

NCMA in Wales

Submission of Evidence in Relation to Issues Raised by the National Assembly's Review into Economic Inactivity in Wales.

March 5th 2004

Registered childcare has a very important role to play in addressing the issues that contribute to the high levels of economic inactivity in Wales, as demonstrated below:

- 1.1 As indicated in the background paper to this review¹, many childcare initiatives funded through Cymorth have pump-primed childcare places, particularly in deprived areas. However, the benefit of these successful initiatives must be sustained by adequate and longer-term funding, and extended into areas of Wales that may not be regarded as 'deprived' but still require support to provide childcare services.
- 1.2 Financial incentives exist to encourage people into the childminding profession, such as Start up Grants which provide a start up 'toolkit' worth up to £300, and free pre-registration training and business support by NCMA sponsored by the WDA. Despite this, other factors continue to deter prospective childminders, in particular low pay and low job profile. These need to be addressed in order to sustain the momentum created by start up support, and to retain new recruits into the childminding profession, ensuring that they remain economically active.
- 1.3 Starting up in business is an attractive prospect when considering employment options. NCMA has been working to gain recognition from childcare workers themselves and other interested parties that childminders are indeed self-employed business people who need dedicated business support if their enterprise is to succeed. Under the WDA contract, childminders are supported to develop their business for the first two years of operation, which aims to promote sustainability.
- 1.4 Working as a registered childminder offers flexibility in terms of working hours and is home-based, thus providing an attractive solution for those who wish to remain at home perhaps with their own children, and still be economically active. The flexibility of a childminder's working hours also works in favour of those who chose childminding to enable them to go out to work.
- 1.5 A high percentage of the population in Wales who are of working age are women with parenting responsibilities, which also partly explains why more women than men are *economically* inactive. There is merit in promoting awareness of childminding as an option here - both in terms of entering the profession themselves, or using the services of a childminder. From the latter perspective, there must be benefits in place so that employment is a worthwhile option financially. The child and working tax credits need to be revisited in terms of how far they go towards supporting parents who want to work. In addition, childminding is a very flexible form of childcare and is well placed to provide working parents with a 'tailored' service according to their work commitments.
- 1.6 In some areas of Wales, most noticeably those that suffer deprivation, unregistered illegal childminding has become prevalent. This is a potentially dangerous situation for

¹ (EDT2 05-03 (p3))

children and their unregistered carers, but it also fails to capitalise on the opportunity to tackle the situation in a way that could eventually lead to higher levels of local economic activity, and a stronger 'social' economy. NCMA in Wales intends on targeting illegal childminding, particularly in areas of regeneration within the business plan period 2004-7.

- 1.7 NCMA runs a multi-cultural project in Cardiff, which aims to address the lower levels of economic activity found in non-white ethnic minority communities. In all our projects, promotion of equal opportunities is an integral part of the care provided by childminders, which is supported by NCMA's Quality Standards.
- 1.8 Poverty and social exclusion are known to have a detrimental effect on a child's development. Fostering a more economically active culture can have a significant impact on eradicating these problems. This can be supported by local, affordable quality childcare, and childminders in particular are well placed to foster positive attitudes in children towards education, personal health and social awareness as part of delivering a quality service. NCMA's Teen Parent Project was piloted in the Newport area and supports teenage parents, who can be vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty, to care for their children. They are also encouraged to become more involved in 'social' activities related to their childcare responsibilities, such as visiting the clinic or parent and toddler groups.
- 1.9 The benefits of childminding as a childcare option and a career option are particularly significant in rural areas, which can be vulnerable to problems associated with economic inactivity and deprivation.
- 1.10 No previous qualifications are needed to train to become a childminder. As a result it is a viable career option for those who have been out of work/education for some time. However, the concept of personal development and career progression is introduced from the outset, and many childminders go on to gain a range of nationally recognised qualifications.
- 1.11 Childminding is a *quality* job with a structured career path. The skills gained through training and personal development schemes are transferable and often lead to progression into other areas of the childcare market. Many childminders join approved childminding networks, which can enable them to become accredited to provide early years education. Alternatively, they may choose to undertake a quality assurance scheme, such as NCMA's Quality First. This is integral to improving the skill level of the childcare workforce in Wales, which consequently impacts on the skill profile of the Welsh population in general.
- 1.12 In order to maximise the benefits of childcare within communities, the issue of matching the supply and demand of childcare places must be addressed. Otherwise, the extent to which childminding can support economic activity could be adversely affected.

<p>NCMA is a National Charity and Membership organisation which promotes quality registered childminding in England and Wales.</p>
