



CHILDMINDING IRELAND

Supporting Ireland's Childminders; Minding Ireland's Children

Introduction

Introduction to the CMI delegation

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to make this presentation so that the members can hear at first hand, the perspective of Ireland's childminders at a time when policy developments and structural changes will have a serious and direct impact on their childminding services and the future of childminding in Ireland.

I am going to speak to you briefly about what childminding is, what Childminding Ireland does and The National Action Plan for Childminding. In order to make the best use of time, we have included in the appendix or hyperlinks more detailed information.

Quality childminding is an incredibly valuable corner stone of the Early Learning and Care sector. However, childminding is profoundly different, and I would ask you to consider childminding on its own merits. Many of you on this committee or your family members, will have had your children minded by a childminder. I need you to picture that childminder, how a new policy and regulatory environment will impact on them and how are their views being captured by the Government as it makes changes that will impact directly on them and the children and families they care for.

We all want the same thing in terms of an environment that supports healthy, happy, safe-guarded and flourishing children, which is what quality childminders provide to the children in their care.

What is childminding?

Childminding is a relationship-based, home-from-home form of childcare, the same childminder will typically mind a child from babyhood, through the national school years and into secondary school.

Individuals starting childminding tend to be on average 35 yrs. of age, and typically have had their own children and wish to mind their own children at home. Childminding is different from centre based or creche care in a number of important respects;

- Childminding takes place in a family home not a premises
- Childminders mind small numbers of children
- Siblings are minded together by the same person
- Continuity of care from babyhood right through to secondary school
- Childminding offers a freedom that protects childhood
- Spontaneity is possible and allows each childminding day to be child led
- It is relationship based – the childminding family and the families they mind.

- Children of all ages mix and play together, replicating a family group
- Younger and older children can learn from each other, similar to the way siblings do.
- A childminding home is like a second home

Children belong there, they don't attend there.

Childminders have life skills, work experience and qualifications in a whole range of areas, a recent Childminding Ireland survey of childminders included non-childcare qualifications such as: Music Therapist, Special Needs Assistant, Chef, Art Teacher, Secretary, 40 years' experience minding children and a Masters' Degree in Law.

Take Sandra for example, Sandra is from the West of Ireland,



Sandra has been childminding for 26 years. The children she minds come on different days from week-to-week, as some of the parents Sandra minds for, work shift patterns including a Garda, a nurse, and a teacher. Sandra worked throughout the pandemic, helping these front-line workers perform their duties. The irregular hours for these front-line workers meant early starts and late finishes, but as she is self-employed, she could provide the service required. Sandra would typically have 2 to 3 children with her each day. She drops and collects an older sibling from national school every day, who then joins his little brother in her home. Over 40 local families have been minded by Sandra and have come to know Sandra's home as a second home.

Take another example, Dee who is from County Kilkenny,



Dee has been minding children for 11 years, and hadn't planned to be a childminder. She describes herself as a stay at home mother and was asked by a local family to mind their baby. Dee minded that family's 3 children over a period of 10 years, supporting the family in many ways through good

and bad times and continues to attend their family occasions. Since starting childminding Dee has provided 16 local families with their childcare.

In 2018 Childminding Ireland held 19 facilitated meetings around the country asking childminders what did they do during their working day, that represents a home-from-home environment to them. We removed any activities that we felt would be common to all childcare providers and were left with 8 themes that we feel give a picture of the unique nature of childminding:

- Encourages a love of nature
- Spontaneously child-led
- Builds long lasting relationships & resilience
- Supports involvement in the local community
- Nurturing care, small group size, one-on-one care
- Offers family support - often like an extended family
- Life-learning and life skills rather than curriculum based
- Unique culture, all ages eat/play together, it's a home

Importantly childminders keep children in their local communities and act as important supporters for local schools, particularly in rural areas – often collecting children directly after school. From this researchⁱ we produced a draftⁱⁱ Childminding Role Profile.

Why do parents choose childminding?

Choosing someone to look after your child when you return to work or training is one of the most important decisions you can make as a parent.

Just as every family and the children within it are unique, so too are childminders. The variety of childminders allows parents and guardians to find the right childminder for their family. Home based care mirrors the atmosphere and flexibility of home life and allows children to grow and develop in this homely setting.

Benefitsⁱⁱⁱ of a childminding

- Continuity of Care: Children benefit from being in a home-from-home family environment, with continuous care from the same individual, often from babyhood through the school years, as most Childminders provide school-age care.
- Parental Relationship: Parents are in a position to develop strong relationships with the childminder, the person who minds, cares for and helps the child in their development.
- One-to-One Relationship: A childminder offers a consistent relationship, which is ideal for babies and children.
- Replicating a Family Home: The childminder's home replicates a family home with a range of ages and where siblings can be minded together and therefore build close relationships.
- Outings: Children can be taken out and about experiencing their locality in a real way.
- Fewer illnesses: There are fewer instances of sickness amongst children minded by childminders when compared with children in large group childcare.
- Flexibility: The parents and the childminder can agree the details of the childcare required and this may develop to include any overnight care needed during family emergencies.
- Children with Special Needs: Childminding is also valued as an appropriate setting for children with additional needs.

- Insured & Garda Vetted: Members of Childminding Ireland are insured, Garda Vetted or in the application process, and are facilitated to complete Paediatric First Aid, and Tusla e-learning Child Safeguarding. They also sign up to a Code of Ethics and a Safety Statement.

What does Childminding Ireland do?

Childminding Ireland is the national association for childminders in Ireland, it is the only organisation in Ireland that is focused solely on childminding, not for profit and with no other agenda. Founded by childminders, and run by childminders at every level within the organisation. We represent over 4,000 childminding contacts throughout the country, both childminders and parents. Childminders mind an estimated 88,000 children and their families nationally.

We are the organisation fighting for childminding. We listen to childminders every day and bring back their concerns and their views to the Department. We actively encourage childminders to become engaged, we believe in a grassroots approach and empowering childminders. We promise to carry the voice of the childminders to the decision makers and we deliver on our promises, but we could so much more if properly resourced.

As there is currently no registration system for the vast majority of childminders, the number of childminders is unknown. Estimates vary from 15,000^{iv} to 35,000^v

Childminding Ireland provides support, information, training, peer support and representation for childminding nationally. We also provide access to discounted Group Childminding Insurance.

Childminding Ireland is committed to training and grass-roots development including:

1. Training childminders with more than 10 yrs. experience to provide an out-of-hours support phone line, being offered to anyone childminding.
2. Our training includes
 - Facilitating Paediatric First Aid training for childminding aiming for cost recovery where possible and will run at a financial loss to support access to training.
 - Also facilitate Child Safeguarding, Childminding Ireland have been absorbing costs within existing grant, but when additional childminders are trained additional funding will be necessary.
 - Additional training in order to support quality childminding will be considered and delivered as appropriate
3. 2 childminders have been trained to deliver child safeguarding for childminders. It is hoped in the future to train additional childminders to deliver child safeguarding for childminders.

Childminding Ireland's core objective to support and represent childminders is chronically restricted due to underfunding. Currently we get €340,000 funding from DYCA and generate an additional €40,000 -€50,000 through membership fees and by running training courses. We make the very best use of our limited resources and provide an excellent return on investment with only 1 full time and 4 part time members of staff.

Given the fact that for the first time in the history of the state, childminding is now being included in a regulatory and support system, we would urge the Committee to recommend that the one organisation with the authentic childminding voice, should be adequately funded to support and assist childminders.

The National Childminding Action Plan (2021 – 2028)

The Action Plan promises many positives, for example:

Training will be delivered in formats that are suited to childminders

- Prior learning will be recognised.
- Assessments will be competency-based.
- Peer support will be provided through staffed local childminding networks.
- New Regulations and a new inspection model that are specific to childminding and that reflect the environment and circumstances in which childminders operate will be introduced.

Our concerns are that the initial signs are not positive:

- The process doesn't acknowledge where we are now:
 - childminding is working well for tens of thousands of families throughout Ireland
 - The vast majority of childminders should be engaged to feed into the current changes being made to the regulation. They should be given opportunities to input on the shape of things to come. We believe that there is a significant cohort of childminders that can be reached and engaged – we would need additional resources to achieve this engagement.
- Clarity is needed on the evaluation of progress; how will success be evaluated? How will the views of childminders be included on an on-going basis?
- There is a lot yet to be decided, the views of childminders and those proximate to childminding, including parents, need to be considered. This is not the case at the moment. We need some new thinking, the gravitational pull towards centre-based care as the 'norm' is very strong. Recommendations for childminding are being created through the prism of centre-based view.
- Workforce Development Plan Steering Group^{vi} is currently **without any childminding representatives**. The role of the steering group is to make recommendations to the Minister describing the roles, and minimum qualification **requirements to be introduced for childminders** and for the school-age childcare workforce. In addition, the structures feeding into the Steering Group are dominated by centre based interests. These needs to change. Centre-based care can co-exist alongside childminding. However, they are very different propositions and require different approaches.
- The Department's method of consultation with childminders, needs new thinking. The very group who will be directly affected by the National Action Plan for Childminding, must be properly engaged. We know that the Department were satisfied with the consultation on the Draft Action Plan for Childminding. We were not, for the following reasons:
 - The Department did not promote the consultation in a meaningful way to the extent that the public and childminders were generally unaware of the process being discussed. Many only heard about the DCYA Focus Group meetings when we sent out communications, urging our members to attend and give their views.

- The time frame of 6 weeks for consultation did not reflect the enormity of the change in such a sizable and important sector for children and families.
 - The Open Policy Debate lacked debate. There was no childminding perspective addressed to the room, just the DCYA's perspective. The Open Policy Debate was held on a working day and was not arranged at a time and manner that would allow childminders to attend.
 - The fact that efforts were made to hold focus groups with the County Childcare Committees in the evenings was appreciated. However, these events were not appropriately promoted, were rushed and many childminders received short notice, making it impossible to attend.
- There needs to be an active engagement with parents who choose childminding for their children. We are concerned that the vast majority of these parents remain unaware of the planned changes. Parental satisfaction with childminding is currently very high. We know from the Childminding Working Group survey of parents using childminding services (response rate 3,630 people completing the questionnaire and the average response rate per question was approximately 1,687), that the childminder's personal qualities – kind, caring – was the statement with the highest (92.4%) 'very important' ranking by respondents (n=1,308). However, their childminder's highest impact for parents was allowing them to return to work 70.4% (n=1,408)^{vii} A high percentage of parents are very satisfied (71.8%) or satisfied (21.4%) with their childminder (n=1,208)^{viii}

Childminding Ireland Recommendations:

- The process needs to acknowledge that there are thousands of childminders that are unengaged and unaware that the National Action Plan for Childminding exists. There is a real fear that childminders will leave childminding or move further away from supports if changes are not considered to be supportive of childminding and adding value.
- Childminders and those proximate to childminding should be **in the majority** on all of the Advisory Groups of the National Action Plan for Childminding, supported by the relevant framework experts e.g., QQI and ETB for Training and Supports Advisory Group, Tusla and Better Start for the Regulation and Inspection Advisory Group together with the appropriate Department staff. It is inappropriate for those not proximate to childminding to be making recommendations for an entire workforce.
- Childminding Ireland the National Associative body for childminding should be given a seat on the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group
- Childminding Ireland needs to be appropriately resourced to support and represent childminding and parents particularly at this time of change. At present we receive €340,000, there is a huge job of work to be done now, and we have the connections to deliver. A grant of €860,000 would make a transformational difference. We are asking you the Committee to make the recommendation to increase Childminding Ireland's funding to a minimum of €860,000

Thank you for your time and attention and we would be happy to answer questions

ⁱ Summary report appended

ⁱⁱ Childminding Ireland Draft Role Profile appended

ⁱⁱⁱ Research on the benefits of childminding appended

iv <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/132300/5d403d61-a868-488c-9766-5b1e42f1e408.pdf#page=null>

v <https://www.childminding.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ChildmindingVol1-230318.pdf>

vi <https://assets.gov.ie/26650/a384c2888749488d8e93badc501507b3.pdf>

vii [ChildmindingVol2-160318.pdf Page 11](#)

viii [ChildmindingVol2-160318.pdf Page 14](#)