

childwise

Childcare news for parents

Childwise Issue 42 Summer 2011
Daycare Trust National Childcare Campaign



Parents as partners



Welcome

Welcome to the Summer 2011 edition of *childwise*.

Being involved in your children's childcare can have big benefits for your child, you and the childcare setting. By working in partnership with your childcare, you can help improve quality, bring skills and activities that might be needed and have a better understanding of your child's development. With this theme of Parents as partners in mind, we've got an update on this year's National childcare week and details of how you can be involved. We also give you news on some new work that Daycare Trust is undertaking to help more parents get involved and to have a stronger voice in improving the quality of childcare services.

On page six, you will find the initial findings of research we introduced in last summer's issue of *childwise* about informal childcare. Our research highlights how many families depend on family and friends to provide childcare. As we continue to work on this topic, we will urge for proper recognition and support to be given to informal childcarers. We are also beginning work with the Grandparents' Association. News of this partnership will be on our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Finally, you may have noticed a longer lapse of time than usual since the last issue of *childwise*. This is because *childwise* will now be distributed three times a year, rather than quarterly. But each issue will still be packed with important news, updates and stories about Daycare Trust and childcare. If there is something new you would like to see included in *childwise*, be sure to let us know. We strive to keep our work as relevant and useful to parents as possible.



Anand Shukla
Chief Executive



Paying for childcare website



Daycare Trust has recently re-launched its parent website, www.payingforchildcare.org.uk. The website has all the same useful information about paying for childcare, but it is now even easier to use and find information about the help you can get with childcare costs.

The website is divided into different sections depending on your circumstances. For all families, it explains the 15 hours of free childcare that is available for three- and four-year-olds in England, as well as Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit.

There are also sections for families who work, study, or where someone in the family (either a parent or a child) has a disability or special need. Each section clearly explains the help with childcare costs you may be able to claim, and how to apply.

For working families, the website also has a tax credit checker to find out if you qualify for the childcare element of Working Tax credit. This can pay up to 70 per cent of eligible, registered childcare costs for working families on low incomes.

Please visit the re-launched website www.payingforchildcare.org.uk to find out if you are receiving all the help you should be with your childcare costs. We always welcome your feedback about how the website works for you. Email us at web@daycaretrust.org.uk.



Parents as partners in childcare

Research shows that children benefit more from childcare when their parents have a good understanding of the activities they are doing whilst away from home and are involved in their childcare. This is why Daycare Trust believes that all parents should have the opportunity to be fully involved in their childcare and have the confidence to be partners in their child's early learning.

Things that you could do to ensure that you are fully involved include:

- Talking regularly to your child's keyworker about their progress, and telling them about things your child has enjoyed at home.
- Asking whether there are other ways that you can keep in touch, for example by text message or email.
- Looking at your child's 'learning journey' (this is a common name for your child's record of achievement, and should include examples of drawings, photos etc) and adding things from home.

While some families may view the time that their child spends at home and the time they spend in childcare as entirely separate, our latest work will seek to bring the two closer together by promoting opportunities for parents to become more involved in childcare.

If they don't already have one, you could suggest that your setting does a daily diary showing the activities that the children have taken part in that day. Some settings also have a monthly newsletter for parents and conduct a regular questionnaire asking for feedback.

There are other ways you can play a role in improving the quality of childcare settings:

Ofsted

How well your childcare setting communicates with you is something that Ofsted looks for during its inspection. However, Daycare Trust believes that Ofsted needs to speak to more parents during its inspection process about the quality of childcare, and we will be campaigning to get your voice heard.



Management of childcare

Daycare Trust believes that parents should have a say in how their childcare setting is organised and managed. Many nurseries and children's centres have parent committees or reps, who are a link between the management and parents. Voluntary sector nurseries and pre-schools often have parents on the management board or as trustees. In this role you could help to set the direction for the organisation.

Volunteering

Another way that you can get involved is by helping out with specific activities. This could include reading to the children, helping with music, art or sports activities, or helping out with trips. This way, your childcare setting benefits from your skills and enthusiasm, and your child benefits by having you there! Many parents find that volunteering in their childcare setting is a great way to meet other parents and feel part of the community. Some even move on to paid work in the setting, or decide on a career in childcare.

Helping from home

If you are too busy to give time during the day, there are other things that you can do besides helping out directly with the children. For example, you could fundraise, organise social events or help with DIY or publicity.

Why should childcare settings use volunteers?

Many childcare settings are finding that their finances are tight, but using the skills and talents of parents is a way of offering a wider range of activities without spending a fortune. Of course, using volunteers cannot replace qualified and experienced staff, but rather be used to complement them and increase the diversity of activities on offer.

Over the summer, Daycare Trust will be doing some research to find out more about the barriers which prevent parents from volunteering. And during this year's National childcare week (11–18 July) we will be promoting the idea that parents should be full partners in childcare settings and encouraging parents to get involved. Later in the year we will be developing resources for both childcare providers and parents to make volunteering as easy as possible. Everyone has something to offer, and it could make a real difference to children, families and the community.

Parent case study

I have been involved at my 2-year-old daughter Beth's preschool, Carousel under Fives at Sutton in Ashfield, since 2009, first as Secretary when my eldest daughter Daisy attended and then more recently as Chair of the committee. I am involved in chairing meetings, presiding over decisions about staffing and training, liaising with Ofsted and the Preschool Learning Alliance as well as fundraising – for example we have a fun day coming up in June and I have been put in charge of the teddy tombola! As it's a voluntary managed committee made up entirely of parents I feel my role is an important one and it gives me a "behind the scenes" look at how the preschool runs. I enjoy volunteering as I get to meet new people. Beth enjoys coming to the meetings as they're generally held at the preschool so she gets extra time to play! I aim to carry on with my role when Beth moves up to "big school" as it's something I enjoy, it boosts my confidence knowing I'm chairing meetings, and the committee works really well together.

Jo Wilson



National childcare week

Parents as partners 11–18 July 2011

Daycare Trust's National childcare week, now in its 14th year, aims to promote the importance of childcare, extended schools, and early years provision for children. This year is a double celebration for Daycare Trust, as we are proud to be marking 25 years of campaigning for quality, affordable, accessible childcare for all.

The theme of National childcare week, Parents as partners draws upon our work in promoting the voice of parents and developing opportunities to get more involved with your childcare.

We very much hope that you will join us to celebrate National childcare week. There are a number of ways in which you and your family can get involved.



Birthday Bash

Why not organise your own birthday bash for Daycare Trust. The party can be as big or as small as you want, or you can link with your own family birthdays. If you would like to, you can use this as a fundraising event. Just ask your guests to make a birthday contribution for attendance which will be donated to Daycare Trust.

To help make the organisation and planning as simple as possible, Daycare Trust along with Chapman Entertainment has produced a special birthday bash pack which includes invitations, place mats and more. Visit our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk to download your pack.

Children's art competition

We are asking children and young people of all ages to celebrate childcare by entering our art competition. One winner will receive a fantastic prize from Haven Fun and Fitness, plus there will be prizes for runners up. Visit www.daycaretrust.org.uk for an application form.

Why not ask your childcare setting or employer to get involved?

This is a great opportunity for childcare settings to show off the wonderful early education and care they provide and for employers to demonstrate their support for working parents. If your childcare setting or employer would like to support the week by organising their own event or activity then let us know. We will be happy to provide our promotional materials and add the event to our calendar of activities. Email us at nationalchildcareweek@daycaretrust.org.uk to receive our special pack.

Find out what is happening near you.

We will be compiling a calendar of events happening in your area. Visit www.daycaretrust.org.uk for details.



A hidden army of informal childcarers

Daycare Trust recently published the first-stage findings of 'Informal Childcare: Choice or Chance?', which shows that childcare by family, friends and neighbours (informal childcare) is as crucial as ever. Over half of parents we surveyed use some informal childcare, with 36 per cent of families being helped by grandparents. 4 million grandparent carers in the UK provide on average almost 10 hours of childcare each week. It is a generation of youthful 'super grandparents', typically aged 55-64 and often still in employment themselves who are most likely to regularly care for their grandchildren.

Many parents choose to select informal childcare because they either want their child to be cared for by relatives or friends, or want their child to be cared for in their own home. However, 46 per cent of parents choose informal childcare because it's cheaper than formal childcare (such as a nursery or a registered childminder). This underlines the need for formal childcare to be more affordable, so that parents can make a decision based on what is best for their child and themselves, rather than what is cheaper. With families in the UK spending on average 33 per cent of their net income on childcare, it comes as little surprise that many families rely on informal childcare.

The low cost, 'trust factor' and the flexibility which family and friends offer demonstrate why informal childcare is favoured by so many parents. Childcare from family and friends is also good

for many other reasons, for example by allowing more quality time between children and grandparents. It is perhaps for these reasons that despite a growth in formal childcare many parents continue to embrace informal childcare. For the most part families use a combination of informal and formal childcare, which can offer the best of both worlds, keeping costs low and offering flexibility, whilst helping to ensure school-readiness through formal early childhood education. Moreover, our report found that it is quality of care rather than type that determines a child's development – and that high quality nursery and high quality grandparent care will both deliver positive outcomes.

The work we have undertaken thus far has given us a clearer picture of the use of informal childcare. It has also demonstrated how little support there is for the seven million informal childcarers in the UK. There is a need for proper recognition of this care.

We are very pleased to be working in partnership with the Grandparents Association to support them in their work with grandparents who provide informal care for their grandchildren. We'll be including more resources on our website for grandparents as well as highlighting the work of some children's centres who are working closely with grandparents. For more Information visit: www.daycaretrust.org.uk or www.grandparentsassociation.org.uk.

Join our Parent network

For your free subscription to *childwise*, please fill in the form below and and join Daycare Trust's Parent network. Return completed forms to: Daycare Trust (see address right)

I am a parent and would like to join Daycare Trust's Parent network and receive my free copy of *childwise*.

Name

Address

Email Tel

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



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