



**Association of Childhood Professionals**  
The Professional Body Representing Practitioners in  
Early Years and School Age Care & Education

## **Opening Statement to Committee on Children, Disability, Equality & Integration**

25/05/2021

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to speak today.

I am here on behalf of the Association of Childhood Professionals (ACP), a voluntary membership organisation representing practitioners in early years and school age childcare. As a professional association all our members have at least a minimum of a Level 5 qualification in early years and this includes our members who are childminders.

I am Ida Lane. I have been providing homebased early years and afterschool care in my family home for the past 14 years. I started childminding providing a service to 3 pre-school children and regulations precluded me from registering with HSE so, like many other childminders, I became a member of the professional childminders organisation- Childminding Ireland, and got childminding insurance, Garda vetting, Paediatric first aid and did child protection training as well as voluntary notifying my service with my local childcare committee. In 2009, to enable my service to survive the introduction of free preschool year, I registered with HSE and opened my ECCE preschool catering for 6 preschool children, which I still run in the heart of my home to this day. So, I feel I am well positioned to speak regarding the difficulties of working with increased regulation, inspection and oversight within the home environment.

I have been asked to set out today what I see as being the strengths and challenges of the recently published National Childminding Action Plan.

The strengths include:

- A recognition that childminders are an integral part of the childcare landscape in Ireland;
- Recognising that childminders offer care to multi-age groups of children - family groups, preschool, school going and after school care can all be catered for;
- Recognition that low adult: child ratios and consistent caring in a family home setting offer positive wellbeing outcomes for children;
- Acknowledgement that childminders can offer a wrap-around childcare option which can be flexible and negotiable and, where possible offers flexibility in terms of early, late, overnight and weekend arrangements;
- The Action Plan builds on recommendations, experiences and expertise gathered from childminders, children, parents, childminding networks, organisations and county childcare committees;
- Formal recognition is finally being given to the childminding sector, recognising that children, families and communities have benefitted from the quality of care offered through the dedication and commitment of childminders who offer their childcare services;

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- The comprehensiveness of its approach, identifying core areas of implementation namely: Regulations and Inspection, Training and Support, Funding and Financial support, Consultation and Communication.

Whilst I welcome the formal recognition the Action Plan gives to the central placement of childminding in the Irish childcare landscape, there are, in my view, certain challenges within the plan:

- The time frame for full implementation of the plan is overly ambitious, considering that there are thousands of non-regulated childminders, caring for children, that have no idea that regulation of childminding is rapidly approaching, or that they will need to engage in accredited training and meet regulations and face inspections. Serious investment in communication and consultation have to be made to engage these childminders;
- Connections were made with only a small percentage of working childminders, generally these are already engaged with Tusla, CMI and with local CCC's. These childminders are already committed to raising professional standards in childcare and welcome appropriate regulation, however their view may not be shared by many who may see childminding as a short term more casual job;
- I have concerns that the Department sees the networking groups as being their main communication pathway to reach out and contact/connect with many or all childminders.
- I am also concerned that childminding development officer positions require a L8 degree in ECEC (which generally have a centre-based focus), or equivalent, thereby excluding many experienced, knowledgeable childminders
- Childminders must be centrally involved in the development of a phased training and qualifications framework that identifies necessary training, desirable training and finally, as childminding incrementally become increasingly professionalized, what would be the "icing on the cake";
- All training needs to be accredited and, to allow for professional and personal commitments, training could be possibly broken down into "micro credentials" that incrementally build to a full qualification
- Increased regulation, administration, inspection, audits, etc. will result in a higher financial cost for childminders. Significant state investment will be required to make sure that this increased cost does not mean that childminders cannot operate without charging parents more.
- Need to be mindful that significant investment continues to be required for development of centre-based provision – both early years and school age. The funding required to implement the Action Plan cannot be to the detriment of continued increased investment in that area.
- Need to be mindful that small home and centre-based services, subject to current regulations, standards, inspections and oversight, may lose out to childminders, who may be subject to less onerous inspections/regulations.

Thank you for listening and I welcome your questions.