

SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH CHILDMINDING ASSOCIATION

Background

Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) promotes childminding as a quality childcare service, through its Vision and Key Priorities for childminding. These were developed by the Association's Elected Members. The Association's Vision Statement is:

"Quality Childminding ... building confident children within a family childcare experience"

In order to achieve the Vision, there are three key priorities:

1. Raising the profile of childminding and the work of the Association
2. Continue to improve the quality of childminding
3. Recruiting and retaining professional, quality childminders

SCMA is a national charity and membership organisation founded in 1985. It has over 4,000 members representing around 80% of Scotland's childminders and others with an interest in quality childminding.

Our work is best summarised via our website: www.childminding.org with our strategic plan and annual report in the 'About Us' section.

Childcare

This is one of the areas that we know is crucial for women. While caring for a child is the responsibility of both parents we know that it is mainly women, especially lone parent women who are prevented from working if appropriate childcare is not available.

There are just over 6,000 childminders in Scotland caring for over 28,000 children. The information now gathered by the Care Inspectorate via the Annual Returns gives a good profile of where childminders are set up and more of a breakdown of the type of services they provide.

The latest statistics are available from the Care Inspectorate website: www.scswis.com

A summary from the 2011 statistics is as follows:

- There was a rise in the number of childminding services from 6,107 in 2010 to 6,249 in 2011. This was mirrored by a rise in attendance; around 29,150 children (3.2% of the population aged 0-15 years old) attended a registered childminding service in November 2011, compared to 28,020 (3.1% of the population aged 0-15 years old) in November 2010.
- There were more childminding services per head of population in remote small towns compared to in large urban areas (85.8 compared to 41.9).
- However the size of childminding services was similar across urban and rural areas with around five children on average attending each service.

- Childminding services were less abundant and slightly smaller in the more deprived areas of Scotland compared to the less deprived areas, with four children attending per service in the most deprived areas steadily increasing to 5.6 per service in the least deprived areas.

The vast majority of people providing a childminding service are women with an average age of 35 years. The time they stay in childminding varies tremendously with some only staying while their children are young and others staying till they retire.

Records show that the number of childminding services stays around the same number. While there was a slight increase in 2011 there has been an equal decrease in 2012.

Apart from providing a childcare service these women are running an increasingly complex small business. Mostly they are sole providers though a small percentage have an assistant. This needs support in order for quality to be maintained.

The rest of the Care Inspectorate statistics needs to be read with some care. The other services are registered as day care services but the category of nursery is made up both of private nurseries and the sessional local authority nurseries. I don't consider the main function of sessional local authority nurseries is to provide childcare.

I would agree though that to try and distinguish between education and care for this very young age group is unhelpful.

Childminding services also play an increasingly important role in providing an early intervention service. They are well placed to detect concerns early and support vulnerable children and families.

Ensure affordability

If we take lessons from other countries then the most cost effective way of ensuring affordability is to subsidise the cost of childcare on a sliding scale rather than including a proportion of the cost to the parent. We regularly have calls from childminders who find that parents default on paying even though they are in receipt of the childcare element of working tax credit.

I don't see the increase in the number of free hours that is proposed in Scotland is going to really help the majority of women to access work. Those hours were originally to give access to preschool education that is mostly provided by local authority nurseries. That has proved successful but not in relation to employment but rather to improving outcomes for children. Trying to make these hours more flexibly delivered is likely mainly to assist parents using private nurseries who are partner providers.

It would certainly help if there was an increase in the number of employers providing employees with childcare vouchers. This works well for parents and providers of childcare. The only drawback is the childminder is paid in arrears but at least they

are paid. There are some disadvantages for some parents on low pay where it is not always to their advantage.

Ensure accessibility – capacity in the workforce

This is most difficult as currently the registration of childminders is often left to chance. SCMA can run recruitment drives and these are very successful, but these are subject to funding from local authorities and there is no pattern to when this happens.

There were systems developed that were funded through the 'Working for Families' fund. These were very successful in assisting parents towards and into work in deprived areas but this funding is no longer available.

SCMA is part of the new 'Making it Work' bids that will be funded through BIG Lottery. 'Making it Work' will assist lone parents whose youngest child is soon to go to school in the five local authority areas with most lone parents.

Childminders are increasingly providing a service that is more flexible. SCMA has recently improved their public liability insurance so that it will cover the childminder for occasionally providing a service in the child's own home. This allows the childminder to care for the child during the day and then taking the child home till the parent arrives.

Provide support for childminding services

Experience shows that setting up and the first year in business is where childminders need most support. SCMA does provide this service but it is subject to funding. This is mostly provided by local authorities and has been heavily cut.

We now run induction training for those who are interested in providing a childminding service. This can be paid for using an Individual Learning Account. The Care Inspectorate is very supportive of this service as it ensures that the right people come forward. This should be made a requirement of registration with support for set up costs where necessary.

The best service for Scotland's children

I would argue that childminding services are the most appropriate for very young children, especially babies. Research shows that this first year is when baby's brains develop and the one-to-one care provided by a childminder will give babies what they need. At school age the service is based in the child's community and will be easily available for short times before and after school and over the long school holidays. For the middle age range the childminder can provide a wrap-around service taking the child to playgroup and local authority nursery.

With appropriate recruitment, support and training childminding services can provide both increased employment as well as access to appropriate childcare.

Childcare is much more than giving access for parents to work; it is about ensuring good outcomes for children. Women want access to work but they also want the best for their children. There should be no compromise in ensuring quality outcomes.

Maggie Simpson
Chief Executive
Scottish Childminding Association
1 February 2013