

issue 24
Autumn
September 2006

childwise

CHECK OUT CHILDCARE: NEWS AND VIEWS FOR PARENTS FROM DAYCARE TRUST

Listening to families

The new Childcare Act
and what it means for you

**Extra help with
childcare costs**



Visit Daycare Trust's website at www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Call Daycare Trust's helpline 020 7840 3350

Childwise is part-supported by the Department for Education and Skills - Child, Young People and Families Grant Programme

 **DAYCARE
TRUST**
THE NATIONAL CHILDCARE CAMPAIGN

welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of *Childwise*, Daycare Trust's newsletter for parents. As there has been a bit of a gap since the last issue of *Childwise*, we are bringing you as much information as possible in this special extended issue.

For the first time ever, we have a dedicated Childcare Act. The Childcare Act 2006 became law on 13 July 2006. Read about what this might mean for you and other parents in the future.

welcome to Childwise

Make sure you are getting what you are entitled to! This year, with an increase in support you can get through tax credits, the amount you

can receive in childcare vouchers and an increase in the amount of weeks free part-time early education places can be used for, there could be extra help out there that you haven't claimed. See Money Matters for information.

Local authorities need to ensure that families' views are listened to when looking at the provision of childcare. Parents, carers and children alike need to have their views heard and included in any future planning of childcare services.

Listening to families is at the forefront of our current work here at Daycare Trust. In this issue of the newsletter we highlight what we have been doing so far and what is happening next, as well as asking you to get involved.

Please keep in touch!



Thom Crabbe
Director of Services

What's happening in childcare

Early years places for three- and four-year-olds

Since April 2006, the government increased the provision of early years education places for 3- and 4-year-olds by 5 weeks, from 33 weeks to 38 weeks per year. The government currently funds these free places for 12.5 hours per week, but this will increase to 15 hours per week from April 2007.

You can use the free sessions in registered childcare settings, such as a nursery school or private, voluntary or community nursery, a pre-school or through an approved childminding network. You can split your entitlement across more than one place if you wish, over a minimum of three days per week. Parents cannot be charged for any part of the free entitlement, either directly (by providers asking you to pay a top-up) or indirectly (by providers asking you to take additional hours if you do not wish to do so).

Have you had difficulties finding a free nursery place for your child? Have you been asked to top-up the government grant? Let us know about it - email Childwise@daycaretrust.org.uk, or call us on 020 7840 3350.

Early Years Foundation Stage

The government has recently consulted on the development of an Early Years Foundation Stage. This will provide a development and learning framework for children from birth to age five and states what childcare settings are required to provide by law, suggesting models of good practice.

The consultation also suggests changing the ratios of staff to children, for children aged 3 and 4, to 1:13. The current ratio is 1:8. However, a number of organisations, including Daycare Trust, think that this ratio is too high for young children. We will let you know what the government decides.

The consultation has now closed, but a copy of it can be downloaded from: www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/ensuringquality/eyfsconsultation or you can request a copy from the Department for Education and Skills publications line on 0845 602 2260 (quote ref: SESCO6_18).



More Choice for Parents

We have produced a new audio resource providing clear and accessible information to parents and their advisors about childcare and children's services. 'More Choice for Parents' provides information about the wide range of childcare options and children's services on offer to parents, potential benefits and help available to access them. The ten-minute audio file, which can be downloaded for free from our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk, is available in English and nine other community languages, along with supporting written information. Daycare Trust has produced the resource, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), in order to widen access to information about childcare for all families, particularly for communities that do not have English as their first language. 'More Choice for Parents' complements the booklets 'More Choice for Childcare' and 'Looking for Childcare', both published by Sure Start.

National Childcare Week 2006

'Children at the Centre', our theme for this year's National Childcare Week, emphasised that quality early education and care developed around the needs of children gives them a great start in life. During the week we held two events, the 'Me and my childcare' children's art competition and the Childcare Champions Awards for parents. Both events celebrated the benefits of quality childcare for children and their families.



In association with Nursery World, we held an event for the prize winners of the 'Me and my childcare' children's art competition on 5 June at Tate Britain. To enter, children had to draw or paint pictures of themselves in their ideal childcare environment. The winners received a toy, art materials and gift vouchers, which were presented

by the Rt. Hon. Beverley Hughes, Minister of State for Children and Families. Prizes were also presented to the carers of the children in recognition of their hard work and dedication.

The Childcare Champions Awards for parents were held in association with Calpol and aim to highlight the importance of parental involvement and the role of childcare in building strong communities.

The awards recognise those who have campaigned to improve access to quality, affordable childcare services in their community, and this year's winners were of an exceptionally high standard! One of the winners, Carol Fairburn, was responsible for setting up a very successful childminding support group near Stevenage, as well as encouraging and supporting other childminders to become qualified.

An award also went to Karina Choat who cares for her child who has severe cerebral palsy. This experience encouraged her to set up a support group for families of children with disabilities. The result was the establishment of 'Special Kids in the UK', which has now developed into a charity supporting almost 400 families.

This year an award was made to a project, the 'Special Matters' scheme in Staffordshire Moorlands. This project was set up to offer support to families who have special needs, who previously felt unsupported and lacked information about services available to them. Collecting the award on the groups' behalf was Suzanne Senn and Faith Asplin.

Finally, Debbie Irving also became a Childcare Champion. A lone parent with three children, Debbie has been the leader of Kool Kidz, a parent and toddler group that is run with support from Sure Start Preston East. She has also previously been the secretary, treasurer and activity coordinator, demonstrating a long-term commitment to the project.

The winners received a plaque and prize to recognise their achievements, which were presented by the Rt. Hon. Ed Balls, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, on 7 June 2006 at a lunchtime reception at No.11 Downing Street. We also launched a new publication, *RAMPS: a framework for listening to children*, which focuses on how services can improve how they listen to children's views (see our New Publications section).

Look out for National Childcare Week in 2007.

National Childcare Week forms part of National Sure Start Month, which celebrates services for children and families. For more information see www.nationalsurestartmonth.com

Childcare Act 2006

The Childcare Act has now officially become law. It is the first piece of legislation dedicated to early years and childcare. Included in the Act are new duties for local authorities to:

- Improve outcomes for all children under five and reduce inequalities between them.
- Ensure sufficient childcare is provided for parents who work or who are training for work.
- Provide information about childcare and other services for parents (this is likely to be undertaken through Children's Information Services).

To ensure sufficient childcare is provided in the area, local authorities will need to review current provision (both local authority-funded and private, voluntary and independent provision) and fill any gaps that are identified. Childcare for working parents must be provided for children up to the age of 14, or 18 if they are disabled.

Local authorities must also consult parents about their childcare needs and listen to the views of young children when designing services.

Ofsted registration review

From September 2008, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) will maintain two registers for the regulation and inspection of childcare providers:

- The early years register (provision for children up to five years).
- General Childcare Register (children aged five and over).

Ofsted is currently consulting on proposals for revising the General Childcare Register, which will be compulsory for providers caring for children aged five–seven, except:

- provision provided through maintained and independent schools for pupils over the age of three, which will be inspected as part of the school's inspection; and
- nannies, short-term occasional care and providers looking after children aged eight and over, where there will be voluntary registration.

Only registered provision will be eligible for financial support through Working Tax Credit and employer-supported childcare.

Holiday costs

Our annual Holiday Childcare Costs Survey shows that costs are still rising around the country and the national average remains worryingly high; currently standing at £77.34 per week, an increase of £1.50 on last year's average cost. However, surprisingly, costs for Inner London have dropped noticeably from last year.

The Inner London figure is significant because it shows the effect that significant local authority financial support is having in the area.

Holiday childcare costs for Inner London this summer have dropped to an average of £48.90 per week and are considerably cheaper than for North West England (£84.04) and North East England (£77.62).

The majority of families in Scotland are also having to foot an increasingly high bill, with the average weekly cost of holiday playschemes costing £75.82.

Daycare Trust carried out its survey of Children's Information Services in June 2006, in the run up to school holidays. Costs vary widely across the UK and many areas in England have experienced an increase in costs since last year's study.

For further information see our Holiday Costs Survey on our website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Have you experienced increased holiday childcare costs, or did your childcare costs go down over the summer break? Let us know what your experiences are and we will show you the results in a future issue of Childwise. Please email details through to Childwise@daycaretrust.org.uk, or telephone us on 020 7840 3350.

It takes two...



We would like to give a warm welcome to our two new joint Chief Executives, Alison Garnham and Emma Knights, who are working in a job-share capacity. Their appointment very much supports our campaign for flexible working for parents.

Alison was Director of Policy and Research at

One Parent Families for nine years and previously lectured in Social Policy at London Metropolitan University; Emma brings a wealth of experience, most recently from the Legal Services Commission, but also from the Local Government Association and Child Poverty Action Group, where she previously also worked with Alison.

Each brings complementary skills which, at this vital time, will take the Daycare Trust forward in its campaigning and other activities.

MONEY MATTERS



Childwise's regular feature to keep you updated on financial support for childcare.

Increase in the amount of employer-supported childcare

The weekly exempt amount for childcare vouchers and other directly-contracted childcare increased in April 2006, from £50 to £55 per week, with the monthly amount being raised to £243 from £217.

For information about childcare vouchers, see our website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk or call our information line on 020 7840 3350.

Changes to Working Tax Credit

In April 2006, the maximum proportion of eligible childcare costs through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit increased from 70 per cent to 80 per cent. From the same date, Working Tax Credit, which was previously paid by your employer through your salary, is now paid directly to you into your bank account.

For more information about tax credits, contact the Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900 or see www.hmrc.gov.uk

Teachers to benefit from salary sacrifice schemes

From September 2006, if you are a teacher in a school or a nursery, you are now able to benefit from salary sacrifice schemes to pay for your childcare. Previously, teachers were not able to benefit from salary sacrifice as their contract did not allow them to be paid less than their normal legal entitlement.

For further information, see www.teachernet.gov.uk/pay or contact 0870 000 2288.

New Help with Childcare Costs website

We will soon have a new website dedicated solely to helping you find out about where you can get help with your childcare costs. There will be information that is relevant to a range of parents in different situations, including, for example, young parents, parents who are employed or looking for work and parents in training or education.

Keep checking our website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk for further information.

Make Child Benefit Count - 60 years of Child Benefit

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is celebrating 60 years of Child Benefit (and its predecessor Family Allowances) by launching a new campaign called Make Child Benefit Count.

The purpose of the campaign is to ask the Government to increase Child Benefit and ensure that younger children get the same rate as the oldest child.

A number of organisations, including Daycare Trust, have lent their support to the campaign and you can too. For further information visit the campaign website: www.makechildbenefitcount.org where you can send an e-postcard asking for the changes to be made. Alternatively, you can contact CPAG on 020 7837 7979.

The campaign will continue until November when CPAG will present all the postcards to the Chancellor.

ENJOY LEARNING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Family Learning with Sure Start encourages parents and very young children to play and learn together.

Courses for parents and carers and their three-year-old children began at Sure Start Hindley, in Wigan, five years ago. The courses, which are run by Sue Williams and Dionne Blower from Family Learning, helped parents and children develop language and number skills together in preparation for starting school. This proved to be so popular that other parents, who had younger children in the crèche, thought it would also be good to have some programmes for them. The Early Start course, developed by the Basic Skills Agency, was an ideal option for them.

Following a very successful pilot in April 2004, Early Start has been a very well attended and permanent feature of the Family Programmes at Hindley. The Rt. Hon Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children, Young People and Families, 2003 – 2005, visited the centre in 2004 and met parents and children on the Early Start course.

Other projects, such as the Family Programme for parents and children between 12 months and 2 years and Language and Play, developed by Sue and Dionne, were introduced and were also very successful. Both courses recruited numerous parents, carers and children and served as a link between Early Start and Family Literacy/Numeracy.



The programmes have had some notable success stories. One learner, Debbie, came with her twin boys to a Family Literacy/Numeracy course. She then became a Sure Start volunteer, encouraging other parents to attend Sure Start activities. Debbie brought Vicky, a mother of four, to the Family Programmes. Vicky has now completed the Family Literacy course with her three year old, Early Start with her baby and has become a volunteer herself.

Family Learning at Sure Start has proved to be beneficial for parents, carers and their children, as it not only provides fun activities that they

can do at the centre or at or at home, but also enables them to form lasting friendships and gives them opportunities to become involved with their local community.

For more information please contact Justine Silcock, Family Learning Co-ordinator on 01942 828908 or contact your local Sure Start programme to see what activities are being held in your own area. To find your local Sure Start Programme, contact 0870 0002288, or see www.surestart.gov.uk. See www.surestart.gov.uk/stepintolearning for more information about Step into Learning programme.

Listening to families Daycare Trust is starting work on a new project, called 'Listening to Families'.

The project, which is funded by the Department for Education and Skills, will involve listening to parents, carers and children about their experiences of using childcare and their views on how services could be improved. We will use the information gained from this project to feed back to the government and policy makers, as well as distribute good practice to local authorities on how to effectively listen to families. We plan to pilot the project in three local authority areas in September 2006 and then extend it to other parts of England. We will be contacting families primarily through questionnaires, telephone interviews and focus groups. We will be sending out a questionnaire as part of the project in the next edition of Childwise, so watch this space!

For further information about this project please contact us on 020 7840 3350 or email info@daycaretrust.org.uk

useful information

Contact-a-family extended helpline hours: Contact-a-family, the charity that supports families with disabled children, have extended their helpline hours to include a new evening service. You can now call them on 0808 808 3555 (textphone 0808 808 3556), 5.30pm – 7.30pm every Monday. The helpline is normally open 10.00am – 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

Parents' Week 2006: The seventh national Parents' Week will take place from 16 October – 22 October 2006. The campaign theme for this year is 'Happy Families' and the week will highlight the importance of families. In previous years, organisations around the UK have put on fun and informative activities, which parents can participate in throughout the week, ranging from information stalls in shopping centres to workshops, parenting cafes or activities organised by parents for parents. Look out for events at your local library, Sure Start Project or Children's Information Service. Activities may also be held at local schools, prisons, museums and galleries or community and voluntary organisations. For further information contact National Family and Parenting Institute on 020 7424 3460, or see their website www.family-parenting.org/PW2006.

Looking for childcare? Are you trying to decide which childcare is best for your children? Do you want to know what your options are? Sure Start's booklet *Looking for Childcare? - A Sure Start guide to help you make the right choices* is a useful resource for any parent looking for help finding the right childcare. The booklet describes the different types of childcare available, provides advice about choosing quality childcare and has information about possible sources of funding to help with childcare costs. For a free copy contact the Department for Education and Skills publication line on 0845 602 2260 or email dfes@prolog.uk.com quoting ref: SESCO-17.

useful organisations

- **Childcare Link**

0800 096 0296 www.childcarelink.gov.uk

Information about different types of childcare. Provides contact details for local Children's Information Services, which can provide you with a list of registered or approved childcare providers.

- **Disabled Parents' Network**

0870 241 0450 www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk

Information, support and advice for disabled people who are parents.

- **Homestart**

080 0068 6368 www.home-start.org.uk

Support, friendship and practical help for families with children under five, through local schemes.

- **Parentline Plus**

0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Advice and support for anyone in a parenting role including stepparents and grandparents. Runs parenting classes around the country.

GET CHILDWISE

For your free subscription to Childwise please fill in the form below and post it to Daycare Trust at 21 St George's Road, London SE1 6ES, or fax it to 020 7840 3355. You can also telephone our information line on 020 7840 3350 or email childwise@daycaretrust.org.uk

We may occasionally contact you about other publications and services offered by us. If you do not wish to be contacted please tick

Name _____

Address _____

Contact number _____

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, campaigning for quality affordable childcare for all and raising the voices of children, parents and carers. We advise parents and carers, providers, employers trade unions and policymakers on childcare issues.

Registered charity number 327729. Daycare Trust gratefully acknowledges the support of the Department of Education and Skills. All rights reserved. ©Daycare Trust 20056.

New publications

We have recently published two new reports that focus on families' views of childcare.

The first, *RAMPS: a framework for listening to children*, draws on research from the Coram Family's Listening to Young Children project and focuses on what it means to enable children to make a positive contribution to their learning, social and/or health care. It provides a way of thinking about children making a positive contribution through the quality assurance framework of RAMPS. This publication is free of charge and also available to download from our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk as a pdf document.

The second of our new publications, *Ensuring Equality: black and minority ethnic families' views on childcare*, looks at parents' and carers' experiences of accessing childcare, as part of Daycare Trust's Ensuring Equality project, and looks at the gaps in provision for families from black and minority ethnic communities. It includes two papers, which bring together research undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research. This publication is available to purchase for £8.

If you are interested in either of these publications, please contact us on 020 7840 3350 or by email at info@daycaretrust.org.uk.

DAYCARE TRUST CONSULTANCY SERVICE

Do you need some help with your childcare services? Daycare Trust's Consultancy Service provides a variety of high quality services to a range of different clients. From local authorities to community nurseries, from business planning to childcare sufficiency assessments, Daycare Trust's Consultancy Service may be able to help you. For more information, please contact Emma Kirk, Business Development Officer, on 020 7840 3350 or email ekirk@daycaretrust.org.uk.

