantitative baseline data collated on the qualifications attained is that 32% of the staff are currently qualified to the equivalent of FETAC level 2 or 3 (Figure 12.0). This leaves 68% of staff with either basic childcare qualifications completed at FETAC Level 1 or other introductory training and includes 16% of staff with no formal training.

The profile of qualifications attained by workers in the subgroup of centres with CE schemes is 83% of workers with Level 1, introductory or no formal childcare training. In contrast, the subgroup of centres without CE schemes, 28% of workers are at Level 1 or below.

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Figure 12.0 - Qualifications Attained - All Centres

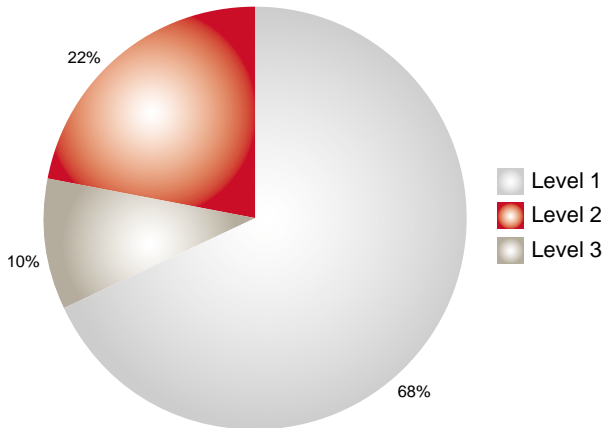


Figure 12.1 - Qualifications in Progress - All Centres

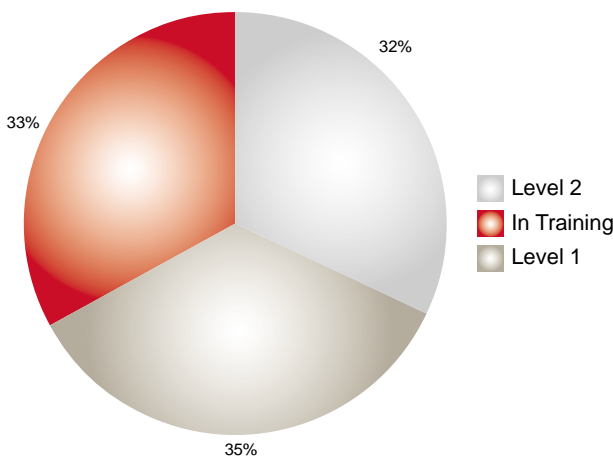
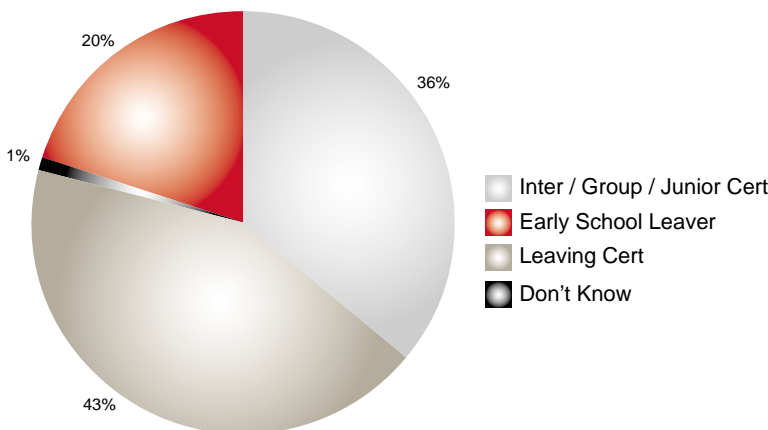


Figure 12.2 - Level of Education - All Centres



In addition to qualifications attained by workers, data was collated for childcare qualifications where training is currently in progress (Figure 12.1). Overall 35% of the workers interviewed are attending courses for FETAC Level 1 and 2 qualifications.

The majority view of 72% of the workers interviewed is that the training received is meeting their needs as childcare workers and approximately 56% of these workers elaborated in their response to this question. From an issues perspective, 40% of workers identified training concerns.

Information was also collected on the workers experience in education and the level of secondary education completed (Figure 12.2). In total 43% of workers completed their Leaving Certificate with 57% leaving secondary school at Junior Certificate stage or before. For this latter group it was not always clear if the worker had completed formal examinations before leaving school. Workers experience of mainstream education was mixed with almost 40% stating that they did not have a good experience in education generally. Furthermore, although literacy was not directly explored in the interviews 17% of workers admitted to having learning difficulties due to poor education levels attained prior to commencing childcare training.

## Discussion

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that the quality and availability of a broad range of childcare training has improved significantly in the last four years. At a National level an important milestone has been the launch in 2002 of the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector*. Furthermore, the NQAI is driving the development of a National Framework for all qualifications in the state, to include childcare. At a local level there is significant training activity both for accredited qualifications and professional development to include a range of practice and quality topics.

EOCP and the DL-R CCC have been instrumental in significantly improving the availability of accredited qualifications and professional development training in recent years. However there is still a prominent level of diversity, confusion, complexity and frustration with regard to childcare qualifications and professional development training at a local level. This appears to be primarily attributable to a shortfall in co-ordination and co-operation between training providers to meet the local training needs. Perhaps a key issue in the local training scenario is that there is no central organisation with overall responsibility or ownership of all aspects of childcare training co-ordination. Evidence from this research suggests that the current local process is fragmented and cumbersome to access and negotiate.

Childcare leaders and workers interviewed did not convey an extensive understanding of the training developments at a national level to address the standardisation, regulation and accreditation of training and qualifications in childcare. This created a sense of uncertainty and anxiety in the community sector regarding the likely impact of expected changes in the regulation of childcare qualifications. Experienced workers with limited formal qualifications were doubtful regarding their eligibility to avail of a future credit system and were worried about how the lack of qualifications would impact their job and future career opportunities in childcare.

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There was generally a greater sense of enthusiasm among workers for professional development training, such as Child Protection rather than training for the accredited qualifications. Workers found the former training very useful and “*practical*” in their daily work with the children. Overall though, workers felt that training was important and gave them the “*confidence*” to work with and “*speak*” with the children using the correct “*words*”. They “*understood the children’s development and behaviour*” better. They had become more “*aware*”, had a better “*attitude*” and ability to “*observe*” the children.

Although the workers felt that training was important many workers found it difficult to elaborate on how childcare training was meeting their needs in the work environment. In the qualitative data workers made limited connections between the accredited qualification training and their daily work situation. Similarly there was little evidence of actual contact or cooperation between the trainers and the play leaders. This would suggest that workers need further supports to help them relate and apply the classroom training for accredited qualifications to the childcare practice.

With CE participants there is one additional layer of complexity in the local childcare training scenario where the focus of the CE supervisor is primarily on the training and development needs of the individual participant. If the participant is not fully motivated and committed to pursue a career in childcare, the CE training plan can potentially create some conflict with the needs of the childcare service.

One of the main CE scheme performance measures is the level of completion of the agreed training plan by the participant. The training plan for all CE participants is set up by the CE supervisor who is required to research relevant courses which might suit the individual participant’s circumstances, training needs and is within the training allowance budget. Although in general the CE supervisor works in cooperation with the childcare leaders, in practice there are scheduling conflicts and training incompatibilities which need to be negotiated. In some cases the childcare provider is required to facilitate training for a CE participant which is not specific to childcare.

The need for ongoing professional development is extensively documented in childcare literature and research. However exactly what is meant by professional development in the context of childcare is not clearly defined. The childcare providers and workers in this research appear to approach this type of training in an ad hoc and reactive manner, with little evidence of forward planning. Participation is not essentially needs driven, but tends to depend on the parameters of funding, staffing resources to provide cover and course accessibility and availability. The leaders and workers should have a better understanding of the importance and benefits of this aspect of training. This might be achieved through the availability of more specific guidelines on the amount, content and format of training which should be completed at the different stages of a practitioner’s professional development from the basic to expert levels.

In addition to the lack of clarity regarding what is professional development in childcare, there is also a dearth of information regarding the need and benefit of childcare practitioner supervision<sup>8</sup> or facilitation support. As a caring profession where the attributes, skills and well being of the childcare worker are instrumental in the delivery of a quality service, an element of professional development training should be practitioner supervision.

The efficiency and effectiveness of training as discussed above leads to the other important topic of quality in training. Quality Assurance is recognised as a key part of the **Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the ECCE Sector** which introduces the chapter on quality assurance with the following quote:

*‘Quality needs to underpin the setting of award standards by the Authority ... To achieve this, planned and systematic actions are necessary to provide confidence in the system.’ (NQAI, 2002a)*

Quality in training is difficult to define. However, in the childcare sector there is a general consensus that quality permeates all aspects of the education and training system and should be regarded not as a finite goal, but as an ideal which is consistently pursued. As stated 35% of the workers in the SSP area are currently in training for a formal qualification. Although this clearly represents significant progress in the amount of training that is in progress, there was evidence of a range of quality issues associated with this training impetus.

There is some concern regarding the consistent quality of trainers both in terms of their experience as trainers and also in terms of their childcare practice experience. This issue is in some cases compounded by the readiness of workers to access training, especially when their general experience in education was unsatisfactory. Of the thirty workers attending training for formal qualifications at the time of the research, 80% of these were CE workers. Indicators of this subgroup’s potential need for learning support were that 47% of CE workers expressed dissatisfaction with their previous experience of education and 24% of this subgroup acknowledged that they experienced learning difficulties in training.

<sup>8</sup>Supervision is a formal arrangement for a practitioner to discuss their work regularly with someone who is experienced in childcare and supervision. The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficacy of the carer/child relationship. Supervision is an important process which can help to ensure that the standard of service delivery is competent and continues to develop and has proven to be an effective method of consultancy to widen the horizons, problem solve and give relevant professional feedback to practitioners in many caring professions.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

The general consensus of all participants in this research and other childcare research is that formal qualifications and professional development are essential to equip staff with the knowledge base, skills and supports that they need to provide a quality childcare service. Although the lifelong learning approach was supported in this research, perhaps the short-term priority for many workers and providers is to get accredited FETAC qualifications.

The more recent trend in childcare research, which was also topical in this project, is the need to better understand and perhaps broaden the definition of childcare. Childcare traditionally evolved from the practice of minding children outside the home environment. However the expectation of childcare and the concept of the holistic needs of the child have evolved significantly since these early days. Childcare today is a more sophisticated service which includes Care and Education to support the broad range of complex developmental milestones of the individual child. Taken in this broader context the importance and urgency of training and professional development for the early childhood care and education staff can be better understood.

## Recommendations on Training

- That there is a coordinated approach to accredited and professional development child centered training at a local level in line with best practice.
- That those involved in training provision locally work with SCAN to develop a model of training that takes account of the very specific educational requirements of workers coming from areas of disadvantage.
- Provide training on the basis of a combination of training and learning support needs
- Implement the Marte Meo Programme<sup>9</sup> to facilitate staff and child development.
- Introduce compulsory induction training for all staff including CE participants before they start working directly with children in a childcare setting.
- Introduce practitioner supervision and team facilitation in all childcare settings.
- Address all barriers to training including issues around transport or timing of courses, and implications in terms of social welfare entitlements.
- Ensure that all tutors have appropriate childcare qualifications.
- Examine and address the discrepancy between the current CE training allowance and the actual cost of quality accredited childcare training.
- Extend *"The Implementation of the Free Fees Initiative 95-97"*, to include Adult Education and Lifelong Learning.
- Standardize the system of salary scales to reflect qualifications and experience of staff.
- Ensure that the link between theory and practice is addressed for all childcare training, and that workers are supported in making this connection.
- Implement formal consistent evaluation of all childcare training to inform future courses.
- Ensure that training providers improve and implement their quality assurance system for all aspects of the training programme.
- Develop flexible methods of assessing *"prior learning"* linked to *"Fairness to Learners"* as defined by *"FETAC Provider Quality Assurance"*.
- Disseminate information regarding qualifications and training in childcare to ensure this information is filtered through to individual workers.
- Consider all training initiatives in the broader context of childcare as early childhood care and education.

<sup>9</sup>The MARTE MEO METHOD is a video-based interaction programme that provides concrete and practical information to parents/carers, on supporting the social, emotional and communication development of children/adolescents in daily interaction moments. The thrust of the Programme is in prevention, early intervention and treatment. Marte Meo is a solution focused method and supports developmental processes.



## Quality Service Provision

### Introduction

Quality service provision or best practice in childcare is intrinsic to the concept of meeting the holistic needs of the child. At a national level noticeable progress has been made to develop an understanding of quality with the establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education (CECDE) in October 2001. The primary objective of the CECDE work programme is to develop a National Framework for Quality for early childhood care and education. Much of the preparatory research and consultative work has been completed, with the next stage to implement the National Framework for Quality.

The childcare environment, staffing, training and development as already discussed are fundamental elements of quality. However the focus of this section is to consider specific practice based quality dimensions to include a Child-centred Approach, Adult-Child Interactions, Curriculum/Programme, Standard/Best Practice/Policy & Procedures, Equipment/Materials, Parental Involvement, Response to Diversity, Response to Special Needs, Networks/Linkages/Support.

In the report *Insights on Quality (CECDE, 2004)* practice developments in Ireland from 1990 to 2004 have been comprehensively documented, identifying the wide range of organisations contributing to the development of quality practice. From a Government perspective responsibility for quality service provision is spread across three main departments namely DES, DHC and the DJELR.

The most relevant initiative by the DES is through the NCCA whose function is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum matters in early childhood education. In 2004 the NCCA launched a consultative document, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning*. This document provides a stepping stone for the NCCA to begin to develop a national framework for early learning. Building on existing curriculum development work, this framework will help bring more coherence to learning throughout early childhood and ensure that all children are supported appropriately in their learning.

The *Child Care Act (1991)* imposes a statutory duty on DHC to inspect preschool services. In 1998 Preschool inspection teams were established in each Health Board (now HSE) to carry out the inspection process outlined in the *Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations (1996, 1997)*. The purpose of the inspection is outlined in the Explanatory Guide as *“Inspection is designed to ensure the health, safety and welfare of children and the promotion of their development.”*

In addition to inspections the DHC is also responsible for the rollout of the **Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (1999)**. The primary objective of these guidelines is to improve the identification, reporting, assessment, treatment and management of child abuse cases. Other objectives include:

- i To facilitate effective child protection work by emphasising the importance of family support services and the need for clarity of responsibility between the various professional disciplines
- ii To maximise the capacity of staff in organisations to protect children effectively
- iii To consolidate inter-agency co-operation based on clarity of responsibility, coordination of information and partnership arrangements between disciplines and agencies.

The involvement of the DJELR in ECCE stems from the equality brief where the provision of childcare is regarded as an important element in the equalisation of work, training and educational opportunities between men and women. The department's EOCP 2000-2006 has three funding strands, the first two being capital and staffing grants which have already been explored in the funding and staffing sections above. The third strand of funding is the **Quality Improvement Sub-measure** which specifically aims to raise the quality of childcare provision.

This is achieved by supporting the quality aims and objectives of the 33 CCCs and to support quality initiatives by the seven NVCO's including training, quality accreditation programmes and seminars. The interim evaluation of EOCP concluded that progress made in respect of this sub-measure was disappointing (Department of Finance, 2003). One of the main deficiencies mentioned was the lack of indicators to measure tangible outcomes of the NCVO's and CCC's quality initiatives.

From a local perspective, the DL-R CCC Action Plan for 2005 (Table 8.0) includes several action items which can contribute to practice development. These action items are in addition to a number of specific training initiatives.

Table 8.0 - DL-R CCC Action Plan 2005 - Extract of Quality/Practice Initiatives

Action Name	Objective
Information dissemination	Provide quality information on the activities of the DL-R CCC including newsletter, booklets, website and Resource Room
Quality Workshops	To develop and promote quality provision
Social Inclusion	Facilitate social inclusion in the childcare sector by identifying needs of groups at risk of being marginalised and taking practical measures to help address those needs
Support for Childcare in Disadvantaged Communities	Fund a part-time development worker through SSP to support SCAN
Networking	Support existing and new networks and network with other agencies at local, regional and national level

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In general the DL-R CCC Action Plan takes an inclusive approach by providing coordination and support services to the private and community childcare sectors simultaneously and not making a distinction in their approach. Overall the DL-R CCC is responsible for supporting almost 200 registered childcare providers of which 23 are identified as community providers. Notwithstanding the predominance of private providers part of the **Strategic Plan of the DL-R CCC** (objective 3.5) and the **Action Plan 2005** (Table 8.0 items 3 & 4) are to promote social inclusion through consultation with disadvantaged communities and groups about their childcare needs.

The DL-R CCC's Social Inclusion sub-committee is the specific mechanism set up to focus on the childcare needs of the disadvantaged communities. A part-time development worker employed through SSP to support SCAN is the main resource available to implement the Social Inclusion Action Plan and report on the outcome of the process to the sub-committee. In addition the DL-R CCC development worker is also available to provide some support for Social Inclusion initiatives as part of the brief for this role.

The NVCOs have been working with childcare practitioners towards the development of quality service provision for many years developing valuable expertise and useful materials. NVCOs are recognised as an important resource in the development and support of quality service provision and receive EOCP funding to continue this work throughout the childcare sector. Membership of NVCO's is available to both the community and private childcare providers. Similarly the NVCO's work in cooperation with the DL-R CCC on a range of quality and training initiatives providing valuable resources and expertise.

One of the most relevant NVCO's for the community sector is Barnardos whose mission is to focus specifically on children and young people whose well-being is under threat. At a national level Barnardos are responsible for the National Children's Resource Centre (established in 1993) which is dedicated to information, training, policy and research to families, professionals and the general public with the aim of improving the life of children in Ireland.

At a local level Barnardos have a number of specialist childcare services in the SSP area, as previously outlined. In addition, Barnardos are actively involved in supporting the community sector through the regional childcare development worker who is allocated 50% of the time to the SSP area. Work carried out includes direct support to two providers around best practice issues and policy development. The Barnardos development worker is also a member of the DL-R CCC Social Inclusion sub-committee and is therefore appropriately linked in to local initiatives. Collaborative work with the DL-R CCC included the organisation of a practice based workshop on "Supporting Children with Challenging Behaviour in the Childcare Setting". Under a separate arrangement with the HSE, Barnardos uses this development worker to also provide ongoing direct practice support to one of the SCAN members who is operating in a high risk area of disadvantage.

The scope of this research did not include the collation of detailed information or documentation on practice, programmes, policies and procedures etc. However the interviews did include both direct and indirect questions to provide some qualitative data in relation to the aim of the service, approaches/methodologies used, meeting the needs of the children, support services and general practice issues.

### Leaders

The main approach to childcare practice described by leaders is to promote the holistic development of the child through play, which includes a combination of free play, structured play and organised group activities. All of the centres designed an activity programme or schedule to provide a daily and weekly structure for the children. Notwithstanding, all of the leaders acknowledged that a flexible approach is taken on a daily basis to accommodate the many variables that can change e.g. number of staff, temperament of children etc. One of the providers has a Montessori based service with a team of qualified staff. A few centres are at different stages of implementing, or considering the implementation of the Highscope method, however staff training to support the new approach is an issue.

Six of the leaders (40%) discussed operational and practice support issues that were of concern to them. The issues included:

- i *Not happy with the level of support available for staff both from a practice and a facilitation/supervision/team work perspective*
- ii *Would really benefit from a dedicated childcare manager/co-ordinator to develop the practice and work with the play leaders*
- iii *Some of the children need more support than is available from the community childcare service especially when there are difficult family circumstances. There are lengthy delays getting children assessed for special needs or speech therapy. In general accessing support services is problematic and depends on the personal dedication of the leader.*
- iv *Need a better management committee with more support from parents on a consistent and longer-term basis*
- v *Would benefit from more support on the practice side. Would like to participate more in SCAN but finds it difficult to attend meeting due to lack of staff cover.*
- vi *More recognition leading to more support for working in the community.*

# KEY ISSUES

## The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project

### Workers

In general there is a clear awareness among the workers regarding the importance of quality service provision to meet the holistic needs of the children. Almost all of the workers believe that they are meeting the needs of the children attending the childcare services. However the workers' ability to elaborate on what specific needs they are addressing and how they are meeting those needs varied considerably. The needs most frequently mentioned by workers are social, communication and language skills. The main approach mentioned was individual, free and structured play and group activities, with a few workers discussing the benefits of the Montessori and Highscope methods. Less than 40% of the workers responses demonstrate a specific understanding of the needs that the service is addressing. The other 60% are satisfied that they are meeting the needs of the children, however they did not elaborate much on this.

From an issues perspective service provision was high on the agenda with 51% of workers expressing concerns. Further analysis of this category identifies that the three main themes were activities/equipment, practice support and parental involvement. Specific issues identified under these three headings are outlined below:

#### Activities and Equipment

- i *Funding for outings and trips*
- ii *Programme can be too routine, more variety needed including more organised activities*
- iii *More creative activities*
- iv *Better quality and more equipment which is usually limited by funding*
- v *2-3 activities available at the same time to give children choices.*

#### Practice Support

- i *Would like to be able to cater for children with special needs but would need training and support to do this*
- ii *Facilitation/Supervision to deal with stressful, demanding aspects of job, help to separate work from home life and problem solving*
- iii *More outside support to deal with practice issues e.g. advice line*
- iv *Practice support to introduce new practice methodology e.g. Highscope.*

#### Parental Involvement

- i *More involvement of parents with work being done with children, a co-operative approach with more follow-up in the home*
- ii *Parent involvement in the management of the service could be improved*
- iii *Parent and community education of the benefits of childcare and the work being done with the children*
- iv *Not equipped to deal with difficult parents*
- v *In a community setting, general community issues or tensions can spread and affect workers and morale in the childcare services.*

### Discussion

The current national impetus to develop a Framework for Quality and a Framework for Early Learning are important strategic developments to standardise, support and develop the quality of service provision in the childcare sector. From an operational stance the funding available through the EOCP quality measure has facilitated many information, training and practice support initiatives that are available to support the sector in the development of their day to day practice. Inspections by the HSE and the rollout of the Child First Guidelines have similarly helped to develop the quality of the providers practice.

The data collected confirms that there is a general awareness among leaders and workers of the ethos of a child-centred approach to the service, with the overall aim to meet the holistic needs of the individual child. However it was widely acknowledged by leaders, workers and stakeholders, that in practice there is significant scope for development and improvement of the quality of the service provision. The approach used in the daily childcare practice did not appear to be very sophisticated. Although there was an activity programme in place, this appeared to be fairly simple, static and routine. Creative input tends to come from the individual enthusiasm of a leader, worker or in some cases an effective team dynamic. In addition, the workers' ability to describe how they meet the needs of the children was relatively inhibited and there was limited qualitative data collated to demonstrate the workers' practice knowledge base.

One of the most notable practice issues was the lack of tangible practice supports available to assist with problem solving, deal with difficult children or parents, understanding practice developments, policies and procedures etc. There was a strong sense of isolation in how many of the service providers described their service provision. The main support network discussed by leaders was their membership of SCAN which allowed them to meet with other service providers and kept them in touch with local developments.

The SCAN development worker has been a very valuable resource for the community sector. The development worker's report to the DL-R CCC in January 2005 states that SCAN has extended the scope of its work from a training and support network, to an organisation that looks at how the childcare service is provided and what supports are needed to ensure the children in disadvantaged communities get the best possible service. Some of the specific initiatives mentioned in this report are as follows:

# KEY ISSUES

## The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



- i Training initiatives for community workers included information dissemination on available training, getting places on the DL-R CCC FETAC training course, Children First training, Personal Development through Drama and 'In Touch With Children'<sup>10</sup> training run by Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project
- ii Staff support initiatives included the collation of information to inform training using a questionnaire on 'Children with Additional Needs', set up of a Peer Support Workshop where workers had an opportunity to meet up regularly and share ideas.
- iii Voluntary library readers are engaged to go to the centres on a weekly basis supported by the DL-R senior librarian
- iv DIT, Mountjoy Square Access Office, and DIT Department of Fine Art worked with SCAN to facilitate playgroup workers to develop their creativity. Students from the college also ran Art Workshops in the playgroups for the children.

Finally, SCAN (through SSP), initiated this research to collate baseline local community childcare data and information on the needs of the workers. Although the monthly SCAN meetings are well attended, there is further scope for the development of this network through more active participation from its members, and the availability of more resources to implement a broader range of local initiatives, including training, practice support and the strategic development of community based services.

In addition to SCAN, perhaps the other most relevant feature of the local supports currently in place for community providers is the availability of a triad of development workers to include SCAN, DL-R CCC and Barnardos. Although this group are co-operating on local initiatives and are formally linked through the DL-R CCC Social Inclusion sub-committee there is perhaps further scope for the development of this cooperative relationship. This could include additional availability from these resources, since the three development workers are currently only available to the community sector on a part-time basis.

One of the cornerstones of community childcare is the active involvement of parents locally. However evidence from this research suggests that there are a number of issues with regard to parental involvement. There were two main elements of concern expressed. Firstly at a committee level, parent involvement is required to maintain and develop the service to respond to the childrens' needs in the community. Secondly parental co-operation may be required to ensure continuity for an individual child who may need additional support.

At a committee level leaders expressed concern regarding the volatile and transient nature of parental commitment and how this can conflict with the development of the service. Parents may not share a longer term vision since their involvement is linked to their own children attending the service in the short-term. With regard to individual children's needs workers felt that they were not well equipped to deal with parents, advising them on issues or concerns and in certain cases looking for their cooperation on specific interactions and behaviour. Similarly workers felt inadequate in their ability to handle difficult parents.

### Conclusion & Recommendations

The CECDE graph Defining Quality (Figure 1.0) in childcare is a useful tool to provide insight into the dimensions of quality and the potential relative importance of the dimensions. However like the local issue profiles this graph does not explore the relationship between these dimensions. It is proposed that 'Quality' as defined in this graph, is essentially made up of a number of fundamental and practice related dimensions. What is perhaps the most profound truism that has evolved from this research is that unless the fundamentals of 'Quality' in community childcare are directly addressed and resolved the 'Quality' of the service provision will continue to be compromised. The four key fundamentals identified in this research are funding, facilities, staffing, training and development.

There is a direct correlation between the quality of service provision and the status of these key fundamentals. Quality service provision is directly compromised by shortcomings in these key fundamentals. The dedication of many of the leaders and workers in the community services that contributed to this research is admirable and commendable and to a certain extent can compensate for some of the gaps in the key fundamentals. However the right of the children to access quality, affordable childcare services should not be compromised. Dedicated service providers doing the best they can with limited resources is not good enough for our children. The expectation of providers, agencies, families and all those directly or indirectly involved with community childcare services needs to change. There is currently a malaise of acceptance or putting up with minimum or in some cases below minimum standards in the community childcare sector. This needs to change to a more dynamic reality of fixing the problems based on the widespread acknowledgement and recognition of the right of all children to access quality childcare services. The overall recommendation under this section is to address as a priority the issues identified under funding, facilities, staffing, training and development. This will directly improve the quality of the service provision and ultimately will free up skilled resources to concentrate on quality service provision, rather than having this element at the end of the 'Operating Loop'.

### Recommendations on Quality Service Provision

- Build on current supports to make available additional resources within each centre to ensure the development and implementation of quality childcare practices.
- SCAN, (SSP) supported by the DL-R CCC access funds to employ area based childcare managers to support locally based community services.
- Expand the support available to the community service providers from the triad of part-time development workers, namely SSP/SCAN, DL-R CCC and Barnardos.
- Expand the HSE childcare inspector service to include a quality officer.
- Look at ways of increasing the involvement of parents in the services.

<sup>10</sup>"An integrated short training course aimed at social workers and childcare workers. The course focus is on attachment, and developing the workers ability to help the child form an attachment and to create a relationship based on trust."

# CONCLUSION

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



The dedication and commitment of individual service providers and workers interviewed in this research has been instrumental in providing and maintaining the valuable childcare services which are currently available in the SSP communities. However the consensus reflected in the data explored above is that this is not sufficient to ensure quality childcare services. What is required is a secure national and local foundation to support the development of existing services. In addition, a robust foundation is necessary to provide a basis to realistically tackle the service expansion challenges by increasing the number of childcare places and expand the range of services available to the target population of children.

In the *Childcare Census Report (2000)* childcare providers most often identified finance as the greatest barrier to expansion, buildings came next as a barrier to expansion, with the lack of staff identified as the third most significant barrier to expansion. Interestingly, a greater proportion of community based than privately run childcare facilities identified finance, building and staff as barriers to expansion.

Two types of expansion were considered in the census report, namely expansion through the extension of opening hours and expansion through extension of the range of services offered. Both of these types of expansions were considered significant. Firstly, expansion of opening hours is necessary to achieve the labour market equality initiative under EOCP. Secondly, expansion to achieve further diversity, one of the guiding principles adopted in the *National Childcare Strategy (1999)*, highlights the need for a variety and choice of services in order to meet the dynamic needs of children and their families. Although not specifically mentioned in these reports, the other aspect of expansion which underpins Government policy on childcare in recent years is to increase the number of childcare places available in existing and new services.

For the purposes of this research expansion and development of services is considered in its broadest context to include opening hours, range of services offered, developing the quality of existing services, new places in existing services and additional places in new facilities. Although specific data on barriers to expansion and development was not collated in this research the existence of the '*Operating Loop*' as a working model for the community service providers is substantive evidence that the barriers of finance, premises and staff continue to exist as real challenges. These barriers not only inhibit the development and expansion of services but most importantly they stymie the daily operation of the existing community childcare service.

This is not the full picture since the operational reality for the community childcare participants is not hampered exclusively by the above three well documented barriers. The other themes which permeate the data in this research and which need to be addressed as fundamental to a future effective working model within community childcare are as follows:

**What is Community Childcare?** The development and expansion of community childcare will continue to be held in abeyance until there is a clear definition and strategy with regard to the purpose of Community Childcare. The belief that has emerged from this research is that community childcare should be viewed as a "Family Support" rather than a labour market initiative, with a guiding strategy and a tailored funding stream.

**Improve Co-ordination** The need to improve co-ordination at a national and local level continues to be an important factor within community childcare. Perhaps implicit in this co-ordination theme is the facet of ownership and responsibility, with the majority of agencies expressing a view that their role is to provide indirect support. However what is unclear in the current structures is which Government Department and agency has direct responsibility and is required to give direct support to community childcare providers across the entire service. A central co-ordinating mechanism would help to guide and bring some recognition, coherence and momentum to the development and expansion of the community childcare services which are currently operating in a limbo.

**Reduce Complexity** Closely related to the concept of co-ordination at a national and local level is the aspect of complexity. As already illustrated there are currently seven Government Departments involved in childcare. Similarly at a local level this structure can become even more complex with a number of local government bodies, agencies and organisations involved. Each service provider is required to be informed, understand and negotiate, virtually single handedly, a myriad of organisations responsible for childcare related policy, procedures, funding and service supports. For the community childcare providers that have the skills and resources to navigate this complex terrain there is evidence of a significant overhead in doing so, in terms of cost, time and energy.

In addition to the overheads caused by complexity in childcare there is evidence in the more extreme cases of a '*sidelining*' effect, whereby community providers are not fully represented at a national or local level and in cases may have chosen to opt out. The current structures do not ensure that all community childcare providers are equally represented and therefore may not have access or benefit from the support mechanisms that are available. This is ultimately a third equality issue (previously discussed equality for parents and children) with preferential access attainable by the providers that are most adept at negotiating and leveraging their position.

# CONCLUSION

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project

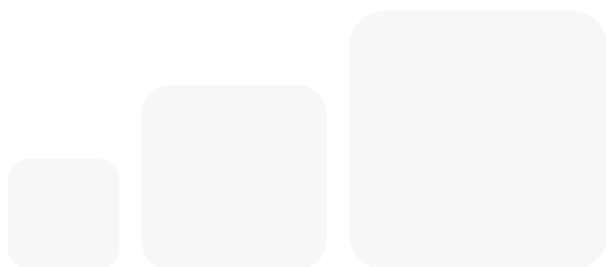


**Increase Capacity** Capacity building in the context of community childcare in Ireland should involve investing in initiatives to build the skills, abilities, knowledge and confidence of people and community groups, to enable them to take effective action and play leading roles in the development of childcare within their communities. It also however should include expanding the learning and development within the public services etc. so that support services, professionals, practitioners and policy-makers are better equipped to engage with the communities. Capacity building in childcare is currently only being achieved as a by-product of general capacity building initiatives within community development. To ensure the successful development and expansion of community childcare services, capacity building needs to be specifically focused on the needs of childcare service provision.

The '*Operating Loop*' as a working model for community childcare service provision has been extensively explored in this report. The issues represented by the model have been described and quantified by the leaders, workers and stakeholders who in general agree that the model reflects their current experience in community childcare. It is only by directly tackling the issues and implementing the range of recommendations proposed that this inefficient '*Operating Loop*' can be transformed, through a managed process of change, into a more secure long-term framework, which will firmly support the future development of quality childcare provision in the community.

The crucial dilemma in community childcare in the SSP area is that the current working model is fundamentally flawed. The assurance of equality for children to access quality affordable childcare in the future cannot be achieved by adjusting or tweaking the existing working model. What is finally recommended and proposed in this report is that there needs to be a qualitative change in the community childcare model which should be designed and orchestrated by representation from all the organisations and interest groups identified in this report. The qualitative change needed in the community childcare operating model should include a transition process whereby recommended short-term changes can be expedited to improve the more immediate operational issues in service provision.

In conclusion a broader representation of the equality agenda should be incorporated in a future childcare working model to include the primary right of the child to access quality childcare services, the right of all service providers to access funding and resources appropriate to meet the needs of the children, the right of families to be supported and finally the right of parents/ carers to access training, education and work opportunities.



# APPENDIX A

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



## Leaders Interview Template

Name & Address of Centre						
Manager Name				Date		
Brief History & Background of Centre - Date established						
Primary Aim of Provision						
Service Provided & Approaches used						
Describe Type of Building (Resource Centre etc.), Facilities and Equipment						
Current and Planned Sources of Funding for Childcare Centre - Sustainability of Service Provision						
CE Supervisor(s) Name & Role						
Staff Numbers	Total	Employed	CE 1 yr	CE > 1yr	JI	Other
If Other Staff Please Specify Details						
Number of Children Attending Centre and Average Age?	Total	0-1 yrs	2-3 yrs	4+	Min Age	
Size of Targeted Community - No of Families or Children - Disadvantaged	Number on Current Waiting List					
	Average Length of Time on Waiting List					
Hours of Service	Fees Charged					
Attendance Levels & Comment if appropriate	Staff			Children		
Prioritise 1-5 Most Important Issues to be Addressed at Childcare Centre & Comment	Building & Facilities					
	Staffing Levels - Number & Continuity					
	Staff Training & Development					
	Equipment					
	Admin, Technical & Operational Support					
	Other - Please Specify					

# APPENDIX B

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



## Workers Interview Template

Staff Ref No, Type of Employee & Centre Details	
Length of time in this Centre and details of previous childcare work or related experience (time & centre(s))	
Route into childcare work - time, choice or recommended career etc	
Specific route into community childcare	
Future plans in childcare and if not describe other future work plans	
Childcare Training - specific with Qual & modules completed when and through which training centre	
Other Relevant Training	
Future childcare Training Planned - course, when etc.	
How does childcare training completed to date & planned meet your needs	
How do you find childcare training material and assignments?	
Educational Background - Junior/Group/ Intermediate/Leaving Certs	
Describe general educational experience before childcare	
How satisfied are you with the current working terms, conditions and why	
How well do you think the centre meets the needs of the children attending	
How would you describe as the most important short & long term needs of the centre	
What do you like most about working in this centre	
What do you like least about working in this centre	
What are your other support needs that could be provided by the centre, your employer, statutory or support organisations	

# APPENDIX C

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



## CE Supervisors Interview Template

CE Supervisor (CES) Name, Number of CE Employees & No of Centre Details - Full-time or Part-time position	
Can you describe your role as a CE Supervisor	
Can you describe your role as a CE Supervisor for Childcare	
Specifically explore CES role as coach, mentor, career guidance, identifying individual Training needs of CE workers	
Time allocated to training (within working hours or afternoon/evenings). Funding for training – allocated on an individual basis or through the centre	
Outline CES role in organising and advising on Childcare Training	
Specifically describe role in organising and advising on other Training - specify type of courses and training centres used	
How do you evaluate training - childcare and other	
What is the training standard/criteria for a childcare worker under the CE scheme	
How are staff selected for Childcare under the CE scheme	
How do you measure a CE Childcare workers performance and what mechanism is there for feedback with the worker - formal, informal etc.	
How would you address performance issues?	
Who would you describe as your customer and why?	
Is the link between the CE Supervisor and the childcare centre they are working in?	
How is this link with the Childcare Centre maintained - regular formal/informal updates?	
How are the logistics of training coordinated with the CC centre	
What do you enjoy most about your role as a CE supervisor for Childcare worker	
What do you enjoy least about your role as a CE supervisor	
What do you feel are the top three needs of the CE Childcare workers you supervise	
Areas where the role of the CE supervisor could be developed to benefit the needs of the Childcare workers	
How do you feel the CE Scheme could be specifically developed to benefit the needs of the Community Childcare Centres	
Any other areas that are important to your role as CE Supervisor for CC workers that is not covered in our conversation to date	

# APPENDIX D

The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project



## Stakeholders Interview Template

Name, Job Title, Agency, Date of Interview, Scope of Individual's Role within Agency and Community Childcare	
From your understanding - can you outline your Agency's role in relation to Community Childcare – clarify if role is childcare in general or specifically community childcare	
Can you describe the mechanics of this role including funding, types of resources, service delivered, involvement within the childcare centres, feedback/evaluation from centres of service etc.	
From your Agency's perspective what is the objective or aim of community childcare?	
What needs within community childcare is your agency currently addressing?	
How effectively are you meeting these needs and how do you evaluate this?	
What other needs are you aware of within community childcare and are there any plans for your agency to address these needs in the future?	
Can you describe links/cooperation with any other Agencies in relation to your work with community childcare centres?	
Is there a statutory background to your role within community childcare?	
Is there a policy background to your role within community childcare?	
How consistent is your grass roots response to community childcare with the statutory and policy background (are they in harmony)?	
What has been achieved so far from your work within community childcare?	
What are the main milestones left to be achieved within Community Childcare and specify timescales?	
Is there any specific ways in which your agency's response to community childcare could be improved?	
What are the future plans within your Agency for community childcare?	
What statutory and policy changes could further facilitate your role within community childcare?	
What issues do you encounter in the delivery of your service to community childcare?	
Specifically do you encounter any obstacles or barriers to your work within community childcare?	
Is there any conflict in how you deliver your service with other agencies, people running the centres etc.	
Is there any duplication or overlap in the work you are doing regarding community childcare?	

# APPENDIX D



The Southside Partnership Community Childcare Research Project

Specifically focusing on the following areas of need within community childcare centres can you clarify your agency's involvement now or planned and how successful you have been in these areas:

1 Premises and Facilities

2 Staff levels – number and continuity

3 Staff Training and development

4 Equipment, Toys and Materials

5 Admin, technical (rules & regs, timetables, curriculum etc and operational support

6 Other

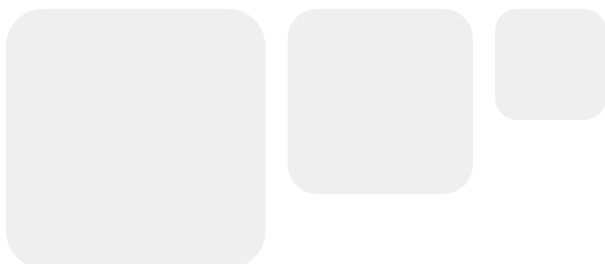
In our research we have identified the following key issue what is your agency's response to these?

Sustainability of Service – constant uncertainty regarding the future of the service?

Facilities and Premises?

Staffing levels, training and conditions?

Any other areas currently or in future plans, that are important to your Agency's role/response to Community Childcare that have not been discussed above?



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