

issue 26
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childwise

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

**Your views
on childcare –
findings from
our Listening
to Families
Project**

**Look out
for National
Childcare Week**

**Childcare
at a price**

Visit Daycare Trust's website at www.daycaretrust.org.uk
Call our helpline on 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 to *Childwise*

Welcome to the latest edition of *Childwise*, Daycare Trust's newsletter for parents.

Under recent law there is a duty for local authorities, through Children's Information Services, to provide more information about childcare to parents. Good quality, accessible information is invaluable when looking at childcare for your children. In this issue of *Childwise* we're giving you information that will help you to make more informed decisions about the childcare that you use.

We're bringing you information about the early findings of our *Listening to Families* research, which includes information from the responses to the questionnaire in our last issue. Read about what you, and other parents, think about the childcare services you use.

Do you know about all the help you are entitled to with the costs of your childcare? Look at our *Money Matters* section and see if you are maximising on the help available to you.

We are always keen to hear from parents about any childcare issues. Why don't you get in contact and tell us about your experiences of childcare? We may be able to use you as a case study, or consult you about childcare issues, for use in our future work.

Please keep in touch!



Thom Crabbe
Director of Services

PS. Don't forget that if you want to keep receiving copies of *Childwise*, you need to become a Parent member of Daycare Trust. This is free for parents in 2007 and you can complete and return the form on the back of this issue if you want to join.

Campaign for formal childcare

The Department for Education and Skills are currently raising awareness of the benefits of using formal childcare and are encouraging more parents to use it and find out about what help is available to pay for it. There is a dedicated helpline number, 0800 234 6346, which will re-direct you to your local Children's Information Service, who can provide you with information about formal childcare in your area. Look out for posters on local buses or adverts in the magazine or newspaper you read! You will also find information on www.direct.gov.uk/childcare.

Listening to Families – what you think about childcare

You may remember from previous issues of *Childwise*, that we are carrying out a project called 'Listening to Families'. The aim of the project is to find out more about families' experiences of, views on, and needs for childcare in England today. We also hope to set up working links between Daycare Trust and parents, in order to involve you in our policy and campaign work.

We have had a great response from you to our Listening to Families questionnaire, with almost 250 of you completing it and giving us information on your use of childcare and your experiences and views of childcare services. Many thanks to those of you who took part! Winners of the vouchers have been notified by letter.

The research is well under way and we have already held 12 discussion groups, 6 of them with black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, which included Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali parents. In the other six groups we included London-based parents whose children have a disability.

So what have you been telling us about your childcare?

Most of you already make use of some form of childcare, but almost all of you would like to have more available. Many of you had only recently started using childcare, and some had initially met with resistance from other family members. Generally, you have positive experiences of using childcare and for many of you this has opened up new possibilities for training, studying, socialising and work.

Unsurprisingly, those of you with disabled children experience difficulties finding appropriate childcare. In many cases, your needs are very specific and childcare can only be used if it is tailored to those needs and if one-to-one support is provided. For all parents trust and complete confidence in the childcare provider are important factors when looking at childcare. This is necessary for you before you will even consider using a service.

Cost is also very important and is a great influence on whether you will use childcare. However, for some, availability of appropriate places is a bigger issue than cost. All of the parents we spoke to agreed that more information about help with childcare costs and where to find suitable places would help them to find and use childcare.

Many of you find out about childcare by word of mouth. This means that the quality and consistency of the information you receive varies considerably. You described the process of finding out about childcare, or benefiting from it, and help towards paying for it, as 'a battle' and 'a struggle'. In some cases this would actually lead to you giving up trying.

What next?

Over the next few months we will continue to hold discussion groups with parents – and particularly hope to speak to lone parents and low-income families. We then plan to move on to hearing children's views on how they feel about their childcare. We will also be feeding this information back to the Government. This is a very exciting part of the Listening to Families project, and one that presents many challenges!

Further updates about the project will be available in future issues of *Childwise* and on the Daycare Trust website www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Sufficient childcare in your area

Over the coming year your local authority has a duty to assess the childcare provided in your area. Under the Childcare Act 2006, by April 2008, local authorities in England will have to review the supply of, and demand for, childcare in their area. The aim is to ensure that childcare services meet the needs of the families and communities living there, enabling them to work or undertake education or training leading to work.

Your local authority will need to make a detailed analysis and identify areas where there are gaps in childcare provision. This is then used to plan and shape services, which are responsive to parents' and children's needs.

Effective consultation will be an important factor in childcare sufficiency assessments and will give people with an interest in childcare an opportunity to highlight relevant issues or concerns. Local authorities will need to obtain the views of children, parents and carers and childcare providers (amongst others) during the assessment process. You may be involved in this process, perhaps through contact with your local Children's Information Service or local Early Years team or through filling out a questionnaire about childcare on your local authority's website, for example. This important local work will be a great opportunity to give your views on the childcare in your area.

In order to contact your local Children's Information Service, call ChildcareLink on 0800 096 0296 or visit www.childcarelink.gov.uk.



Keep keeping up-to-date with childcare news

Childwise will now only be offered as a membership benefit for Parent members of Daycare Trust. In order to keep receiving regular copies of our quarterly newsletter for parents you will need to sign up for membership. This is free for parents in 2007 and joining will also provide you with other member benefits, such as discounts on publications and events. Why don't you complete the form on the back of this issue and join us in our work?

Money Matters

Free early years places

Are you aware that if your child is three- or four-years old they are entitled to a free part-time early years education place? If your child is already in childcare, check with them to see if a place is available there. If you are looking for a free place, contact your local Children's Information Service (CIS) for where these are being delivered locally. Contact ChildcareLink on 0800 096 0296 or visit www.childcarelink.gov.uk for details of your local CIS.

Help with Childcare Costs website

Are you looking for information about help with your childcare costs? Our Help with Childcare Costs website provides information about the different sources of financial support that are available to parents. Visit our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk and click on the link from the homepage.

The Childcare Indicator

If your employer offers an employer-supported childcare scheme in your workplace, through childcare vouchers for example, you may be trying to decide whether accepting these will be beneficial for you. HM Revenue and Customs are currently piloting a new tool on their website to help you to see whether you might be better off on an employer-supported childcare scheme or with help from tax credits. Similar to the Tax Credits Calculator, you can input your financial information and details about you and your partner, if you have one, and your childcare and the results show the likely effect on your tax credits, income tax and National Insurance Contributions, so you can see which system you will be better off on.

You can access the Childcare Indicator on the HMRC website: www.hmrc.gov.uk/calcs/ccin.htm

Financial help for nannies in Wales

Parents using an approved nanny in Wales will now be able to claim tax credits and benefit from tax and National Insurance Contributions exemptions when using employer-supported childcare to help towards childcare costs. Similar to the scheme already offered in England, financial help will be offered to parents who use a nanny who has been approved under the Childcare Approval Scheme in Wales.

For further information contact 0844 736 0260 or see www.childcareapprovalschemewales.co.uk

Childcare Affordability Programme

The Childcare Affordability Programme (CAP) is funded by the London Development Agency and Sure Start. It provides lower-income families with access to subsidised full daycare and flexible childcare arrangements. It is designed to offer families in this situation greater choice, flexibility and quality to enable them to remain in, or return to, full- or part-time work or training. It is currently running as a pilot project in London only.

Subsidised childcare places will be available in all 33 London boroughs and will be provided through registered (with OFSTED) nurseries or childminding networks who are accredited by the National Childminding Association.

Subject to availability of places, a full daycare place under the scheme will cost parents no more than £175 per week. Flexible childcare places are also made available at times to suit the needs of parents at an affordable hourly rate.

Children must be aged 0–5 and must be attending a participating childcare provider. In addition, parents must be in receipt of Child Tax Credit at higher than the family element - currently £545 per year - and be able to provide evidence of this to a childcare provider, by showing the annual tax credit award notice from HM Revenue and Customs.

Every Children's Information Service in London should have access to a list of childcare providers that are participating in the programme and details of the places offered. For contact details of your local Children's Information Service, contact ChildcareLink on 0800 096 0296.

For further information about the Childcare Affordability Programme, see the 'Information for Parents' section of our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Childcare in the Pre-budget Report

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, delivered his pre-budget report speech on 6 December 2006. Measures aimed at children and young people include:

- The child element of Child Tax Credit will increase by £80 per year to £1,845 from April 2007. This represents a total increase of £400 since its introduction in April 2003.
- From April 2009, every mother-to-be will become eligible for Child Benefit from week 29 of her pregnancy. Worth up to an additional £200 for the first child and up to £130 for subsequent children, this recognises the importance of a healthy diet during pregnancy, and the additional costs of a newborn child.
- The renewal period for tax credits will be shortened to 4 months (from 5) in 2007, helping to reduce the size and number of overpayments.

We will bring you further information about the budget in the next issue of *Childwise*.

Free early years education places for 2-year-olds piloted in 15 local authorities.

The Government are currently testing a scheme of providing early years education places, normally for three- and four-year-olds, for two-year-olds. The pilot focuses on families who do not currently access childcare provision and those from lower-income and disadvantaged families. The aim of the pilot is to build up knowledge about the benefits of early access to free, high-quality early years provision for disadvantaged children.

The local authorities running the pilot until summer 2008 are: Barnsley; Birmingham; Bradford; Cornwall; Doncaster; Durham; Haringey; Islington; Kingston-upon-Hull; Liverpool; Nottingham; Portsmouth; Sandwell; South Tyneside and Tower Hamlets. Most participating authorities are operating a referral system mainly through health visitors. However, it is important to note that even though you may live in one of the pilot areas, you may not be targeted for the pilot.

Free early years education places extended to 15 hours in 20 pilot areas

In a previous issue of *Childwise*, we told you about the early years education places for three- and four-year-olds being increased from 12.5 hours to 15 hours. From April 2007 the free entitlement will be extended in 20 pilot local authority areas in England. The 20 local authority areas chosen are: Blackburn; Blackpool; Derbyshire; Gloucestershire; Greenwich; Hampshire; Haringey; Hertfordshire; Leeds; Leicestershire; Newham; Peterborough; Rochdale; Sheffield; Slough; Somerset; Sunderland; Telford and Wrekin; Worcestershire and York.

Calling all student parents!

We have numerous calls to our information line, from parents who are studying on a course of further education, but do not have any financial support available to them to pay for their childcare. We recognise that this is a serious issue for many parents and hope to help change the situation. We will soon be undertaking some research into the support available to parents in this situation. We would like to hear from you if you are currently studying on a course of further education or have recently completed one. What do you think about the funding that is available to you, to help you pay for your childcare whilst studying? Does your child have a place at the college nursery? How have you funded your child's childcare if there was no help through your college? Please email any comments or experiences you may have to Childwise@daycaretrust.org.uk. Alternatively, you can call us on 020 7840 3350 and give us your contact details and a brief description of your situation. We may be able to use you as a case study in our research.



At what cost childcare?

In January we released the findings of our annual childcare costs survey. The survey highlighted that the costs of childcare, for pre-school children, continue to rise steadily for parents and carers and above the rate of inflation.

A typical full-time nursery place for a child under the age of 2 is £152 per week, a rise of almost 6 per cent on the cost from last year of £144 per week.

The highest childcare costs were found in London and the Southeast, where typical costs were in the region of £180–£200 per week. Parents, who are paying the highest-reported costs, could be paying as much as £400 per week, which is almost £21,000 per year. The lowest nursery costs were in the Midlands and the lowest childminder costs in the Northwest.

In contrast to the rising costs of nurseries and childminders, the cost of out-of-school clubs have

dropped by 7 per cent on last year, with typical costs of £38 for 15 hours per week. The lowest costs for out-of-school clubs were found in inner London, reversing the trend of high costs usually found in the capital.

Out of the Children's Information Services surveyed, 67 per cent said that parents had reported a lack of affordable childcare in their area in the last 12 months. Many families still struggle to meet the costs of childcare provision. Parents in the UK pay around 70 per cent of the cost of childcare, compared with some European countries where parents pay around 30 per cent of their childcare costs.

Further details of the results of the survey are available on our website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Are you finding it a struggle to meet your childcare costs? Why don't you let us know about your experiences? You can email details to Childwise@daycaretrust.org.uk or post them to the address on the back this newsletter.

National Childcare Week 2007

Childcare Benefits for Life

Quality, affordable childcare benefits everyone. It gives children a good start in life. It enables parents to work or train and contributes to a prosperous society by supporting employers and regenerates local communities. It underpins policies to tackle social exclusion, creates jobs and raises educational standards.

We will be celebrating the benefits of quality childcare during National Childcare Week 2007, which will take place this year on 11–15 June.

Daycare Trust will be holding a number of events and activities during the week, including a children's competition where children can be creative and express their thoughts about their childcare setting through making cards, designing adverts and writing newspaper articles. Winners of the competition will be invited to receive an award at an event held in central London during National Childcare Week, and the winning pieces will be published in a newspaper-style booklet. For details of how your child can get involved in the competition, visit our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Childcare settings around the country will be running events in their areas in support of National Childcare Week. Local childcare settings can register with Daycare Trust to receive their National Childcare Week promotional pack, so look out for events being held in your area.

For more information about activities taking place during National Childcare Week and for information about how you can join us in celebrating the benefits of quality childcare, visit our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk, email us at nationalchildcareweek@daycaretrust.org.uk or call us on 020 7840 3350.

Look out for the June edition of *Childwise*, which will be a National Childcare Week special!

Support with your childcare from your employer

Recent research*, carried out by HM Revenue and Customs in partnership with the National Centre for Social Research, highlighted that larger employers were more likely to set up an employer-supported childcare scheme for their employees, than smaller ones.

Employer-supported childcare is where employers help employees with the costs of their childcare, through offering a scheme in the workplace whereby an employee can make savings on tax and National Insurance Contributions. These savings are made through childcare vouchers, direct payments to childcare providers or direct provision, such as workplace nurseries.

Currently around 2.5 per cent of organisations, equivalent to 17, 000 employers, in the UK are offering employer-supported childcare schemes, but it seems as though employees of small organisations are missing out (under half a per cent of organisations with 1-4 employees offered childcare support compared with 61 per cent of organisations with 10,000 employees or more), because it is generally felt that it is not worthwhile to operate a scheme if there are only a handful of employees.

The most common form of help provided by employers is childcare vouchers. They are twice as likely to be offered by an organisation than either direct provision or direct payments. Employer-supported childcare schemes are most likely to be found operating in London or where there are a high number of female employees, although the schemes are open to both male and female employees.

Do you have an employer-supported childcare scheme in your workplace? Do you want further information about how you could benefit from this type of help for childcare?

Daycare Trust has a number of factsheets on employer-supported childcare available, both from your point of view as a parent, but also from the employer's perspective. These factsheets also give details about what type of services employer-supported childcare can be used for. So whether you want to find information about these schemes for yourself or you want information to pass on to your employer, visit our website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk for information. You can also contact our helpline on 020 7840 3350 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday.

*A summary and the full research report are available on HMRC's website www.hmrc.gov.uk.



Daycare Trust's Conference

Childcare and child poverty – delivering solutions

Daycare Trust's National Childcare Week Conference – Childcare and child poverty – delivering solutions – takes place on Wednesday 13 June 2007 at the QE11 Conference Centre in London.

The Rt. Hon. Ed Balls, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, will be making the keynote speech and there will be other prominent speakers from the childcare field attending on the day. This event is a must for anyone who has an interest in childcare, or who is working in the field, and will offer practical advice from childcare professionals and speakers, plus informative workshops and an exhibition area for you to attend.

We have a very limited number of Parent member places available at a discounted rate of £25. There is also a special early bird booking discount of 21 per cent off the normal conference place price, available for all members if booked by the 19 April.

To take advantage of these great offers please contact Celia on 020 7840 3350 or email cjoseph@daycaretrust.org.uk. Further details about the conference are available on our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Have your say about your childcare experiences

We are currently looking for parents to step forward and speak up about their experience of using childcare, both good and bad, and to talk to the media about this. If you are interested and would like to find out more please contact Sharon, our Press Officer, on 020 7840 3350 or email scharity@daycaretrust.org.uk.

Become a Parent member of Daycare Trust

Daycare Trust membership for parents is free in 2007. For your free subscription to *Childwise*, please fill in the form below and become a free Parent member of Daycare Trust.

Return completed forms to: Daycare Trust at 21 St Georges Road, London SE1 6ES, or fax it to 020 7840 3355. You can also download the membership form from our website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

I would like to become a free Parent member of Daycare Trust and receive free copies of *Childwise* .

Name

Address

Email Telephone

We may occasionally contact you about other publications and services we offer. If you do not wish to be contacted please tick here .

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