

The Role of Childcare in Getting Disadvantaged Parents into Employment

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Abstract

Drawing on the findings of the evaluation of Working for Families Fund initiative, this paper will explore (a) how childcare responsibilities can be a barrier to enter and/or sustain employment, education or training and the factors surrounding it, and (b) various potential solutions to meeting these childcare issues.

The Working for Families Fund (WFF) was established by the Scottish Executive in 2004 and was administered through 10 Local Authorities during 2004 to 2006 and 20 Local Authorities during 2006 to 2008, with a total budget of 50 million pounds. The aim of WFF was to invest in new initiatives to improve the employability of parents or guardians who had barriers to participating in the labour market, specifically to help them move towards, into, or continue in employment, education or training.

From the start of WFF it was recognised that clients needed support in terms sustainable childcare solutions. During the programme, childcare was found to be an important barrier, at various points, for a sizeable number of parents. In particular, for those who had no childcare arrangements at all or where previous childcare arrangements, either formal or informal, were not viable. This paper will principally focus on formal childcare as that was, for different reasons, the main childcare solution offered by WFF.

The main issues parents or guardians faced regarding childcare were: the cost of childcare; the lack of childcare services; lack of knowledge of childcare services; the quality of childcare; and the logistics of using and accessing childcare services. Diverse circumstances and situations made childcare issues more or less problematic for different parents.

WFF operated through a core project, the Key Worker model, which provided clients with a holistic and individualised service tailored to their needs. Each Local Authority developed a number of projects specific to local needs. In order to address childcare barriers most WFF Local Authorities developed four main approaches: offering childcare information; providing childcare subsidies; ring-fencing childcare places; and developing the childcare infrastructure. This paper will explore how these approaches operated and their effectiveness.

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We conclude that childcare provision in conjunction with employability services are vital in order to help parents move towards, into, or continue in employment, education or training. Childcare solutions need to be tailored to individual needs, preferably as part of a holistic programme that seeks to address employability.

Introduction

Drawing on the findings of the evaluation of Scottish Government's Working for Families Fund (WFF) initiative (2004-2008), this paper will explore (a) how childcare responsibilities can be a barrier to enter and/or sustain employment, education or training and the factors surrounding it, and (b) various potential solutions to meeting these childcare issues.

The WFF was an initiative that aimed to tackle a number of policy priorities in Scotland. These included those embodied in the Scottish Executive's 'Closing the Opportunity Gap' approach launched in 2004¹ which included tackling poverty and disadvantage, by improving rates of employment and economic activity and; eradicating child poverty within a generation. WFF was established to invest in new initiatives to improve the employability of parents who faced barriers to participating in the labour markets. Specifically it was to help them move towards, into, or continue in employment, education or training. From the start of WFF it was recognised that clients needed support in terms of both sustainable childcare solutions and the provision and access to other relevant support and services to improve their employability.

The programme was administered through 20 local authorities which the then Scottish Executive measured to be the most deprived regions in Scotland²: ten local authorities in the first two years of the programme (2004-06), plus an additional ten during the last two years (2006-08). £50m of funding was made available over the four years (2004-08). To the end of March 2008, a total of 25,508 clients had been registered with the programme. An extensive independent evaluation was carried out over this four year period on which the findings of this paper are based. From 1 April 2008 WFF funding was streamlined in the Fairer Scotland Fund (FSF).

Parents joining the WFF initiative faced a number of issues in moving into or towards employment, education or training. During the programme, childcare was found to be an important barrier, at various points, for a sizeable number of parents. In particular, for those who had no childcare arrangements at all or where previous childcare arrangements, either formal or informal, were not viable³. A number of gaps in provision of childcare were also identified in many

¹ The political administration in Scotland changed in 2007 with the SNP taking over from the Labour-Liberal democratic alliance. At this time the Scottish Executive became the Scottish Government. Working for F

² Budget allocations were based largely on the number and proportion of children living in households dependent on key benefits (Income Support and Income Based Jobseekers Allowance), while the incidence of multiple deprivation and rurality were also taken into account

³ This paper will principally focus on formal childcare as that was, for different reasons, the main childcare solution offered by WFF.

areas. However, childcare issues were often not the only barriers faced by many parents. Often factors such as the need to develop employability skills were important for a significant number of clients.

The WFF initiative developed a number of strategies in order to address the childcare issues faced by parents on the programme. Each Local Authority developed a number of projects specific to local needs. In order to address childcare barriers most WFF Local Authorities developed four main approaches: offering childcare information; providing childcare subsidies; ring-fencing childcare places; and developing the childcare infrastructure. In addition to this, WFF operated through a core project, the Key Worker model, which provided clients with a holistic and individualised service tailored to their needs. In this way, a wide range of different issues faced by clients could be addressed, rather than dealing with one issue in isolation. It was therefore important to examine, for each client, childcare issues in the context of wider issues and barriers to employment, education and training.

This paper will begin by outlining in detail how the WFF programme operated and how the evaluation was conducted. We then examine the ways in which childcare was an issue for parents seeking to move into employment, education or training, and also look at WFF clients' characteristics. We then identify the key approaches adopted by WFF local authorities and evaluate these in terms of relative effectiveness. Finally, we will draw out conclusions from the WFF initiative on the role played by childcare in getting disadvantaged parents into employment.

The Working for Families Fund

The WFF programme aimed to help disadvantaged parents in 20 local authority areas in Scotland into employment, education or training. The target groups of parents for this voluntary programme included: lone parents (who were pre-New Deal); parents on low incomes; and disadvantaged parents with other stresses in the household, including disability, mental health and substance abuse problems.

Support from WFF has centred around three key stages:

- Pre-employment – supporting parents to improve their basic employability skills, confidence and attitudes;
- At transition points – helping parents to make the transition into employment, education, substantial training or volunteering;
- Post-employment – support to sustain employment, for instance through a period of crisis such as a childcare problem. This has been offered both to parents who engaged with WFF at the pre-employment stage and have successfully moved into employment, and to parents who were already in work when they first approached WFF.

The Scottish Government implemented the WFF programme in a flexible way, allowing local authorities to adapt their proposals in the light of experience. This

was particularly important, as WFF was a new programme where there had been little experience of linking childcare and employability on this scale.

Management of WFF at local level rested with Economic Development department/teams, who had employability as a main area of expertise and activity, in all but one area. This approach was able to build upon departments with skills in partnership working in the area of employability and upon existing partnerships with key agencies. To ensure childcare barriers were addressed it required joint working with childcare specialists and bodies and in most areas close links were made with local Childcare Partnerships as well as local providers.

Many areas carried out extensive mapping exercises of existing services at the beginning of the development period, in order to determine availability of existing childcare provision and employability related support, and to identify any gaps that could potentially be filled by WFF. Projects were developed in response to local needs following in most cases consultation on existing service provision and mapping exercises. The approach in each authority continued to be flexible throughout with additional projects and services developed as required over the four years. Delivery of individual projects on the ground was largely via social economy organisations, depending on the available expertise and capacity of these locally. Services were focused on end goals of progress towards work, education or training, rather than intermediate services such as childcare provision *per se*. This approach clearly signalled to clients, other agencies and other local authority departments that the aim of support was to improve employability.

The main WFF support was based around 'Key Workers'⁴. Key Workers took a 'holistic' perspective of the client and worked to build up a trust relationship, becoming familiar with their personal and employability issues. They acted as a support, giving advice and guidance where they were competent to do so, and linking the client into other specialist services where needed while remaining in contact with the client throughout their time with WFF. Key Workers supported clients who wished to move towards, into, or continue in work, education or training through:

- Helping them to improve their employability; and
- Addressing childcare and other barriers standing in their way.

Clients were helped to improve their employability by establishing goals and producing a personal action plan that linked them to the various types of employability or other support available locally, or to support services developed within WFF that meet local needs and services gaps. These included: personal development courses to boost confidence and self-esteem; education and training to improve skills and qualifications; careers advice; money advice; and work experience – all helping the client to progress towards or into work.

⁴ The Key Worker model developed out of work undertaken by Glasgow City Council in the pilot stage.

A second key element of WFF support was helping clients to identify and access the childcare support they needed at each stage.

Hence the Key Worker provided a central point of contact and continuity with a client. Local needs determined in some cases which skills and expertise Key Workers required. In some local authorities client needs or local needs also had an impact in the Key Workers model, with some areas having, or developing, Key Workers that specialised in different client groups or themes e.g. mental health or young parents.

The evaluation of WFF

An independent evaluation of the WFF programme was carried out by the Employment Research Institute at Edinburgh Napier University. The aim of the evaluation was to document how the programme developed, what the impacts were and what lessons could be learned from it. An evaluation framework was developed in conjunction with the original 10 local authorities (2004) and measured characteristics of clients at point of registration and at various other points during the course of their time on the programme. This data was collected by project workers working directly with clients and entered on a database which was sent to the evaluation team at regular intervals (anonymised to protect client confidentiality). In this way, WFF staff working on the ground could assess information on the project locally in order to support clients more effectively, while also providing data which was available across all local authorities to the evaluation team.

In addition to the data collection forms, the evaluation team carried out interviews at different stages with co-ordinators and project workers. Case studies were also conducted in a selection of projects during Phase 1, and in each area during Phase 1 and Phase 2. In addition a survey was sent to WFF co-ordinators at the end of Phase 2 to cover childcare and evaluation issues.

This paper draws from the various forms of data collection during the evaluation. The statistics presented in the paper refer, unless otherwise stated, to the total number of clients registered up to 31 March 2008 (date when the ERI evaluation came to an end).

Childcare Issues

Through initial mapping exercises, partnership working and using the experience of WFF implementation, local authorities identified some general childcare issues.

In the first instance clients registered with WFF were asked to identify all the issues they felt were barriers to achieving their aim. In broad terms, various types of caring responsibilities were felt to be a barrier for almost three quarters of clients (72%). In particular, responsibility for caring for child/ren was considered a factor for many clients (61%), followed by the cost of and lack of childcare services (see Table 1 below).

During interviews with WFF co-ordinators and staff working on the ground the main childcare barriers parents faced seem to relate to childcare affordability, accessibility, flexibility and availability. There were variations in the provision of childcare both between different local authorities and also within the same areas, although some general childcare gaps and barriers identified by most areas which will be described below.

Table 1: Barriers to Progression for Sustained Contact Clients⁵ at Registration

Opportunities and Skills	No	Yes
Responsibility for caring for child (ren)	11580	60.8%
Cost of childcare services	8442	44.3%
Lack of childcare services	5318	27.9%

In terms of affordability the general cost of childcare was an issue even though once a client is in paid employment the Childcare element of the Working Tax Credit (CWTC) comes into place paying up to 80% of childcare cost. However this is only the case for parents who move into paid employment. The up front fees that in many cases parents have to pay to childcare providers were a problem. A common barrier for those going into paid employment was the mismatch between starting work and having to pay for childcare up front, and receiving the first pay check. Deposits were another hurdle for parents who in some cases have to pay for childcare before childcare provision starts or in order to keep a childcare place during holidays.

In terms of availability, significant gaps identified were: the lack of childcare provision for under 3 year olds; the lack of childcare for children with special needs; in some areas the shortage of childminders; reported shortages of pre-school care; lack in provision of teenage care for children from 12 years old onwards; and finally lack of wrap around care or out of school hours, i.e. childcare provide outside of normal school hours typically evenings, weekends and school holidays.

In relation to childcare service flexibility, local authorities found that in instances of: changing or irregular work, education or training patterns; holidays; work, education or training outwith the standard “9 to 5” routine; and weekends, it was difficult, and in some cases impossible, to find or arrange affordable childcare provision.

Childcare accessibility is primarily a problem in rural areas, where in some cases there is no local childcare provision and public transport links are scarce. Nevertheless, linking childcare and work (or other services) has proven difficult not only in rural settings but in many other areas as well. This occurs mainly where there are not local childcare services and/or no local jobs or other services and parents rely in public transport to link those.

⁵ Sustained Contact Clients (SCC) required long-term support and therefore their involvement with WFF would be sustained for a period of time (see ‘WFF Clients’ section below).

Overall, these issues were cited as key problems for families balancing/juggling the needs of children at different stages, creating a barrier that leads to jobs and other opportunities not being taken up or being given up.

WFF Clients

Not only did WFF clients face childcare issues in their aim to move into employment, education or training but they often also faced a range of other issues. WFF clients were generally disadvantaged in a number of ways. A total of 25,508 clients were registered up to 31 March 2008 (the date when the ERI evaluation came to an end) of which 35% were lone parents, nearly a quarter (24%) were classified primarily as being in the Low Income category, 12% classified as having 'Other Stresses'⁶ and 25% as multiple categories (with 4% choosing the 'none of these categories' option⁷). WFF clients were predominantly female (89%) and in terms of age there was a predominance of clients around the ages of 20-39 years, a younger profile than for the general population of Scotland (40+). Only a small proportion were from ethnic minority groups, slightly more in the large urban areas, though these were slightly better represented among WFF clients than in the Scottish population as a whole (4% in WFF compared to 2% in Scotland). Nearly two-thirds (65%) of WFF clients lived in workless households - where nobody was in paid employment (compared to only 14% of households with dependent children across Scotland). Therefore, in general terms, WFF clients represented the most disadvantaged parents in Scotland.

WFF programmes have had to be very flexible in their approaches to helping clients because of the wide range of clients needs. While this presented a challenge in some areas, it was also a key strength of the programme. WFF clients could, in broad terms, be part of two very different groups: those who needed one-off support mainly to sustain employment, education or training; to take up a job offer; or to move employment. This group of clients were referred to as 'Limited Contact Clients' (LCC) to illustrate that the support needed was short-term support around a specific issue or issues. The other group of clients were referred to as 'Sustained Contact Clients' (SCC) and made up the majority of WFF clients (77%), with some areas drawing clients, almost exclusively, from this group. The support required was a more long-term intervention and therefore the contact with the clients would be sustained for a period of time. Within this latter group the position of the client in terms of readiness to take part in the labour market varied. Some people were more ready to take part in paid employment while others were further away from the labour market. Therefore within this group the level and time of key workers' intervention vary to reflect client needs. Clients' aims from their participation in WFF varied in

⁶ Those were disadvantaged parents with other stresses in the household including disability, mental health and substance abuse problems that made it difficult to access and sustain employment, education or training.

⁷ Most clients fitted into one or more of the available categories: parent on low income; parent with other stresses in the household; lone parent. Around half of those recorded as not fitting in any of these categories ('none of these') did specify their personal situation (reason for joining WFF).

most cases according to their needs and their barriers to achieve those aims were also diverse.

In the case of WFF, it was useful to adopt an approach that includes support for clients with varied needs: one-to-one 'holistic' support over a period of time is important in order to help clients with a complex of needs (e.g. many SCC); and although LCC may need a lower level of support, the Key Worker approach can still help them in the short term and is available to give further support if other issues arise.

Personal Circumstances

Many clients had similar childcare barriers but in some cases personal circumstances⁸ made those barriers more difficult to overcome, as it is seen when hard outcomes or transitions⁹ are analysed against clients' personal circumstances.

Through qualitative data collection (interviews with staff working in the ground) it seems that having a child or children with disability would make it more difficult to access childcare. In terms of achieving a hard outcome, analysis show that lower proportion of clients who had children with a 'Record of Needs', disabilities or health problems made a transition (43% and 47% respectively, compared to 54% for clients whose children did not have either of these).

The number of children seems to also have an impact in the facility to access childcare, in terms of finding affordable childcare and also due to the logistics of using childcare. In terms of achieving a hard outcome, having fewer children was associated with being more likely to make a transition.

Children's age also had an impact on the possibility of using childcare, with parents of children under three years old and those with teenage children finding more difficult to obtain childcare. In terms of achieving a hard outcome a higher proportion of clients with children aged under 12 years old made transitions (54%) compared to those with secondary school aged children (46%). This possibly ties in with the tendency of clients to be slightly younger which for the 20 to 29 age group was positively correlate with making a transition.

Location is also a factor in terms of childcare use, in some areas lack of childcare provision made it difficult to access childcare which is intensified if lack of private transport is also a factor.

This section has illustrated that WFF clients were generally disadvantaged in terms of high proportions of lone parents, low incomes and multiple issues. Many clients required a sustained level of support from the WFF reflecting their

⁸ Contextual socioeconomic factors related to individuals' social and household circumstances that affect their ability to get a job match (McQuaid, R. and Lindsay, C. (2005), The concept of employability, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 42; No. 2, pp. 197-219)

⁹ Hard outcomes or transitions are: being able to sustain or move into employment, education, training or voluntary work of over 16 hours per week

high level of complex and often multiple needs, irrespective of childcare issues. Although childcare issues are similar for parents, personal circumstances can act as a cumulative disadvantage when trying to access childcare.

WFF Solutions to Childcare Issues

Whilst WFF began as a programme designed primarily to break down childcare barriers for disadvantaged parents, most clients had multiple barriers to overcome; therefore a holistic employability service approach was developed to provide continuous support to help parents towards, into and after employment, education or training. Early on in the implementation of WFF it became apparent that additional support was required for parents in areas such as personal development, money advice and transport. Nevertheless childcare support was very important in order to allow parents to access support services (e.g. training courses). The nature of the childcare element in WFF is such that it could be said to run through the whole client process in many different ways.

The WFF programme therefore developed a range of distinct projects to help with specific issues. These included: transport; improving access to training; volunteering; health and disabilities; money advice; supporting young parents, parents in education, lone parents; outreach with hard to reach groups; While childcare issues were addressed through distinct projects which include: childcare subsidy schemes; developing childcare workers and childminders; and flexible childcare and crèches.

Local authorities adopted four main approaches to address childcare needs of WFF clients:

a) Providing Subsidies. This was paying all or a portion of the cost of a client's childcare. This was generally paid directly to the childcare provider, rather than the parent.

Paying for childcare can present a difficult barrier for parents who engage with pre-employment activities in order to make the transition to work, as well as those aiming to move into employment, education or training. All WFF LAs developed childcare subsidy schemes that could support parents in one of the following ways:

- Through the transitional period when moving from benefits into employment, education or training. This usually took the form of short, time-limited subsidies – mainly to cover the period before the first-month wages were paid and tax credits are in place. Parents receiving a subsidy only claimed the childcare element of working tax credits once the subsidy had ended, thereby avoiding duplication of payment. Clients could also be supported with registration fees and deposits if required.
- To engage in pre-employment activity including personal development and soft skills training. This was either in the form of individual subsidies or block provision e.g. provision of a crèche.

Subsidy Schemes that offered support with the costs of childcare expenses were invaluable in helping clients moving closer towards employment, education or training.

b) Ring-fencing Childcare Places. This was paying for a set number of childcare places within particular childcare providers that could be used by WFF clients only.

Ring-fencing childcare places can be a means of gaining access to childcare for WFF clients in areas where there are shortages of particular services.

There was the potential problem that while ring-fencing may help improve access to childcare for WFF clients in areas of shortages, it will restrict access further for parents who are not WFF clients, and also it does little to address the longer term issue of shortages.

There is a question of the cost-effectiveness of ring-fencing, since not all places were used. Therefore, very careful consideration of the supply and demand for such services is required

c) Development of the Childcare Infrastructure. This is developing actual childcare services, either from scratch, or contributing to the expansion of existing services.

The success of WFF relies on the availability of suitable childcare, accessible for parents in the right place at the right time. Following initial mapping exercises, and using the experience of WFF implementation, most Phase 1 areas identified gaps in childcare services, which were seen as crucial to the successful progression of clients. Some LAs identified a lack of provision within their area and attempted to address this through a series of projects. In most cases WFF worked closely with local Childcare Partnerships when developing new services such as childcare workers; childminders and flexible childcare.

However, developing childcare infrastructure proved, in most cases, limited in scope due to practicalities, some of them structural such as lack of suitable venues and some administrative such as meeting Care Commission requirements. Sustainability of these solutions was also an important factor when developing infrastructure. Nevertheless, there were successes in this approach specially the developing of childminders and the setting up in some instances of childcare provision during pre-employment courses.

d) Information and advice on childcare services and in some cases arranging childcare services for parents. Alongside employability support, WFF helped clients to identify and access the childcare they needed at each stage. Often this took the form of information and advice, linking them to an existing childcare place, but it might also have involved financial assistance (e.g. paying one-off, 'upfront' nursery registration fees, paying for childcare for a short time until tax credits came through or paying for childcare while a parent attended education or training). Through mapping exercises of the childcare services in the area and through advertising to childcare providers, Key Workers played a central role in helping parents to find suitable childcare solutions.

In the largest area, Glasgow, the roles of Key Workers were split into two distinct functions of 'Childcare Mentors' and 'Guidance Workers'. The former provided information and/or accessed childcare on behalf of clients and the latter provided more intensive guidance and employability support. Initially, in most other local authority areas, these two broad functions were generally compounded into one role, although the actual balance between these roles varied. However, during the course of WFF, some areas had separated these roles to an extent. For instance, one area developed a Childcare Mentoring Project separate from the Key Workers Project (but linking in). In some other areas, Support Workers and even the Core Administration Team were providing information and support with arranging childcare for clients. In other areas, the Key Workers concentrated more on the Childcare Mentoring role, referring clients onto other services or projects for more specialised guidance support.

Outcomes

WFF tracked the outcomes achieved by clients following their involvement with the programme. In this way, the overall effectiveness of the programme could be ascertained. Outcomes achieved by clients could also be linked to types of support they received and therefore the effectiveness of particular projects or packages of projects can be ascertained.

The assessments of WFF Co-ordinators also provided more detail on particular aspects of the WFF programme (including particular types of childcare) that were most effective.

Overall, a high proportion of clients achieved some kind of measurable outcome through their participation in WFF. Some 66% of all clients registered up to 31 March 2008 had achieved an identifiable outcome, including 'hard' outcomes such as moving into employment and 'soft' outcomes such as improving their employability and making progress towards sustained employment, training or education. In total, 54% of clients achieved a 'hard' outcome which included moving into employment, education or training, maintaining current activity, being able to take up a job offer, improving employment or moving into different employment. Also note that some clients were still working towards an outcome but had not achieved one at the time these statistics were collected, therefore the overall proportion of clients achieving an outcome is likely to be higher.¹⁰

Looking at clients that achieved an outcome and the projects that they accessed through WFF, the Key Worker approach would appear to be particularly effective since many of the positive client outcomes can be linked to Key Worker involvement (55% of clients registered through a Key Worker programme, achieved a 'Hard' Outcome compared to 46% on non-Key Worker projects). Although these figures need to be viewed with care as in many areas most or all clients were registered through Key Worker projects but received assistance from others.

¹⁰ The period of the evaluation ended on 31 March 2008, so the proportion of clients who achieved an outcome after that date is not known

Clients joining the WFF programme were allocated a main project¹¹ at the time of or after registration. In most cases, this was a 'Key Worker' project (80%). In addition to accessing the main WFF project, 60% of clients also accessed other projects (45% accessed other WFF projects with a further 15% accessing external agency services i.e. non-WFF), with the majority accessing two or three other services.

In terms of achieving an outcome, clients who accessed one or more additional projects were significantly more likely to achieve a transition than clients who did not access any other project (62% of clients who accessed WFF projects and 53% who accessed other agencies achieved a transition compared to 44% who did not access any additional services). This would strongly indicate that clients who received a 'package' of support (of at least a main project plus support from one or more other WFF projects) were much more likely to have a positive outcome.

In terms of individual types of projects which were accessed (in addition to main project) and transitions achieved, clients who accessed the following were significantly more likely to have a Transition.

- Childcare Subsidy (80%)
- Flexible Childcare (66%)
- Developing childcare workers (65%)

Childcare subsidy was particularly effective in terms of supporting positive outcomes.

The value of the Key worker model was supported by local authorities themselves who generally felt that this model was the ideal approach to successfully support clients, together with the support given by money advice and the personal and childcare funds. They stressed as crucial to the success of WFF the "great flexibility in the way the money was spent", as it allowed "a person centred approach", "to engage with parents who would not normally have accessed our service", "establish suitable projects to meet the need of clients" and being "able to fund the gap where no other agency could".

WFF Key Workers identified childcare solutions to meet particular clients' needs. While some of the solutions came from within WFF, many others came from accessing existing childcare provision. Childcare provision served people under different circumstances with differing needs and therefore the importance of each service is different according to each case. Nevertheless Table 2 below summarises WFF co-ordinators evaluations of the different types of childcare in terms of how helpful they found them generally in helping parents moving into or sustaining employment, education or training.

¹¹ The main project was defined as the one which took the main responsibility for monitoring the client.

Table 2: WFF - Childcare Services Summary of Comments

	Times of service	Flexibility	Cost-effectiveness	Others
Sitter Services	Out of hours and wrap around care	Very	Not used very much, due to high cost	Impractical for most requirements; requires several weeks vetting before sitter could attend
Crèche	Short periods	Not very	Very cost effective during group work; can be expensive when there is only one child	Useful for short training courses where it was more convenient to have childcare on-site. Crèches work well for training but are unsustainable for work
Registered Child minders		Very, although generally for daytime shifts and not for unsocial hours		Important in helping parents sustain a Transition
Pre-school education	Short periods	Restrictions around timescales	No charge to parents so very cost effective	Few parents are able to access full-time local authority pre-school nursery care and part-time places only offer up to 3 hours per day - a limited option even for parents thinking about part-time options
Nursery	Restrictions around timescales		Cost effective when tax credits come through	Joining fee and other costs can be prohibitive for some parents
Mother & toddler groups	Not really childcare as parents have to be present			
Registered after-school care	Regular day-shift hours		Very cost effective and is manageable for parents to sustain	
Informal services	Flexible		Highly cost effective but there is often a hidden cost	Can be unreliable and break down at short notice

7. Conclusion

Childcare responsibilities are a major barrier for parents entering or sustaining work, education or training. The type of barriers and severity of them depend on multiple factors, including the personal circumstances of the client. Childcare responsibilities were often not the only barrier faced by many parents but one of many issues. It is therefore important to examine childcare needs in the context of wider issues and barriers to employment, education and training in order to find the correct solution to clients' needs.

Addressing childcare needs *in conjunction* with employability needs appears to be particularly effective, as illustrated by outcomes and positive feedback on the Key Workers model. The nature of the childcare element in WFF is such that it could be said to run through the whole client process in many different ways.

Although there appeared to be variations in the provision of childcare both between different local authorities and also within the same areas, there are some general childcare gaps and barriers identified by most areas, specifically in terms of childcare affordability, availability, flexibility and accessibility. Some of these barriers could be resolved by WFF while other barriers or gaps in childcare such as addressing the lack of affordable provision for out of the 'traditional' 9 till 5 working hours, at weekends and during holidays require a different solution, such as large investment in the childcare infrastructure generally.

Developing childcare infrastructure with the aim to fill some of the childcare gaps therefore proved limited in scope. Nonetheless, developing childminders

appeared to have some success and also important was the setting up in some instances of childcare provision, such as crèches, during pre-employment courses.

The approach taken by WFF appears to have been successful in tackling some of the childcare barriers faced by parents. The childcare subsidies specially helped parents to engage with pre-employment activities and during the transitional period moving from benefits into paid employment, education or training. Very important also was the information and advice provided by Key Workers, helping clients to identify and access the childcare provision and/or the childcare solutions they needed at each stage.

The holistic client-focused nature of WFF appears to have been successful in supporting parents to move towards or into employment. Addressing childcare barriers alongside other barriers proved very effective. Also effective was the 'package' of support provided to clients. Clients who received a 'package' of support (of at least a main project plus support from one or more other WFF projects) were much more likely to have a positive outcome.

The Key Worker model appears to be particularly successful as it provided clients with a holistic and individualised service tailored to their needs, so a wide range of different issues could be addressed. It was a central point of contact and continuity with a client. Key Workers addressed employability and childcare barriers and in some cases specialised in certain client groups and/or support themes.