



MAKING THEIR MARK

The Experiences

of Childcare Projects

within the

NOW Programme

in Ireland

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Foreword



“The experience of the projects shows how statutory agencies, educational institutions and voluntary organisations can work together in partnership towards achieving change in a mutually enriching way.”

THE EU COMMUNITY INITIATIVE New Opportunities for Women (NOW), which aims to increase the participation of women in the labour market, has had a substantial impact in Ireland. The participation of a wide range of organisations including statutory agencies, educational institutions, social partners and voluntary groups, has resulted in the development of highly innovative training and employment programmes for women. These programmes target a number of priority issues which affect women in Ireland.

One of the main priority issues highlighted under the NOW Initiative is the importance of childcare provision in ensuring that real opportunities in vocational training and employment are accessible to women. This report, entitled “Making Their Mark”, documents the experiences of the NOW childcare projects in Ireland. These projects have developed a range of childcare services models – the setting-up of creche facilities, home-based childcare and after-school services. The projects played an important role in raising awareness of the value of childcare and represent a remarkable catalogue of expertise and achievement in the field. The experience of the projects shows how statutory agencies, educational institutions and voluntary organisations can work together in partnership towards achieving change in a mutually enriching way.

The report is particularly timely in this, the International Year of the Family. I would commend this document to all individuals and organisations with an interest in childcare, labour-market provision and equality. There is much to be learned and shared from the experiences of the NOW childcare projects. I hope that future national and EU Programmes and Initiatives, in the area of vocational training and employment programmes, build on these experiences.

*Ruairi Quinn TD
Minister for Enterprise and Employment*



NOW

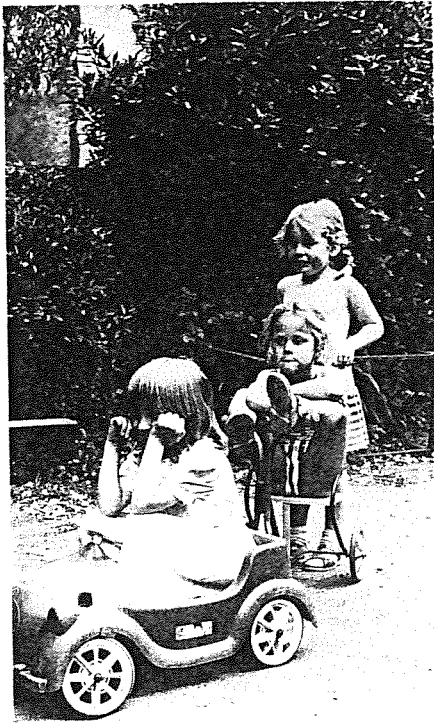
Introduction

The NOW childcare projects represent a rich tapestry of innovation, endeavour and professionalism.

NOW (NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN) is a European Union initiative aimed at facilitating the greater participation of women in the labour market. The NOW programme in Ireland supports 33 projects, all of which are engaged in a variety of innovative actions. Eight of these projects have a particular focus on childcare. Their work has coincided with an increasing acceptance of the critical importance of effective childcare provision, as a means of enabling more women to enter or re-integrate into the labour market.

The NOW childcare projects represent practical examples of innovative and imaginative approaches which can be taken in the area of enhanced childcare provision. Their actions complement the organisations who have been lobbying and campaigning for positive change in respect of childcare services within the Republic of Ireland. The projects have helped to develop working models of childcare which serve to inform and educate a number of different audiences - organisations operating in the same sector, policy makers and decision makers, educators, and all others with an interest in the concept and practice of enhanced childcare provision.

The NOW programme in Ireland effectively commenced in 1992. In the course of the following two years the experiences of individual projects were both developmental and imaginative - a whole range of new networks and alliances were established, new approaches were tried and tested, training materials were produced and refined, access to training and educational programmes was improved in some locations. This helped to create a new dynamism within the childcare



sector. It was considered important that the learning which has taken place was properly documented and shared with the widest possible audience. Whilst the individual project actions were positive and beneficial, it is only in the context of the overall situation that one can gain a true sense of the diversity and richness of the childcare projects supported through the NOW programme. Hence the desire of the project sponsors and support structure to capture the experiences of the participating childcare projects. There is no one absolute way of delivering childcare services - it very much depends on the local needs to be met and the circumstances of those most closely involved (parents, children, family daycarers, creche/nursery supervisors).

The NOW childcare projects mirror this need for diversity and choice both from the consumer viewpoint (needs of Traveller women, lone parents, women in Gaeltacht areas, those who are unemployed or living on low incomes) and the delivery perspectives (centre-based projects relating to creche and nursery provision, home-based services concerning family daycare, childminding). In addition individual projects focused upon employment and enterprise issues, and were guided by the principles of equality and access of opportunities.

This report on the experiences of the NOW childcare projects records and assesses the significant contributions which they have made to the ever-growing demand for effective childcare services. They represent a rich tapestry of innovation, endeavour and professionalism. Learning which has taken place needs to be harnessed and built upon. The projects have provided working models of what is possible and the different types of approaches which can be adopted.

There are a number of policy and programme implications which have arisen from the NOW childcare initiatives - it is the earnest desire of those associated with these initiatives that project experiences will help to inform and guide those organisations vested with responsibility for the ongoing support and delivery of childcare services in this country.

THE NOW PROGRAMME

NOW IS A EUROPEAN UNION-LED PROGRAMME which aims to increase the levels of female participation in the labour market. This need is particularly acute in Ireland where the current level of participation of women in the labour force is amongst the lowest in Europe (circa 32%). This focus on female participation is a key aspect of economic and social planning within the European Union. It is reflected in the Third Action Programme for Equal Opportunities (1991-95). This

Programme identified three priority actions for the changes anticipated with the advent of the Single Market:

- the integration of women into the labour market
- 'mainstreaming', through developing a more integrated approach in the promotion of equal opportunity for women
- the principle of partnership and complementarity at national, regional, local government and social partner level in achieving equal opportunities.

NOW is based on similar principles to the Third Programme for Equal Opportunities, with the integration of women into the labour market as a central theme. This definition of labour market includes women in vocational training and education, women seeking to enter the labour market and women in enterprise creation.

There are three main themes within the NOW Programme relating to:

- promotion of entrepreneurship and local employment initiatives;
- improvement in the quality of employment, through training; and
- overcoming obstacles to access and participation in vocational training and employment.

The Programme addressed these issues through providing financial and organisational support to innovative pilot projects involved in the areas of employment and vocational training for women. Thirty-three projects were approved for support in Ireland in seven broad categories - new technology, advice and guidance, upgrading of skills, pre-training, enterprise development, rural development, and the reconciliation of work and family life. It is this final category, dealing with childcare provision services, which is the particular focus of this report. There is a transnational dimension built into the NOW Initiative: each project has a minimum of two partners in other member states. The objective of the transnational dimension is to facilitate the transfer of expertise, knowledge and skills across member states. The transnational partnerships have contributed greatly to the innovative and creative nature of the actions carried out by projects.

65% of the individual project costs were provided through the European Union with the balance of 35% to be sourced by the participating projects. The Department of Enterprise and Employment was the conduit for the dissemination of information, EU funding and the selection of project promoters whilst the Council for the Status of Women was the officially recognised Support Structure for the development and implementation of the Programme.

Background

This focus on female participation is a key aspect of economic and social planning within the European Union.

There is a transnational dimension built into the NOW Initiative, each project has a minimum of two partners in other member states.

CHILDCARE PROJECTS WITHIN NOW

CHILDCARE IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF EVERY project supported through the NOW Programme. Although the eight projects highlighted in this document have a specific childcare focus, there is also childcare provision within the other 25 projects. These projects are generally concerned with training and business creation - it was considered important that participation on these projects would not be closed to women with young children who had no access to childcare services.

The NOW Programme represents a major attempt to adequately resource local projects which are implementing innovative childcare actions.

This serves to highlight the critical role of childcare. The lack of high-quality childcare is increasingly recognised as a major barrier to women seeking training and employment, and to women remaining in employment following the birth of their children. In effect the absence of adequate childcare is a significant cause of the unequal position of women within the labour market and is a clear disincentive to women who wish to pursue training, education and employment opportunities. The problem is particularly acute in Ireland where there is no state-supported programme for the provision of affordable and accessible childcare facilities. The gravity of this situation (a contributory factor to imbalances and inequality within the labour market) has been recognised in numerous official documents - these include the three national agreements between the government and the social partners, the report of the government Working Group on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents, and the Fianna Fáil/Labour Programme for Government. Unfortunately the aspirations contained in these documents have not been translated into practical support for childcare programmes and projects.

In this context the NOW Programme represents a major attempt to adequately resource local projects which are implementing innovative childcare actions. These projects serve to:

- (i) develop models which are capable of replication in other locations
- (ii) encourage statutory agencies to incorporate these models into mainstream programmes, upon completion of the pilot, experimental phase funded under the NOW Initiative.



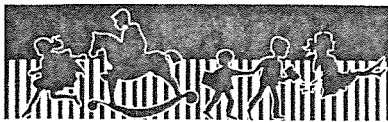
CHILDCARE FOR TALLAGHT

CHILDCARE FOR TALLAGHT IS AN INITIATIVE which is sponsored by the Tallaght Partnership, one of the twelve area-based companies established under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress. The purpose of these partnership companies is to assist people living in socio-economic disadvantage to access education, training and employment opportunities. It is interesting that the Tallaght Partnership, with this clear economic and social agenda, identified the provision of childcare services as a key priority in its operations.

The aim of the Childcare for Tallaght project is to establish and co-ordinate a comprehensive childcare network in the Tallaght area (population of approximately 75,000 people located 10 miles from Dublin); this would enable local women to access education, training and employment opportunities. Matching funds for the project have been provided through a combination of sources including the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Social Welfare, FAS, Barnardos, the Enterprise Trust and the Van Leer Foundation.

The actions being developed by the project are fourfold:

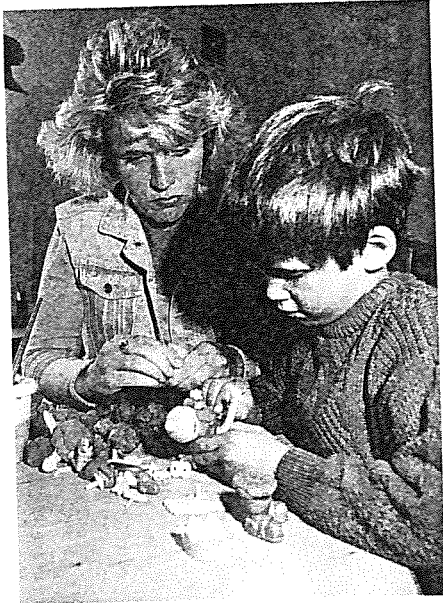
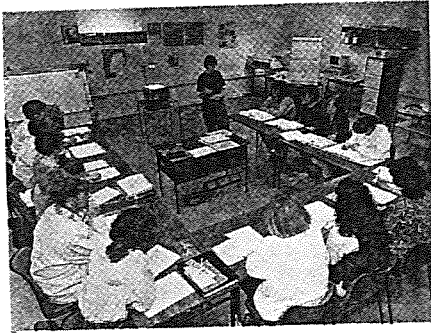
Profile of NOW childcare projects



- the establishment of a Daycare Centre which will incorporate training facilities for childcare workers
- the establishment and co-ordination of a network of locally based childminders who receive training and on-going advice and support
- the piloting of after-school and holiday care facilities for primary school-going children (4-12) whose parents are working or accessing training or educational opportunities
- the provision of appropriate training programmes to meet the needs of those providing childcare services or those wishing to work in this area.

It is intended that the services provided would be flexible and relevant, ranging from nursery-type day-care to full, partial or seasonal childminding, after-school and holiday care. Significant progress has been made in all four aspects of the project:

- a site has been located for the Day Care Centre, on the grounds of the Tallaght Regional Technical College. Plans are currently at an advanced stage for the construction of this facility, which will cater for thirty children and provide employment for eight people
- a childminder network has been established. Fifty women have completed a childminder training course, with 30 now identified as core



childminders. A Childminders Contact Service is operational which lists trained childminders who have successfully completed the training course, and offers information/advice to parents on choosing a childminder

- three after-school and holiday care units will be operational. Two models have already been established employing five local women
- 14 women participated in the City and Guilds 324-1 Caring for Children training course held in the FAS Training Centre, Tallaght. 12 were successful in gaining their City and Guilds certificate. The course was not restricted to those on the live register thus making it accessible for women who would normally not be able to access mainstream FAS training courses. The payment of training allowances and childcare subsidies also made it more accessible and affordable.

The Childcare for Tallaght project embarked on a number of transnational exchanges. Linkages with East Birmingham College provided information, resource materials and insights into the operation of training programmes, which assisted in the organisation of the course held in the FAS Training Centre. Contacts with the Worknet creche in Belfast helped in working through issues relating to the establishment of a Daycare Centre on a site made available by a third level college. The exchange with Kempen (Belgium) assisted in gaining an understanding of a state-supported childcare programme whilst the Belgians benefited through assessing the Tallaght model, which tended to be more community based, child-centred and pedagogical.

At a local level a number of important relationships and networks were established. The project initiated a support network which meets on a monthly basis. Training for the City and Guilds childcare course was provided by the Training and Advisory Service of Barnardos. FAS provided the accommodation and training allowances for the training course. This relationship with FAS is perhaps one of the most interesting outcomes of the project. In recognition of the different needs of women with young children FAS agreed to allow more flexibility in the organisation of the training course - later daily starting times, one month holiday during the summer. Thus a whole combination of factors (not

restricted to those on live register, training allowances and childcare subsidies, flexible scheduling) made it far more accessible than might normally be the case. It is the hope of the project that FAS might mainstream this experience and fund all the course in the future (including trainer fees). This initiative, if replicated in other areas, could have significant implications for women interested in pursuing a career in childcare.

“Through the training, learning became an adventure rather than a chore.....”

– A participant on the course.

THE DUBLIN COMMITTEE FOR TRAVELLING PEOPLE



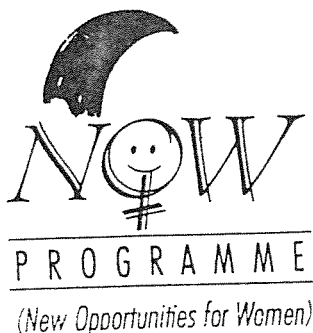
THE DUBLIN COMMITTEE FOR TRAVELLING PEOPLE, generally referred to as Exchange House, has been providing developmental support to Travellers in greatest difficulties for many years. The NOW Programme presented Exchange House with an opportunity to develop a range of innovative actions in relation to Traveller women. One of the primary requirements related to education and vocational training, and the programme was specifically geared to women who had never had any access to training or educational opportunities before. In order for this type of activity to be effective it was necessary to provide significant childcare support and back-up.

Therefore, the primary aim of the Exchange House NOW project is to provide a personal development and training programme which will lead to Traveller women accessing further training. Creche facilities are provided which both enable the women to participate in the personal development programme and also affords a number of Traveller women the opportunity to receive childcare training whilst they supervise the children in the creche.

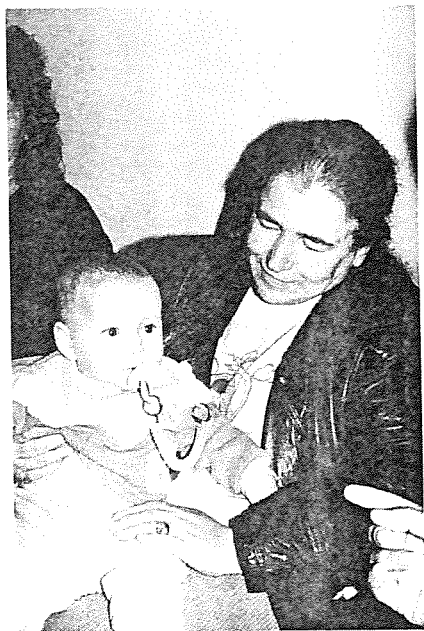
The childcare aspect of the NOW project relates particularly to the establishment of a creche and the provision of childcare training for two Traveller women. It is important also to note the intrinsic link between this childcare element and the personal development course, part of which relates to parenting skills, the changing role of women within the family and other matters associated with child development. The availability of the creche facility also helped to enhance the women's participation in the course. It made them more aware of the importance of their own self-development and gave them time to concentrate upon

"It was the first time for me to use a creche and for a settled person to look after my children."

themselves. In the view of the project leader, this increased self-esteem had "the spiralling effect of benefiting the partners and children of the participants". These benefits would not have accrued without the childcare component and are reflected in the comments expressed by participants on the personal development course. "The creche is good for the children - I knew they were safe and it was good to have it in the same place that I was working in." "I could do work without worrying about the children. I wouldn't have been able to come to the course without the creche."


PROGRAMME
(New Opportunities for Women)

“As a creche employee I have learnt about the needs and wants of children, become more patient with them and more confident in general.”



“It’s good for young children before going to school - learning different things, playing with toys, painting, building bricks - things that they would not have the chance to do on the site.”

The training for the two trainee childcare workers was provided by Barnardos over a 10-week period and was tailored to the needs of the trainees. The creche supervisor also provided ongoing advice and support. The net result was a significant increase in the skills, knowledge and confidence of the creche trainees/workers: “As a creche employee I have learnt about the needs and wants of children, become more patient with them and more confident in general.”

Through their transnational linkages Exchange House have shared information and experiences with projects in Belgium and Holland which are trying to re-integrate immigrant women into mainstream education and training programmes. At a local level networks have been established with other creche supervisors - this has led to a useful exchange of ideas, resources and working methods. This project has also developed a good relationship with the other Travellers initiative within NOW - the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (DTEDG). This has led to a number of beneficial learning experiences including, for example, the attendance of the Exchange House NOW staff on training courses on traveller issues organised by the DTEDG NOW project.

The creche and training initiatives of Exchange House were important developmental and cultural experiences for all involved in this project - mothers, children and creche workers. For the mothers participating on the training programme the notion of leaving their children with somebody else outside of the extended family was somewhat anathema to the normal Traveller system of childcare. While the children in the creche had to get used to the idea of playing within a confined space, many had for the first time access to toys and activities not normally available to them.

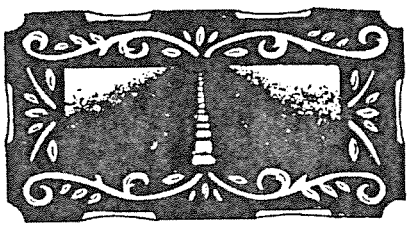
The trainee creche workers had no prior experience of working as members of a team - the challenge of jointly organising and managing their work required a change in thinking and approach. Therefore a significant learning curve was apparent during the Exchange House project. It brought to the consciousness of Traveller women options (training courses, creche childcare provision) which were not previously available or accessible. It gave them more choices about their own development and afforded them the opportunity to work through a number of issues relating to their own life situations. The existence of childcare support structures was an important component both in the process of giving the women sufficient ‘space’ to think about themselves and their own futures and also in relation to the training/work possibilities which were afforded to the trainee creche workers.



DUBLIN TRAVELLERS EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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HE DUBLIN TRAVELLERS EDUCATION AND Development Group (DTEDG) was established in 1984 to develop new responses to the needs and problems experienced by Travellers in Ireland. Travellers and non-Travellers work together in partnership to fulfil the Group's objectives. DTEDG uses a community work approach to address key issues from a collective, not an individual, perspective. DTEDG has become increasingly aware of the needs of Traveller women who have begun to organise about issues of specific concern. In terms of national networks increasing numbers of women are involved in the National Traveller Women's Forum.



D ♦ T ♦ E ♦ D ♦ G

...it is the intention of the project to research the childcare needs of Traveller women whilst also trying to identify the employment opportunities in childcare for Traveller women.

The emergence of the NOW programme coincided conveniently with the increased involvement of women in planning and development issues within the Traveller communities. In relation to its work with Traveller women the overall objective of the DTEDG is "to work towards the full inclusion of Traveller women in mainstream or specialist projects designed to enhance the participation of women in the labour market". In relation to the NOW programme the specific aim is "to stimulate, support and take positive action with Traveller women to overcome their social and economic isolation". This is to be achieved through:

- a national pilot in-service training course for trainers of Traveller women
- the production and dissemination of training materials and new approaches in response to Traveller women's needs
- the development of a National Traveller Women's Resource Centre which will provide back-up services to personnel working with Traveller communities.

The importance of effective childcare provision has also been recognised by DTEDG and it is the intention of the project to research the childcare needs of Traveller women whilst also trying to identify the employment opportunities in childcare for Traveller women. The recently published Green Paper on Education recommended a national network of pre-school provision for the children of Travellers. This recommendation, if followed through, could present significant employment prospects for Traveller childcare workers.

To date the NOW project within DTEDG has been concentrating its energies on the production of suitable resource materials for Traveller women. DTEDG has been involved in designing and piloting training courses for Traveller women for a number of years - a constant problem, in this work, was the lack of appropriate resource materials. This provided the rationale for deciding to produce and

This represents a further example of a NOW project breaking new ground, through identifying the best means of helping a particularly marginalised group who are oftentimes forgotten in discussions about issues like childcare.

disseminate effective training materials. These materials have been published and are in wide circulation with a variety of groups and projects which are working with Traveller women.

Since its establishment DTEDG has been a strong advocate of the concept and practice of transnational exchanges. They would view Travellers as being part of a broader European Gypsy and Traveller movement and it is natural that linkages would be established with counterparts in other European countries. Transnational linkages have been established with organisations in Strasbourg, Madrid and Rome. They have benefited from exposure to, and exploration of, the programmes being operated by DTEDG. At a national and local level DTEDG is conscious of the need to disseminate information and to provide forums for discussion and debate, for issues which impact upon Traveller people. Towards this end, and in relation to the NOW project, DTEDG has been actively engaged in sharing their NOW support information, experiences and resources with a large number of groups in Ireland.

DTEDG still considers it important to carry out research on the childcare needs of Traveller women. In previous times this was not considered to be an issue of primary concern since it was assumed that children would be constantly tended within the extended Traveller family. There is a need to test whether this assumption is accurate and if there has been any shift in focus and emphasis in the last number of years. This should help determine the real, rather than perceived, childcare needs of Traveller women and could result in the formulation of new models of childcare which are appropriate to the culture and circumstances of Traveller women.

This represents a further example of a NOW project breaking new ground, through identifying the best means of helping a particularly marginalised group who are oftentimes forgotten in discussions about issues like childcare. The DTEDG represents further evidence of the diversity of service and provision that needs to exist within the childcare sector - it needs to respond quite specifically to needs of the client group. The proposed piece of research could present interesting insights into childcare within the Traveller communities whilst also establishing new models of service provision. Results emanating from such an exercise would be of broad interest to Travellers, and settled people working with Traveller projects.



MUINTEARAS NA HOILEÁN

MUINTEARAS NA HOILEÁN IS A COMMUNITY education organisation which operates in the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) regions along the western seaboard of Ireland. During the last 10 years they have initiated a variety of programmes involving the education and training of Gaeltacht parents and children. The need for enhanced childcare facilities has been identified as a key requirement. Indeed it has been argued that the expansion of organised and standardised creche provision in Gaeltacht areas is central to the survival of the Gaelic/Irish language.

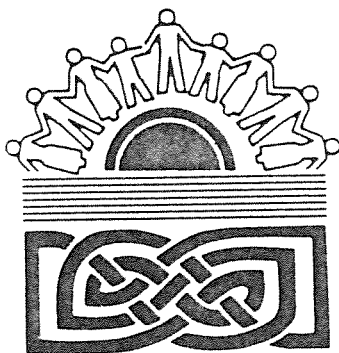
The aims of the Muintearas NOW project, titled Childcare Enterprise in the Gaeltacht, are:

- (i) to provide a Gaeltacht Programme which would incorporate training in childcare and enterprise skills for women
- (ii) to enable women from the different Gaeltacht regions to set up their own enterprises based on the provision of childcare in their communities and to link into tourism in their areas.

The project is operational in two Gaeltacht regions, Donegal and Connemara. Údarás na Gaeltachta are providing 100% of the matching funding for the Donegal component and 50% for the Connemara aspect. FÁS are providing the balance of funding for the Connemara course.

The actions being developed by the project are threefold:

- training of women in childcare
- support for women setting up childcare services in their own communities
- adoption of City and Guilds childcare programme (324-1) for delivery through the Irish language.



“Tá an-tábhacht ag baint le cúrsa den chineál seo a chur ar fáil chun go mbeidh daoine oilte in ann dul i mbun naíolann agus seirbhís cúram cheart a chur ar fáil do pháistí óga”

– Co-ordnóir Togra

In total, the Childcare Enterprise in the Gaeltacht project trained 40 women in the provision of childcare services, 20 in the Donegal Gaeltacht and 20 from the Galway, Mayo, Kerry and Meath Gaeltachts. The latter course took place in Connemara. The childcare courses lasted for 48 weeks and combined vocational training in childcare with enterprise development skills. The participants successfully completed the course and all received their City and Guilds qualification - for many it was their first occupational qualification. The calibre and enthusiasm inherent in the course is evidenced by the report presented by the City and Guilds Visiting Assessor, e.g. “Many students completed really excellent assignments which showed considerable development over the period of the course”; “Students compiled a very detailed resource file throughout the year. This consists of many suitable dramas, poems, songs, stories, activities and crafts for use with young children in Irish. It should be an invaluable resource for future

*“I rith na bliana,
chuir na micléinn
soláthar cuim-
sotheach eolais le
chéile maidir le
chúram leanaí.*

*Insan áireambh anseo
bhí drámaí, dánta,
ambráin, scéalta,
gníomhaíochtaí agus
ceirde a bhí oiriú-
nach go pháistí óga.
Beidh an bailiúchán
luachmhar do
fhostaíocht i gcúrsaí
Chúram Leanaí
uaidh seo amach.”*



*“D’éirigh le foire-
ann an togra NOW
an chlár City and
Guilds do chúram
leanaí (324-1) a chur
in oiriúint le seacha-
da d’oiliúnaithe tré
mbeán na Gaeilge.”*

employment”. The final employment levels are impressive; in Donegal, for example, all participants are now either engaged in establishing creche facilities in their own area, or have obtained employment in pre-school supervision, daycare or other related services.

In respect of enterprise development the courses have produced positive outcomes. The initial challenge was to convince statutory support agencies of the validity of childcare as a viable business proposition rather than merely a socially useful activity. This objective has been achieved with Údarás na Gaeltachta having provided start-up finance for a creche in Donegal. Other notable enterprise outcomes related to the four Donegal-based groups who have linked into the EU funded LEADER (rural development) programme as a means of setting up creches, and the Connemara course participants who also received funding through LEADER to establish creches on a pilot basis in the Carraroe and Carna areas of the Connemara Gaeltacht.

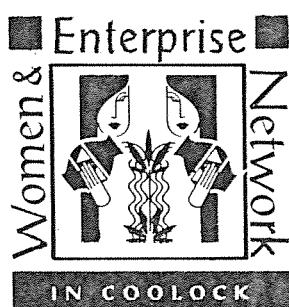
The final project objective concerns the adaptation of training materials into the Irish language. The project team succeeded in adapting the City and Guilds-certified childcare programme (324-1) for delivery through the Irish language. This is the first time that a course in childcare services was available to Gaeltacht women through the medium of Irish. This will have significant implications not only for the women who participated on the NOW project but for future groups of women who wish to be trained in childcare using the Irish language. This, in turn, will have ramifications for the usage of Irish amongst young children - they can now engage in activities conducted through Irish, as a result of the course materials collected and created during the course of the project.

At a transnational level Muintearas linked up with projects in five other countries. These six projects, dealing with the training needs of the long-term unemployed women, formed a loose alliance which organised a number of conferences (including one held in Connemara, attended by 66 people from the six NOW European projects) and produced excellent journals (detailing experiences and issues of relevance to the participating projects). The real sense of transnational sharing is emphasised by the fact that four trainees on the Muintearas courses did their work experience in France and England whilst Muintearas also hosted four people from the French partners, ACEPP. At a national and regional level good relationships were forged with the Health Boards, FAS, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Comh-Coiste Reamhscolaíochta (which provided information on training methods and listing of qualified instructors and trainers). In addition there was a good level of sharing between participants on the two courses, in Donegal and Connemara.

The question of access was a key issue for the Muintearas NOW project both at a cultural and geographical level. Culturally the absence both of the Irish childcare resource materials and the Irish-speaking external assessors posed problems. Geographically the distances to be travelled caused some difficulties, with some trainees having to organise their own 50-mile round trip transport. The fact that these cultural and geographical difficulties were overcome, and that Muintearas is now an accepted training centre for the delivery of City and Guilds childcare training, is testimony to the innovation and determination of all those associated with this project.

PARENTS ALONE RESOURCE CENTRE

"It's great. I'm glad to be part of something, meeting new people at night and being accepted as part of the group."



"I feel great, it's done a lot for me. I'm doing a lot of things for myself now that I never dreamt of doing. Thank you NOW."

PARENTS ALONE RESOURCE CENTRE (PARC), established in 1986, is a community resource centre for one-parent families. It is based in Coolock, a suburb in the northside of Dublin. Coolock has a population of 30,000 people with 15% of families headed by one parent. PARC have always had a commitment to accessible and affordable childcare as reflected in the provision of childcare for all the various courses and programmes it organises.

The aims of the NOW project, an initiative of PARC and run in conjunction with the Northside Partnership, are as follows:

- (i) to set up a Women and Enterprise Network which will create a supportive environment for women engaged in 'home-based' businesses to move out of the black economy into mainstream economic activity
- (ii) to provide accredited training for women already providing pre-school care and educational facilities in the general Coolock area.

PARC were conscious of the number of women running creches or minding children in their homes without qualifications and felt that their status (both on a personal and professional level) would be enhanced if they were able to link into a certified course. In addition PARC wished to explore the potential for additional commercial childcare service in Coolock, site of three major industrial estates. Thus, throughout the course of the NOW project sponsored by PARC ran the twin themes of enterprise and care.

The main actions of the NOW project in Coolock relates to:

- the provision of an enterprise development programme for lone parents and unemployed women
- linkage to mainstream enterprise creation, through the Northside Partnership (an area based company established under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, to assist in alleviating long-term unemployment)
- the provision of accredited training in childcare for local women.

The above actions were primarily delivered in the form of a training programme with five optional modules. The first two modules (induction and self-awareness) are intended for all programme participants with participation on the final three modules (developing business skills, caring for children 0-7 years, developing the enterprise culture) largely dependent upon the career directions chosen by the women participants. Fifty-three women completed the first two modules. In



“Within our area we have advanced a group of approximately 60 women to the stage where they are available to take up job, enterprise and training opportunities provided through the area based Partnership. We have put women’s issues firmly on the local agenda.”

the majority of instances these women would not have had access to state-funded training (on account of ineligibility for mainstream courses/not signing on live register). Sixteen of the total cohort of 53 opted to do the City and Guilds Certificate in Caring for Children 0-7 years.

The City and Guilds Certificate was facilitated by the National Care Institute who reported that the overall commitment and standard was very high. Each participant was required to attend 49 evening sessions and 12 day-long training sessions. The virtually full attendance at these sessions is evidence both of the demand for childcare training in the area and the determination of the participating women to ensure that they would successfully complete the course. It is evident that the women benefited enormously from the experience. All sixteen women obtained their City and Guilds Certificates in Childcare with two trainers receiving awards of excellence from their college. They are going on to a further training course in enterprise opportunities organised by the Northside Partnership.

At the transnational level PARC have established useful and mutually beneficial links with two projects in Holland and one in Luxembourg. The Dutch projects each specialise in one component within the PARC mix of enterprise and childcare. WerkSaam provide training and consultancy in the area of enterprise development whilst the exchange with Athena relates to sharing of information on social and childcare issues. It is important to note the two-way nature of the exchange experiences and the fact that the international partners have also benefited through gaining insights into the projects and approaches being adopted by PARC. Towards the end of 1994, PARC are facilitating an enterprise training programme for 20 women from the project Promozione E Sviluppo in Northern Italy.

In relation to other transnational linkages PARC have become affiliated to the European Network for Business Creation for Women (RECIF). At a local level PARC have established a very positive relationship with the Northside Partnership which is based on a common acceptance of the strength of each organisation. The Partnership recognise the skills and expertise of PARC and use them as a resource and source of advice, especially in relation to issues concerning women in enterprise and childcare needs. It is interesting that the outcome of the NOW programme (and recommendations for future action) will be included in the Northside Partnership’s Area Action Plan (1994-99). This provides significant opportunities for PARC to help women access mainstream enterprise development and support programmes. It is also a reflection of the extent to which actions relating to women entering or re-integrating into the labour market are moving centre stage, on the agendas of organisations like the area-based Partnerships. Other positive relations have been established with a number of projects within the NOW programme and other providers in the northside of Dublin.

PARC have achieved a significant amount through the NOW project: “Within our area we have advanced a group of over 50 women to the stage where they are available to take up job, enterprise and training opportunities provided through the area-based partnership. We have put women’s issues firmly on the local agenda” (Project Leader).

REGIONAL FAMILY DAYCARE PROJECT



NOW

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HE REGIONAL FAMILY DAYCARE PROJECT, which operates from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at University College Dublin, is primarily concerned with the family daycare aspect of childcare provision. Family daycare, or childminding, is the most widely provided form of childcare in Ireland. It is surprising, therefore, that no real attempt had been made to provide a comprehensive range of supports for people interested in pursuing employment as family daycarers. The absence of such a service, given the potential demand that could be generated, established the basis for this NOW project.



The objective of the Regional Family Daycare Project was to establish a Training of Trainers programme for experienced community childcare workers, so that they could deliver training to unemployed women and existing family daycarers at the community level. Effectively the proposed programme would operate on a pyramid basis with the trainers returning to their own communities and imparting further

knowledge and skills to a group of local family daycarers. Matching funding for this project was provided by University College Dublin and also by the eight community groups who sponsored women to participate in the Training of Trainers course.

The eight local networking groups will form a nucleus of support for their own communities, and will provide pre-school childcare provision and childcare advice for women who wish to embark on educational, training or employment programmes

The project was structured around eight modules which took place over a one-year period and involved 300 hours' training. These eight modules could broadly be divided into three main phases - the Training of Trainers course, the training of local family daycarers and the establishment of family daycare networks in the regions where the training had taken place. The Training of Trainers course involved eight women participants who had been selected by their own sponsoring group. The course was centred around three residential modules and two intervening distance learning modules. This indicated a great level of commitment on behalf of the participating women. The training programme was designed in conjunction with the project's transnational partners, Childminding in Business (the consultancy subsidiary of the National Childminding Association in England). Eight women successfully completed this aspect of the project, receiving accreditation from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at University College Dublin.

The major community-based aspect of the project took place when the qualified regional trainers ran the introductory course Family Daycare Course in their own regions. This course, which ran over a 10-week period, involves approximately 10-14 participants in most

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and/or domestic life.*

regions. A total of 210 women (13 courses in the eight regions) did the introductory course and received certificates upon completion. In effect the success of this NOW project depended on the effectiveness of the local training being provided. From both a qualitative and quantitative perspective it appears to have been a highly successful series of training experiences. One indication of the success of the courses is the interest and demand which they have generated in regions where they were organised. The third aspect of the programme - the establishment of family daycare networks in identified regions around the country - is currently at an advanced stage.

This brings a conclusion to this phase of development which has witnessed significant activity and achievement both in relation to the eight trainers and the 210 women whom they trained in family daycare. In addition to the employment opportunities which this programme has presented to the family daycarers it is very probable that a large number of additional women will now be able to access employment and training options, on account of the availability of trained family daycarers.

In terms of networking the most important relationships have been established at the local community level. The eight local networking groups will form a nucleus of support for their own communities, and will provide pre-school childcare provision and childcare advice for women who wish to embark on educational, training or employment programmes. Linkages have also been established with key local providers, including the community care managers within the relevant Health Boards and prominent voluntary/community organisations. A further linkage is with private sector concerns - as an example Fruit of the Loom (in Donegal) sponsored both the start-up materials for the family daycarers and the cost of the ceremony at which they received their certification.

A whole range of relationships have been established during the course of this programme at national, regional and local levels. These networks have been complemented by the advice provided by the transnational training partners in England.

This NOW project is currently engaged in establishing a NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) certification system with the Newry College of Further Education in Northern Ireland. This is the first time that certification of this nature will be available in the Republic of Ireland. The NVQ system is particularly useful for women returning to paid employment in that candidates can proceed at their own pace and fit the assessment around their working and/or domestic life. This represents a further example of innovation within this project which has already achieved significant results such as the creation of a permanent training resource in a number of regions (through the trainers and trained family daycarers); the production of new resource material (some of which has been translated into Irish); and the development of a model of family daycare which has replicable value through the country.

WALLAROO PLAYSCHOOL PROJECT

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HE WALLAROO PLAYSCHOOL PROJECT in Cork was established in 1985. It provides an accessible and affordable childminding service for families, particularly for lone parents and those on low income. It caters for children between the ages of two and eight and operates a two-tier system of payment which takes into account the ability to pay of participating parents. Whilst adults offer a range of options it is the children who determine what happens in the playschool. They are encouraged to develop decision-making, independence and self-discovery with the tutors/teachers acting as facilitators, friends and guides.

The aims of the NOW project within Wallaroo are:

- (i) to improve the quality, and increase the quantity, of childcare services in Cork by setting up an accredited childcare training course in conjunction with University College Cork and FAS
- (ii) to develop a building which will serve as a resource and base for the activities of the Wallaroo Playschool. Matching funds for the projects have been provided through a combination of the Department of Social Welfare, University College Cork, FAS (through the SES/Community Employment Programme) and the Southern Health Board.

The key project action concerned the provision of a certified training course in playschool leadership and management which was experientially based and run in conjunction with University College Cork. The training course, devised by Wallaroo Playschool and organised with the Department of Applied Social Studies and the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, led to a Certificate in Daycare Services for Children. Places on the course were reserved for 12 participants, all of whom received SES/Community Employment allowances.

Demand for this type of training is proven by the fact that over 80 people applied for the training which was provided. The course involved six modules spread over 25 weeks with participants spending three hours a week in the university and 48 15-hour weeks' practical experience in the Wallaroo Playschool. All of the participants successfully completed the course and received their Certificate in Daycare Services. The Wallaroo/UCC course represents an innovative and useful alternative to the standard City and Guilds childcare course. Key aspects of the new programme which has been developed includes its emphasis on parental involvement and a child-centred and holistic approach towards child development.

In tandem with the evaluation of the certificate course the Wallaroo Playschool were also working on the acquisition of a building which would act as a base for its activities. A suitable building was located, planning permission negotiated and funding arranged, some of it



It is the intention of the project that Wallaroo should become a recognised training centre for people involved in childcare and a resource and model for other childcare centres.

through the ERDF aspect of NOW. The premises were secured and the necessary renovation work took place. Throughout this period of development and growth (certificate course, new premises) the parents were actively involved in supporting the project and determining the direction which it might take in the future. It is an interesting aspect of the Wallaroo Playschool that it acts as a resource for parents as well as their children and parents are encouraged to attend workshops which help to address needs relating to parenting, self-development, interpersonal skills etc.

The Wallaroo Playschool have established a wide range of linkages. At a transnational level they have exchanged with ACEPP in Paris and a women's co-operative creche from Harlow in London. In the

local area the Playschool is linked into a whole range of different networks. It is an indication of the project's holistic and inclusive approach that the contacts established are not grounded in any one sector but cut across economic, social and cultural interests. The aforementioned alliance with University College Cork represents a somewhat unique relationship between a relatively small local action project and a major academic institution. The linkages with the North Lee Partnership (one of the 12 area-based Partnerships established under the Programme for Social and Economic Progress) and the Cork Enterprise Board bring Wallaroo into the sphere of social and economic planning. Other relationships with the Southern Health Board, the Department of Social Welfare, women's and community groups, FAS and the Cork Community Development Institute reinforce the inclusive and embracing attitude adopted by Wallaroo, and its belief that childcare is relevant to all aspects of personal, social and economic development.

The NOW input has helped Wallaroo progress to a new and exciting stage in its remarkable evolution process. "Wallaroo has its own premises, a new and committed Board of Directors, an active parent body, a hard-working group of trainees finalising plans for their future, the commitment of UCC to a further training course which will consolidate progress and form the basis of a city-wide access course which will continue to be implemented by UCC, Wallaroo and other interested childcare groups" (Project Leader).

This represents significant achievement for Wallaroo, its parent body, the trainees and the organisations with whom it has formed alliances. It is the intention of the project that Wallaroo should become a recognised training centre for people involved in childcare and a resource and model for other childcare centres. This will help to ensure that the actions carried out under the NOW Programme will be consolidated and built upon in the future.



WATERFORD CHILDCARE

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ATERFORD CHILDCARE IS AN INITIATIVE which has been stimulated by public and private sector organisations in Waterford city. It resulted from a recognition that the absence of quality childcare provision was a major barrier to the participation of women in educational, training and employment programmes in Waterford. This promoted two major statutory agencies (FAS and the IDA) and local employers, (e.g. Waterford Glass, Bausch & Lomb, Waterford Trades Council) to develop a programme incorporating a number of childcare measures.

The actions proposed by Waterford Childcare, through assistance from the NOW programme, were threefold:

- (i) the establishment of a model daycare facility
- (ii) the provision of City and Guilds 324-1 childcare training courses for unemployed women
- (iii) the organisation of an enterprise development programme for women wishing to establish businesses in childcare.

Special focus was placed on encouraging the participation of long-term unemployed women in both the childcare courses and the other mainstream courses being run in the FAS Training Centre, Waterford. Towards this end 10 childcare places were reserved for children of unemployed women engaged in vocational training. Matching funding was secured from the IDA, FAS, the County enterprise Board and a number of private sector companies in Waterford.

In terms of achievements:

- the Daycare Centre, situated in Waterford Industrial Park has been completed and was officially opened by President Robinson in July 1994. The building is equipped with the full range of facilities required to meet the needs of 50 children aged between three months and five years. The private sector have contributed significantly to the costs involved in the renovation and equipping of the Daycare Centre. A further significant input was from the Dutch transnational partner, who having previously constructed specialist daycare facilities, offered invaluable guidance on matters relating to use of space, design and architectural specifications
- twenty-six women successfully completed their City and Guilds 324-1 Caring for Children training course. Following their participation on the course a number of women, with an interest in enterprise, did a Business Appraisal development programme.

The transnational element of this project involved an exchange with the SPIL initiative based in Zwolle in Holland. Reference has already been made to the benefits which accrued from this partnership.



Perhaps as important as the actual tasks which have been achieved (training course, Daycare Centre) is an increased awareness, particularly amongst employers and the business community, of the crucial importance of effective childcare provision.

The support provided by NOW and the other financial backers will have lasting and sustainable results - the establishment of a superbly designed daycare centre and a skilled pool of women trained in childcare.

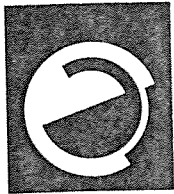
Through contacts established by the sponsors, Waterford Childcare were able to visit many different childcare centres, and gain in-depth insights into how they operated, the equipment used, staff training, ratios of staff to children, parental involvement. It was a most useful visit and was followed through with a regular exchange of correspondence between the Dutch architects and the Waterford project.

At a local level the Waterford Childcare project has generated significant interest and enthusiasm. Perhaps as important as the actual tasks which have been achieved (training course, Daycare Centre) is an increased awareness, particularly amongst employers and the business community, of the crucial importance of effective childcare provision. For many people associated with the project it has been a learning process as, through their involvement and support for the initiative, they increased their understanding of the different types of daycare facilities which might be developed. In addition to direct financial assistance local companies also contributed their management expertise in areas like budgeting and financial control. This is further reflected in the board of management which represents both local business and statutory agencies.

The extent to which a broad cross-section of interests in Waterford have embraced this project was demonstrated at a function organised by the Waterford Chamber of Commerce. The event, attended by 80 people, brought together people from the business sector, social services, state agencies and community groups. It is likely that organisations represented are now more conscious of the importance of childcare provision, as a means of integrating local women into the labour market in Waterford. In this context Waterford Childcare has achieved two positive outcomes - the completion of the planned actions, i.e. training courses and the construction of the daycare centre, and the general heightening of awareness about childcare.

Waterford Childcare represents an example of a range of players collaborating for the benefit of women and young children. It provides opportunities for women to make the transition from community-based training to vocational training and has helped to create the appropriate framework within which women can make this move. It significantly increases the choices and options available to women who wish to pursue a particular course of training activity. Finally, it ensures that the support provided by NOW and the other financial backers will have lasting and sustainable results - the establishment of a superbly designed daycare centre and a skilled pool of women trained in childcare.





DEPARTMENT OF
ENTERPRISE & EMPLOYMENT

SUPPORT IS CHANNELLED THROUGH TWO MAIN mechanisms, the NOW Co-ordinator based in the Department of Enterprise and Employment and the Support Structure established by this Department to assist it in the development and management of the NOW Programme. The partnership, resulting from this co-ordinating and management structure between a government department and a non-government organisation specialising in issues relating to women, has given a unique impetus to the programme. The Department of Enterprise and Employment is responsible for the allocation of the European Social Fund and development of labour market policy at national level and in the context of the European Union. The

Programme Support

close relationship between the co-ordination of the NOW Initiative and the co-ordination of the mainstream EU funds has

facilitated the transfer of learning from the experiences of actions under NOW into mainstream policies and programmes.

The NOW Support Structure, provided by the Council for the Status of Women, assists the NOW Co-ordinator and the project promoters and sponsors in preparing, monitoring and supporting the implementation of actions under the NOW Initiative.

The effectiveness of the model projects was significantly enhanced by the existence of a support structure which provided guidance and advice to projects throughout their period of NOW funding. This support structure was largely responsible for both drawing all the learning together and providing developmental assistance to the participating projects. In effect the support structure helped to translate a number



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of excellent and previously unconnected projects into a coherent well-organised programme.

The Support Structure, on behalf of the Department of Enterprise and Employment, has made a number of valuable inputs into the development of the NOW Programme in Ireland. These include:

- the organisation of workshops and training sessions on issues of common interest to the NOW projects, e.g. drawing up training specifications and training plans, financial management systems, mainstreaming of project actions
- advice on the transnational exchange aspect of the Programme both in respect of the mechanisms involved and the actual selection of appropriate partner(s)
- developing linkages between matching funding sponsors and the relevant projects
- organising meetings between the projects and relevant statutory agencies, to ensure that the agencies are cognisant of the progress being made, and aware of the potential which might exist for mainstreaming particular actions
- dissemination of information relevant to participating projects (e.g. European Union directives, upcoming training initiatives and conferences, reports etc)
- a general advisory service to the projects, available to respond to individual concerns and queries
- the facilitation of the Childcare Support Network, involving all the childcare focused projects within NOW. This Network is an important forum for the sharing of experiences, information and ideas for future development.

The Support Structure has been an integral part of the NOW Programme and has served to maximise the effectiveness of participating projects through creating linkages and providing developmental assistance. The Support Structure has been complemented in its work by the European Union Childcare Network in Ireland which has helped provide ongoing advice and information, particularly in relation to developments which are happening within the European Union. The Support Structure, in the views of project managers and staff, has been approachable and accessible and made a major contribution to the effective management and organisation of the NOW Programme in Ireland.

REFLECTIONS

The story of the childcare projects within NOW is peppered with examples and instances of breaking new ground, effecting change, developing relationships with organisations not normally interested or involved in childcare. It has been a most exciting phase in the history of childcare provision in Ireland.

THE EIGHT CHILDCARE PROJECTS ASSISTED through NOW, and the attendant role of the National Support Structure, represents a significant degree of creative, diverse, innovative and dynamic activity. Hundreds of women involved in the projects have benefited from their experiences on NOW and the impact is likely to continue for many years to come (buildings constructed with NOW support functioning as childcare centres, and people trained in the NOW projects acting as training resources within their own communities). An enormous amount of activity took place during the course of the NOW Programme and this served to generate energy and enthusiasm. People were being actively encouraged to think in an innovative manner and to identify new ways of responding to the needs of parents, with young children, who wished to enter the labour market. The projects responded positively to this challenge.

The excitement results from a number of different factors. Initially the diversity of the projects was very impressive from a number of different perspectives:

- the geographical diversity as evidenced by the combination of urban and rural beneficiaries
- the sectoral diversity as demonstrated by the focuses on Gaeltacht women, Travellers, lone parents, and those who are long-term unemployed or living on low incomes
- the provision diversity as indicated by the range of different childcare options being promoted by individual projects (home-based family daycare, creche, nursery, after school and holiday projects, childminding networks)
- the diversity of family units acknowledges the changing family unit in Irish society of which the two-parent family represents only one model. The actions of NOW childcare projects respond to a variety of needs in the provision of childcare.

It is natural that this diversity should exist given the different childcare needs of different women, living in different communities and circumstances. It is encouraging, in this context, that the NOW projects took on board the whole spectrum of childcare provision and did not merely confine their attentions to one or two of the more traditional forms of childcare provision.

A final issue in respect of diversity concerns the various stages of the development of the individual projects. Some have been established for a fairly long time (e.g. Wallaroo, Parents Alone Resource Centre) whilst others formed primarily as a response to the opportunities being presented by the NOW Programme (e.g. Childcare for Tallagh Waterford Childcare). All of the projects, given this diversity in background, blended well together with a significant amount of sharin

taking place between the longer established projects and those of a more recent vintage.

A tremendous amount of innovation took place during the course of the NOW Programme. Many of the projects are highly imaginative and required a large degree of invention in their planning and implementation. Whether the initiatives involved the formulation of a quality charter for childminders or a distance learning programme for family daycarers the sponsoring groups have adopted innovative approaches to the needs which they identified. The projects have also, in many ways, brought different people and resources together for the first time. The projects view childcare within the broad context of socio-economic development and equality of access for women who wish to enter or return to the labour market. This has led to alliances being established with area-based Partnerships, County Enterprise Boards, IDA, FAS etc.

The NOW projects have assisted in the process of elevating childcare provision onto a new plane, where it is not only perceived as a socially useful activity but could also have significant economic implications (enterprise opportunities, improving the quality of people within the labour market, offering more people the chance to take up employment opportunities).

In relation to examples of innovation the support of women who wish to set up childcare services on an entrepreneurial basis is a relatively new concept within the area of enterprise. Other innovative actions include the participation of SES/Community Employment workers on a university-accredited course in University College Cork; the intention of the Regional Family Daycare Project to establish the infrastructures for national accreditation by training a group of assessors in the National Vocational Qualification in Childcare and Education; the payment of training allowances and childcare subsidies to enable women to participate in childcare training; and the implementation of the first ever certified childcare course using the medium of Irish.

These represent but examples of the creativity that was taking place throughout the country during the duration of the NOW Programme - overall, it was a period of enormous endeavour, commitment and hope for the future.

These qualities were best epitomised by the women who participated in the actions of the different projects, and the personal development benefits which accrued as a result of the participation.

All of the project leaders referred to the great energy which existed throughout this time of the training initiatives. This sense of excitement is reflected in the excellent attendance figures at the training sessions - nearly 100% attendance at courses which took place over fairly long periods of time, for example the Parents Alone Resource Centre course which involved 49 evening and 12 full-day sessions. The sense of achievement at the end of the various courses and programmes was palpable - for many women the certification gained was their first occupational qualification. There was an tremendous sense of pride, enhanced self-esteem and personal growth.

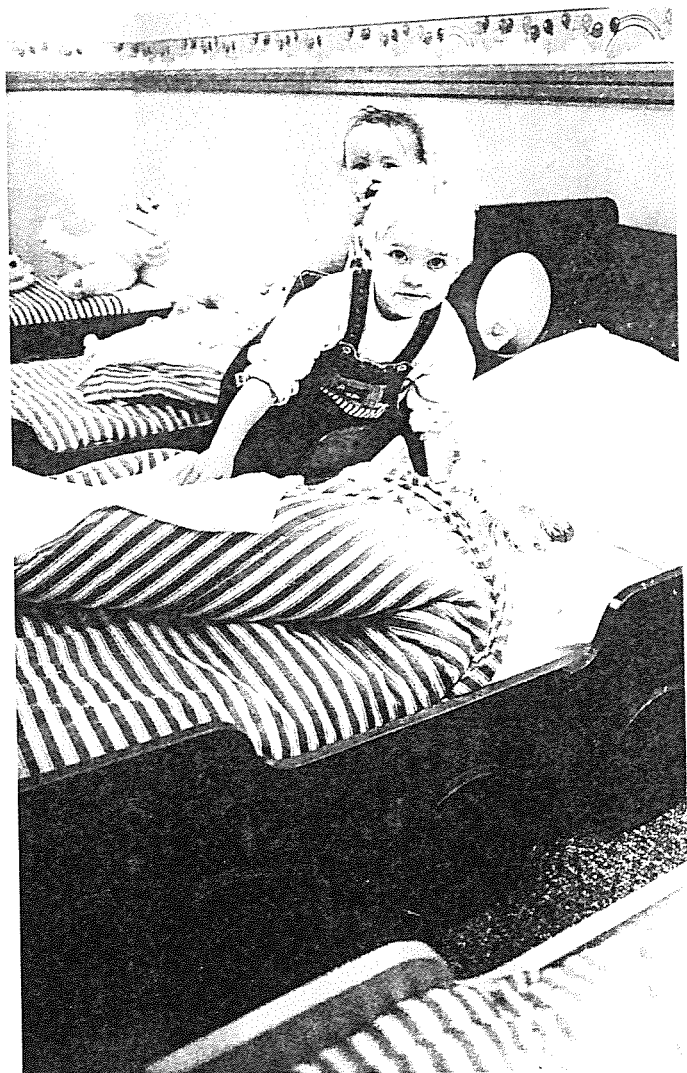
The NOW projects helped to create access for women who would

“The NOW Project is great in the sense that it is like an extra person in the business who has all the expertise that I would be lacking at present.”

... a new momentum has developed within the childcare sector. There is an increasing demand for childcare services and training.

previously not have considered childcare as a career. The conditions applying to participation in the courses run by Childcare for Tallaght and Wallaroo, for example, were more attractive (financially and in terms of course structure) than might previously have been the case. Projects also focused and positively discriminated in favour of particular groups, e.g. in Waterford Childcare, childcare places will be allocated to women in local communities with high unemployment to facilitate their access to FAS mainstream courses; the Tallaght Daycare Centre located in the Regional Technical College will create opportunities for women to return to full-time education; Traveller women are being trained in childcare at Exchange House.

In summary, a new momentum has developed within the childcare sector. There is an increasing demand for childcare services and training. NOW has helped to open up a veritable floodgate of interest from women all around the country. For the Wallaroo course there were over 80 applicants for 12 places, in Parents Alone Resource Centre 175 applicants for 60 places, in Tallaght 120 applications for 14 places. This is an indication of the level of demand which currently exists - NOW has played a formative role in creating this demand, through making available the financial resources required to make participation affordable and accessible.



T HIS POLICY DOCUMENT COMPILED BY THE childcare projects in the NOW Programme identifies a number of issues which are central to the success of NOW in Ireland. These relate to:

Key Issues

- (i) networking and partnership
- (ii) transnational exchanges
- (iii) employment
- (iv) training and standards
- (v) mainstreaming.

This section will consider these issues in the light of the experiences of the participating childcare projects within NOW.

T NETWORKING

THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING AND partnership has been a key priority within all Equal Opportunities Programmes of the European Union. It has also been fully embraced by the NOW childcare projects. At an early stage in the Programme they agreed on the need to meet and share experiences and information on a regular basis. This led to the formation of the aforementioned Childcare Support Network, which meets on a quarterly basis, and at which issues of common interest or concern can be discussed.

There are also more informal links between the projects - it is interesting to note, for instance, that the five remaining places on the Regional Family Daycare Centre NVQ assessors course have been given to five of the other NOW childcare projects. This Childcare Support Network has the potential to grow and develop after this NOW Programme has finished and to continue to provide support to both subsequent NOW Programmes and other childcare initiatives.

At a local level networking has taken place in many different forms and has led to the formation of new or previously unstructured relationships. Some of the more prominent networks which have been established or strengthened include:

- the area-based Partnerships which currently operate in 12 areas of high long-term unemployment and socio-economic disadvantage. Two of the childcare projects have excellent operational arrangements (Northside Dublin and Tallaght) and 11 out of the 12 Partnerships have included childcare provision within their 1994-96 Area Action Plans. These Partnership relationships help to provide an overall local context in which childcare can be effectively supported and encouraged
- linkages with enterprise support agencies which include the

Partnerships but also organisations like the County Enterprise Boards, Udaras na Gaeltachta and the LEADER Programme. There is increasing acknowledgement of the enterprise potential of childcare. Although this is slow to be incorporated into the operations of these enterprise organisations, there is at least an understanding of childcare being a legitimate and valid form of business endeavour and employment creation. In this context it is good to note the financial help provided by the Enterprise Trust to Childcare for Tallaght and the comment of the Chief Executive of the Enterprise Trust. "We think that there is considerable potential to develop this model nationally"

- relationships within the state sector, in respect of organisations like Health Boards, FAS, IDA, Udaras na Gaeltachta and Department of Social Welfare.

All of these have been supportive at a local level of the initiatives which have taken place in their areas. Support has ranged from the provision of facilities and expertise to the sponsoring of local women to attend training programmes to the provision of matching funding for individual projects:

- linkages with academic institutions. Developments at University College Cork (Wallaroo), University College Dublin (Regional Family Daycare Project) and Tallaght Regional Technical College (Childcare for Tallaght) are most interesting and have resulted in a series of precedents having been established for the ongoing support of childcare projects. The links established are mutually beneficial. In Wallaroo, for instance, the project benefits through access to the facilities of a university. The university also benefits by being able to use Wallaroo for observation of childcare practices and being able to regularly use the project for placement purposes
- contacts with employers and businesses in local areas where the projects are located. Reference has already been made to Waterford Chamber of Commerce and Fruit of the Loom in Donegal who have both provided valuable financial, technical and moral assistance to local projects. It appears as if a great deal of goodwill exists within the private sector towards childcare initiatives. Employers are increasingly conscious of the effect that inadequate childcare provision can have on their business (women leaving work not able to return, skilled women not being able to take up employment opportunities). They are a potential source of assistance that could yield significant returns to the childcare sector in future years.

Through these networks childcare initiatives are operating across a number of different disciplines. Until recent times it was firmly identified, by many people, as being purely in the realm of socially useful actions. It is now seen to have far broader economic and cultural ramifications. This is reflected in materials produced by projects like Wallaroo, "Successful economic activity depends on the development of human resources and social infrastructure". It is gratifying to note that this message has also been taken on board by organisations like the area-based Partnerships and the Enterprise Trust.

T **TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE**

THE INTENDED AIM OF THE TRANSNATIONAL element within the NOW Programme was “to present opportunities to benefit from the experiences of Member States (of the European Union) and to develop and implement joint actions”. It was anticipated that the exchange of trainers, trainees, models of good practice and experiences would contribute to vocational training and the occupational reintegration of women.

The transnational exchanges proved to be useful and worthwhile for the NOW childcare projects. They received good insights into how childcare is organised in other European states; practical/technical assistance on issues relating to building/design details, training resource materials, and an opportunity to share their own experiences with other groups of equally committed women.

The nature of the learning was two-way. Equally, as the Irish projects benefited from exposure to the experience of other European initiatives, the European partners also enhanced their knowledge and understanding of the practice of childcare (and the different types of childcare measures) through their contacts with the Irish projects.

It has been argued that the Irish model of childcare is more pedagogical, community-based, child-centred, with greater parental involvement, than is the situation in other countries, where standard state provision is a more normal delivery mechanism. The European partner projects considered the models being adopted in Ireland to be both interesting and innovative. The Irish projects learnt significantly from the strong emphasis placed on adequate childcare provision in other countries (as a central key for economic and social development), concluding that it was not so much a matter of economics as it was of political will and priorities. The potential transferability of national approaches to childcare and the best mechanisms towards lobbying for positive change are reflected in Childcare for Tallaght’s analysis: “The transnational dimension is invaluable because we can look at support systems for women and children, try to put similar models in place here, influence political thinking and create awareness to effect change.”

The experience in other European countries must act as an inspiration and motivation to those organisations who are pressing for childcare to assume a position of greater prominence in the Irish political agenda.

The nature of the transnational exchanges differed significantly from one project to another. Some involved exchanges of training materials, they all engaged in exchanges of people whether at a trainer/project leader or trainee/participant level. A number of projects sought to integrate themselves into sectionally based European networks, e.g. the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group linking into



“The transnational dimension is invaluable because we can look at support systems for women and children, try to put similar models in place here, influence political thinking and create awareness to effect change.”

the European network for Travellers and Gypsy Women. Other projects were involved in joint ventures, e.g. Muintearas na hOileán linking up with five projects in other European countries. This group of projects organised workshops around given themes three times a year, and produced a bi-lingual journal outlining the work of the participating projects and the outcomes of the workshops.

The transnational exchanges were a further source of energy and dynamism for the NOW Irish projects. The amount to be learnt both by the Irish projects and their European partners would suggest that, to gain maximum benefit from the experience, it is critical that the appropriate matches be made.

T EMPLOYMENT

A key problem relates to access to capital and the fact that childcare is still not recognised by the state business-support agencies as an industry that has the potential to create employment.

THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT components within NOW are critical elements of the Programme. The Programme is driven by a desire to enhance women's participation in the labour market. In effect the establishment of effective childcare provision is viewed as a major requirement in promoting increased access to employment and training opportunities. In determining the extent to which the Irish NOW projects have enhanced labour market opportunities for Irish women there are three basic areas to be considered:

- women setting up their own childcare businesses
- women gaining employment in childcare
- new or additional opportunities which quality childcare will present to working women.

In relation to the enterprise option, childcare has long been bedevilled by a fairly general perception that it is a socially useful, philanthropic exercise and not a business that can provide employment. Earlier reference has been made to the gradual shifts that are taking place within some of the main enterprise support agencies in Ireland. The arguments being forwarded in support of childcare as a viable service industry have been bolstered significantly by the actions of the NOW projects. A number of these projects, for example PARC and Waterford Childcare, have included an enterprise/business module in their childcare training programme and the clear link is being established between childcare and enterprise. The NOW projects have trained groups of women in these two disciplines and they are now in a position to establish their own childminding businesses. A key problem relates to access to capital and the fact that childcare is still not recognised by the state business support agencies as an industry that has the potential to create employment. The support provided by Údarás na Gaeltachta to the creche in Donegal is a precedent that might be followed by other agencies.

A number of projects have also made contact with the Co-Operative Development Unit of FAS, including Wallaroo who organised a workshop on Co-Operative Creches. There seems to be a

The NOW projects have generated both enhanced awareness of childcare, and a throughput of trained and competent childcare specialists.

willingness within the Co-Operative Development Unit to at least explore the potential for supporting childcare projects. This appears to be the general pattern amongst enterprise support agencies - whilst interest and awareness in childcare has increased there has been no noticeable shift in their funding of childcare projects. The challenge for the childcare sector is to translate this interest into practical assistance. It is considered that this group of NOW projects coupled with the projects to be included in the second NOW Programme will be able to forward compelling arguments for the support of childcare projects (based on working models, analysis etc.)

In relation to direct employment, childcare is a notoriously difficult area in which to judge impact and effectiveness. Much of the employment generated takes place in the informal sector, the black economy. This is particularly the situation in relation to home-based family day-care. In respect of centre-based provision it is slightly easier to make an assessment. In Tallaght, for example, five women are employed in the after-school and holiday-care units whilst it is anticipated that the Family Daycare Centre will create eight jobs, four of which will be full-time. This return of 13 jobs (and the unknown number of women who are providing home-based childminding services) from one NOW project is indicative of the general potential which exists. This potential also extends to include the many, many women who would be able to avail of training and employment opportunities if quality childcare services were available within their own areas

The NOW projects have generated both enhanced awareness of childcare, and a throughput of trained and competent childcare specialists. Initiatives like the Regional Family Daycare Project should ensure that there is significant national coverage in relation to accessing family daycarers and that women should not be substantially disenfranchised from taking up employment, due to the absence of local childcare services.

TRAINING AND STANDARDS

CHILDCARE IN IRELAND REPRESENTS A fairly haphazard picture in relation to training and setting of minimum standards of service and care. Effectively, apart from the Dublin Institute of Technology in Cathal Brugha Street a number of VEC colleges, UCC and FAS, all training is carried out by private institutions. This tends to be quite expensive and not accessible to many of the people with whom the NOW projects are dealing with on a regular basis. In relation to standards there are no real regulations, especially when less than four children are being cared for. The eight NOW projects, both individually and compositely, have been pushing for a general increase in affordable and accessible training and in the standards/regulations within the childcare industry.

In relation to training the NOW projects have been piloting and testing different models. All of the models have been based on the assumption that prior knowledge and experience are the most

The training involved in the NOW projects takes a number of different forms - training of childminders, training of trainers for family daycare, training of childcare workers, training of Traveller childcare workers.

important pre-requisites for entry into a childcare training programme, not qualifications gained. This is explicitly stated in projects like the Regional Family Daycare Centre which "builds on the expertise of women who have provided this service without accreditation before". The NOW projects aim to provide training and accreditation which is appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the women participants. For example, in devising the training programme for Exchange House account had to be taken of cultural differences allowing for flexibility in terms of timing, resource materials and literacy needs. The training involved in the NOW projects takes a number of different forms - training of childminders, training of trainers for family daycare, training of childcare workers, training of Traveller childcare workers.

The training mechanisms used also suggest increased variety and choice. Heretofore the standard course in childcare was provided by City and Guilds (324-1, Caring for Children 0-7). A number of the NOW projects are piloting alternatives to City and Guilds. Wallaroo and the Regional Family Daycare Project have both stimulated new training initiatives, which have been certified/accredited by University College Cork and University College Dublin respectively.

A particularly interesting aspect of the Wallaroo approach is the payment of training allowances to participants (setting a precedent for SES/Community Employment workers getting paid to attend university) whilst the Regional Family Daycare Centre deploys a cascading or multiplier model whereby the trainer can train numerous multiples of people at the local level (following her/his participation on the Training for Trainers course).

The projects have helped to emphasise the need for more coherence in the childcare training which takes place. There is currently a plethora of training courses with different types of qualifications. Whilst this provides choice it is difficult to determine the status of all the options available. The proposed action by the Regional Family Daycare Centre (i.e. National Vocational Qualification) will begin the process of creating a mainstream qualification for all those working with young children, by creating a national unity of accreditation. An important point to note is that this accreditation will build upon proven competence rather than past qualifications. This will also help to create a progression route for women interested in childcare and assist in developing some type of model which will provide continuous training (upgrading skills and updating knowledge). This need for progression is also evident in the Wallaroo model where it is intended that the Certificate in Daycare Services for Children can be used to access the Higher Diploma in Childcare Studies of UCC.

Thus it is evident that a range of different training approaches are being piloted by the NOW childcare projects, whilst some are adopting existing materials for their own uses (e.g. Muintearas translating City and Guilds into Irish). A further training achievement relates to both Waterford and Muintearas receiving formal recognition from the London City and Guilds as providers of childcare training in the south-east and Gaeltacht regions of Ireland respectively.

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I MAINSTREAMING

IT WAS THE CLEAR INTENTION OF THE ORIGINATORS of the NOW Programme that the actions of the pilot projects should be disseminated widely and that relevant learning and examples of good practice should be adopted by relevant mainstream agencies - whether they be involved in health care, training, education, employment or enterprise. This aspiration is detailed in the report of the Irish Working Group on the Childcare Facilities of Working Parents:

"The European Union's mainstreaming, i.e. childcare provision for women in education, training and employment should become an integral element of the Community Support Framework of each member state, the ultimate aim being that childcare provision will be available not only as part of a Community Initiative such as NOW, but an integral part of the social infrastructure which enables women to enter the labour market."

*...this accreditation
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This need to provide more resources and support to childcare, and embrace it as part of statutory policy, rather than one-off pilot projects, has also been recognised by the government in various national pay agreements with the social partners.

Given this desire of both the European Union and the Irish government, it is appropriate to consider the extent to which mainstreaming has happened as a result of the NOW childcare projects, and whether policy makers/legislators are any more informed or persuaded of the need for effective childcare provision.

It should also be noted that the projects themselves are anxious that learning from their initiatives should be captured and brought into the mainstream.

"Our medium-term objective is to merge successful outcomes of the NOW programme with our mainline programme of community education and training, and in this way to ensure sustainable childcare services in the Gaeltacht and to disseminate our experiences to other European countries where multicultural services are required or minority cultures exist" (Muintearas na hOileán).

"Such a course should prove to be a step towards the establishment of national system of family daycarers" (Regional Family Daycare Centre).

"Plans are currently underway by the Department of Social Work and Social Administration in UCC to make the childcare course generally and permanently available and UCC have already replicated the course with the Horizon Childcare Project, Wexford" (Wallaroo).

The NOW projects have achieved significant results in encouraging, persuading and cajoling relevant agencies to adopt a more positive approach towards the provision of childcare services. This has

generally taken place at a local one-off level rather than being integrated fully into the national policies of relevant agencies and organisations. It does prove, however, that it is possible to effect necessary change as a result of well planned and managed pilot projects. Examples of changes which have taken place include:

- universities and other third-level institutions providing expertise, resources and facilities for childcare initiatives
- the accreditation by universities of childcare courses organised and run in Cork and Dublin
- The effect on training agencies as evidenced by the flexible and supportive stance adopted by FAS in Tallaght and Waterford. NOW has given public training organisations the necessary boost and resources to draw up innovative training programmes exclusively for women. This has had a positive influence on the equal-opportunity policies and practices of these bodies. The organisation of the childcare training course in Tallaght (flexible training hours, training allowance and childcare subsidies) could have important implications if extended nationally to other training courses which involve women with young children
- the extent to which the area-based Partnerships have accepted the need for effective childcare as a means of encouraging long term unemployed women to take up training, education and employment opportunities. Childcare is now firmly on the agenda of 11 out of the 12 area-based Partnerships
- the capacity of people previously considered ineligible (i.e. not on live register) to now access childcare training and educational opportunities.

It is appreciated that mainstreaming is no easy matter and that one is generally dealing with a situation where it is often more comfortable to maintain the status quo rather than effect positive change. Mainstreaming can often be a difficult and lengthy process - "it would be unreasonable to expect mainstream agencies to fully absorb the actions without allowing further time for testing and evaluation" (Muintearas na hOileán). The NOW projects have, however, made a significant mark in relation to relevant mainstream agencies. In addition to the changes taking place in individual project areas, NOW is also forcing all agencies and organisations to re-assess their stance in relation to childcare and equal opportunities. NOW gave projects the money which allowed them to become credible and be taken seriously - to a certain extent it challenged the relevant agencies to state their position, particularly in cases where matching funding was being requested.

Currently the projects and the various actions are in the middle of a journey between the pilot project and the mainstreaming stage. The projects have successfully won many of the arguments in relation to the need for childcare - the next stage is for the lessons that have been learned to work their way up from the local to the national scene. The NOW projects have significantly helped to put forward strong and compelling reasons for effective childcare, based on their own experiences. It is important that this momentum is maintained, that pressure continues to be applied to mainstream agencies and that visible model action projects begin to shift public and social policy.

THE PREVIOUS SECTIONS OF THIS REPORT have considered the development of the childcare projects supported by NOW and issues of relevance to all these projects. The reader should have a sense of the creativity and imagination which has been evident throughout the Programme and the extent to which the pilot projects are beginning to impact upon those organisations who can provide meaningful and long-term support to the childcare sector.

There have also been a number of other ways in which the childcare projects within NOW have helped to enhance the status of childcare in this country:

Impact of NOW childcare projects

Number of Additional Childcare Places	406
Number of Participants Trained	852
Number of People Employed by NOW Projects	33

- they have given added credibility to the childcare sector. Alliances established with institutions like the third-level colleges and the Chamber of Commerce in Waterford have led to a new awareness and understanding of the importance of adequate childcare as a means of creating opportunities for women and of actively promoting a policy of equal opportunities;
- they have provided a practical example of how change can occur in the childcare sector. The projects are a practical demonstration of what it is possible to achieve - they complement other persuasive tools that might be used e.g. research, analysis, experiences in other countries etc. Thus, rather than comment-

ing from an abstract viewpoint, the projects bear testimony to the types of actions which could be implemented on a wider scale if the will and resources existed;

- they have helped to change attitudes towards childcare and bring it into the centrality of issues, rather than the periphery. The NOW projects, as mentioned before, have coincided with positive reference to childcare in a number of key government planning documents. The projects have assisted in keeping up the pressure and demand for enhanced childcare provision. Furthermore it has encouraged agencies to think through their equal-opportunities policies and changed perceptions in relation to childcare as a visible service industry;
- the projects themselves have benefited significantly through the NOW experience. The scale and flexibility of funding available was far greater than existed in any other prior programme with European Union funding, ranging from £100,000 to £235,000 for the NOW childcare projects. This ensured that the projects did not have to go to other funders with a 'cap in hand' approach but could enter into the relationship as equal partners prepared to make their own contribution to the funding requirements. Effectively the NOW programme

“NOW has proved to be a very fertile breeding ground in the search for new responses to the structural difficulties with which women are confronted in the labour market”

“The model will help to ensure that the favourable effects of NOW will be sustained after 1994 - the Trainers will continue to train family daycarers as the need and demand arises.”

facilitated the projects piloting innovative childcare provision with proper resources both in relation to staff and funding. Projects received resources and recognition from NOW and a working, supportive framework within which to operate;

- they brought additional monies into the childcare sector. Matching funding came from a variety of sources including state agencies, academic institutions, the private sector and national voluntary organisations. In addition to the £1,185,860 contributed by the European Union an additional one third of this sum was provided by Irish based agencies and organisations. It is likely that, in a number of instances, these Irish financial inputs will be respected, e.g UCC contributed £11,000 to the childcare programme inspired by Wallaroo - this will be maintained within the sector for as long as UCC continue to repeat the programme. It is evident that many of the actions developed by the NOW projects will be sustained long after the immediate funding ceases. For the Regional Family Daycare Project “the model will help to ensure that the favourable effects of NOW will be sustained after 1994 - the Trainers will continue to train family daycarers as the need and demand arises”. In Tallaght the Family Daycare Centre and the childminder network will continue to support parents and children; the Waterford centre will similarly act as a focus for childcare provision for many years to come. A final advantage concerns the extent to which not alone will projects be sustained in their own areas but their approach is also replicated elsewhere - the Horizon Childcare project in Wexford (which adopted the UCC/Wallaroo model) is one example of where this replication has already taken place.

The NOW childcare projects have served to bring a new dynamism and energy into the childcare sector. The NOW Programme has enabled a number of projects, with exciting ideas for childcare in their own areas, to translate plans into practical realities. The experience of the childcare projects augers well for the second NOW Programme - there is much to be built upon and a further set of imaginative projects who can benefit from NOW support.

The Programme has helped to raise the stakes in putting forward persuasive arguments for ongoing support of childcare provision - it has helped to prove that there is a significant, and unmet, need for flexible, affordable and quality forms of childcare.

There is enormous interest in the development of projects within the childcare sector as evidenced by the Wallaroo/Cork programme being replicated in Wexford and the Waterford project receiving numerous enquiries from Tramore. These are only small examples of the general expansion in interest and involvement in childcare.

The NOW childcare projects have, without doubt, helped to facilitate the greater participation of women in the labour market, and learning which has evolved from the projects will continue to inform and influence those who are in a position to effect positive change with regard to childcare provision.

THE EIGHT PROJECTS IN THIS REPORT WILL offer the reader an impression of what is possible in childcare provision, if the appropriate resources were invested in the sector. The amount and standard of high-quality work achieved by the projects is primarily due to:

- (i) the professionalism of and commitment of organisations involved
- (ii) the financial resource provided by NOW.

The direct experiences of the eight projects have helped to inform, and contribute to, discussions on childcare provision. Their inputs are

Recommendations for the future

borne out of practical activity on the ground and have helped to develop working models which, if the political will and resources existed, have the potential to be replicated throughout the country. In addition to the development of these models the projects have also identified a series of

actions which, if implemented, would enhance the general childcare sector in Ireland. These actions, and attendant recommendations, relate to:

- finance
- training
- disincentives
- multi-dimensional support for childcare
- childcare as a service industry.

FINANCE

- Guaranteed access to childcare to be included in all European Union Human Resource Programmes, not merely within the NOW Programme.
- Tax relief to be provided for working parents, to afford them the opportunity to access childcare services.
- Provision for the childcare cost to be made to unemployed participants on EU-funded educational and vocational training programmes. Many unemployed women and men are inhibited from participating on these programmes due to the prohibitive cost of childcare.
- Exchequer funding to be set aside for the co-finance element of initiatives like NOW and for childcare provision in relation to labour market programmes.
- To meet the childcare requirements of participants, vocational training and education agencies could use childcare places in existing playgroups, daycare centres and creches and avail of home-based daycare services for participants with child-rearing responsibilities.

TRAINING

— A national framework for the certification of childcare personnel should be put in place. Key components would include accreditation of prior learning, coherence and progression routes between different levels of qualification, flexibility in delivery systems (modular training, part-time/full-time courses) and provision to take account of the circumstances of participants to ensure equality of access for all.

DISINCENTIVES

— Disincentives for women involved in childcare who wish to enter the formal economy should be eliminated. Further change is required in relation to welfare and taxation systems to ensure a smooth progression from unemployment/black economy to the formal economy. It is recommended that this issue be examined further, with the intention of eliminating existing and hidden disincentives.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL SUPPORT

— All sectors within society – community, statutory, voluntary, employers, trade unions – should play a more prominent role in the development of effective childcare services at both a local and national level. Childcare must be on the agenda of all organisations that have a function in the labour market.

— The concept of partnership between different agencies/sectors has proved to be a cost-effective and an equitable approach to meeting childcare provision. This approach should be incorporated into national policy and funding structures to encourage this creative and effective use of resources and expertise.

CHILDCARE AS A SERVICE INDUSTRY

— The childcare industry to be accepted and recognised as a valid enterprise sector and to receive the same types of incentives and supports which are normally available to industrial development.

These recommendations are not based on some abstract or theoretical framework; rather, they evolve directly from the experiences of NOW childcare projects. These projects have encountered obstacles and impediments in their work - the recommendations listed will help lead to a more accessible, affordable and equitable system of childcare provision. Ultimately it relates to equality of access to opportunity, and to providing the framework within which women can truly link into the areas of training, education, employment and enterprise.

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