

GIVE US A HAND WITH CHILDCARE

10 KEY MESSAGES FROM PARENTS IN SCOTLAND



Save the Children

THIS REPORT OUTLINES THE 10 KEY MESSAGES AND ISSUES THAT THE PARENTS WHO TOOK PART IN THESE CONVERSATIONS RAISED ABOUT USING AND ACCESSING CHILDCARE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Save the Children would like to sincerely thank all the parents who took the time to share their views and experiences with us. Without you, this work would not have been possible.

We are also indebted to all the professionals and organisations that helped us to organise the 'childcare conversations' with parents.

The report was written by Euan Lloyd.

INTRODUCTION

Childcare is a vital service for families.⁽ⁱ⁾ High quality child and out of school care provides nurturing, stimulating experiences for children that help them to grow and develop. It also helps parents⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ who would like to take up and remain in work,⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ or study, balance this with raising their children.

CHILDCARE IN SCOTLAND

Progress has been made in the last decade to increase the availability and affordability of childcare in Scotland and many examples of good practice exist. The number of places has increased and entitlements have been introduced to nursery education for three and four year olds. Alongside this parents in work living on low incomes have been able to access support in paying for childcare through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Yet, despite these advances and the public good to be gained from investing in high quality childcare, the affordability, availability and quality of services across Scotland remains inconsistent. Many parents are still struggling to access high quality affordable childcare, with parents living on low incomes being particularly disadvantaged. The majority of the costs of childcare still fall on families, with fees being a high proportion of parents' incomes, and there are still significant gaps in provision.

There is an on-going public debate about the future of childcare in Scotland and the best way to address the existing barriers that prevent families from accessing suitable childcare. Of late, childcare has also moved up the political agenda. There is a clear consensus amongst the main political parties that the provision of affordable, quality childcare must be increased.^(iv) The cross-party Equal Opportunities Committee of the Scottish Parliament recently produced a report calling for the Government

to develop a timetable for creating a statutory right to childcare. The Scottish Government has a long term vision to develop a high quality, affordable, flexible, coherent and universal system of early learning and childcare.^(v) It has recently announced plans to increase the provision and flexibility of publicly funded nursery hours via the Children and Young People Bill, which aims to 'set the stage' for wider reform. This political and policy context presents an opportunity to make real progress towards creating an affordable, flexible and high quality childcare system that delivers the best for our children and supports parents to balance work, training or study with raising their children.

IF WE ARE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY, IT IS CRUCIAL THAT THE VOICES OF PARENTS ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. SAVE THE CHILDREN IS PARTICULARLY KEEN TO ENSURE THAT THE VIEWS OF PARENTS LIVING ON LOW INCOMES ARE HEARD IN THE DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF CHILDCARE IN SCOTLAND.

Parents and children are the experts in their own lives. They are the people who need childcare but find that what is available is not always suitable, convenient or affordable. Yet parents' voices are not always the first to be heard in debates and discussions about what government should do to improve childcare in Scotland.

CHILDCARE CONVERSATIONS

To help give parents a voice, Save the Children organised a series of 'childcare conversations' between parents and local decision makers. We worked in partnership with local organisations and services to hold twelve discussions with groups of parents across Scotland. The vast majority of parents were living on low incomes.

Over 100 parents took part – mums and dads, single parents and parents in couples, parents who are in work or studying and those who are currently unemployed. The views of parents from across Scotland were sought from the central belt to the highlands and islands and the south of Scotland.

This report outlines the 10 key messages and issues that the parents who took part in these conversations raised about using and accessing childcare.

The discussions we held with parents were in depth and wide ranging, taking in private, public and informal methods of childcare and covering all age groups from the earliest years to school aged children. While it is not possible in this report to reflect every opinion or point of view raised, we have sought to draw out the most common messages that emerged throughout these conversations and provide a sample of direct quotes to illustrate each of these. For clarity, the findings are presented in 10 key messages and grouped into four themes – quality, affordability; flexibility; and availability. There is, though, significant overlap between these messages and themes. Speaking to parents made it clear that many of the issues raised interacted with, and often compounded, each other and cannot be addressed in isolation.

One notable aspect of the conversations was that the majority of the parents we spoke to were mothers – only fourteen were fathers. Care must be taken when drawing any firm conclusions as to the reasons for this gender divide, but it is possible that it reflects a wider pattern whereby childcare remains a heavily gendered issue that impacts on men and women in distinct ways.

Above all, the parents in this report want the best for their children. That aspiration underpins each and every one of the messages that emerged from these conversations. Parents told us that they wanted their children to have the best start in life, to be able to fulfil their potential and have safe, nurturing, stimulating environments and enriching experiences. Parents want to be able to spend quality time with their children (whether they are in work or not) and provide them with the emotional, financial and social support they need. For the parents in this report childcare services play a key role in making this aspiration a reality.

10 KEY MESSAGES FROM PARENTS:

1. CHILDCARE SERVICES MUST SUPPORT CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING
2. THE COST OF CHILDCARE IS TOO HIGH – PARTICULARLY FOR PARENTS ON LOW INCOMES
3. PARENTS HAVE A STRONG DESIRE TO WORK – BUT FEEL TRAPPED BY THE COST OF CHILDCARE
4. THE HIGH COST OF CHILDCARE MEANS THAT PARENTS ON LOW INCOMES ARE OFTEN NO BETTER OFF IF THEY WORK
5. A LACK OF AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE IS MAKING BALANCING PARENTING AND WORKING EVEN MORE DIFFICULT
6. CHILDCARE SERVICES MUST BE MORE FLEXIBLE IF THEY ARE TO SUPPORT PARENTS INTO WORK
7. EMPLOYERS ALSO NEED TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEEDS OF WORKING PARENTS
8. THE AVAILABILITY OF CHILDCARE VARIES SIGNIFICANTLY
9. THERE ARE PARTICULAR CHILDCARE CHALLENGES FOR PARENTS WISHING TO STUDY
10. MANY PARENTS HAVE TO RELY ON FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOR CHILDCARE

A. QUALITY

Throughout the conversations, parents spoke of the importance of finding high quality childcare and the positive impact that doing so had on their children's growth and development.

KEY MESSAGE 1: CHILDCARE SERVICES MUST SUPPORT CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

The parents we spoke to stressed that the wellbeing of their child was the most important consideration for them in making decisions about childcare.

'And you stand back and you look at it, how can you put a price on that [a child's wellbeing]? Because you want them to be looked after, you want them to be safe... but you want it to be sustainable and affordable.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'You know, I care about the money but that's not my first priority. I want to feel comfortable with that person and knowing that I feel safe and to be honest it is a gut feeling.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

The commitment to their children's wellbeing meant that the relationship between childcare provision and child development was another theme in the conversations. Child development was spoken of both in terms of the importance of stable and loving home life and also the opportunities that childcare, particularly nurseries, provided.

'Nurseries teach them not to smack other children but I want to be the one that is discussing with them why don't we do this and how do other people feel, and check that he's not just learning to live according to the rules of the room he's in. He's actually grown up to be a person who I would like to know in twenty years.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

Some parents felt strongly that nursery places should be available from a younger age. This was as much for the child's development as for the parent's independence.

'Basically just try and get somewhere that take the kids in from an earlier age because see by the time they go to nursery and they're three, they cling on to you and don't want to go because they're not getting that opportunity to go and mingle, well, interact with other kids. So I think they should maybe take them from a younger age.'

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

Some parents talked of the positive impact that attending nursery had on their child's development:

'When she is at nursery she is more outgoing. It's great for socialization.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

'[the services] are brilliant. When they're playing like that they're learning.'

PARENT, FIFE

Although parents felt that childcare could contribute to their children's development, there was also a concern that long days for children in childcare and parents working long hours could have a detrimental impact on that development.

'...for some children their day can be from half seven in the morning actually to half six, seven o'clock at night. How are children coping with that? Because this whole thing about children being robust and resilient and able to cope with change and transitions, we know now, falls down at every hurdle because if the emotional support isn't at home, parents are tired and then if it's just gestures of toys and products being given and the emotional availability isn't there then we're letting our children be extremely vulnerable.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

B. AFFORDABILITY

Throughout our conversations with parents the cost of childcare was the major issue and overall the biggest barrier preventing the parents we spoke to accessing formal services. The lack of affordable childcare had a major impact on already stretched household incomes and the ability of parents on low incomes to find or sustain work.

KEY MESSAGE 2:

THE COST OF CHILDCARE IS TOO HIGH – PARTICULARLY FOR PARENTS ON LOW INCOMES

'I think it just boils down to money. I think that's the biggest, you know, that's the common denominator in all the conversations, it comes down to money, the amount you get paid and the amount you have to scrape by to cover.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

Parents gave a number of examples of the high cost of childcare they were facing.

'I pay £6500 a year for two full time places for two children under 12.'

PARENT, DUNDEE

'I pay £480 [a month] for two children to go to nursery for two and half days a week.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'It costs me £300 per week for two children to get looked after full time.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

While many parents recognised that you have to pay for quality services they felt that the burden of costs to parents should be reduced, particularly for parents living on lower incomes.

'I expect to pay something for childcare but at the moment I pay 50% of my salary on childcare. That's more than my mortgage. It's getting to a point where it's difficult to see the point of working.'

PARENT, DUNDEE

'I think it's very difficult to lower the prices of the nurseries because the number of carers that you need per the number of children a carer can take charge, so, in that sense it must be, the nurseries might receive some kind of help in order for the money to go round.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'I think it would help parents if the childcare facility available to them did not cost as much. The hourly rate for childcare is expensive... make childcare more affordable for those on a low income... please make childcare cheaper.'

PARENT, WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE

The recent reduction in the proportion of the costs of childcare that parents living on lower incomes can claim back, through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit from 80% to 70%, along with other reductions in tax credits, was highlighted by many parents as adding to an already difficult situation.

'Well they have now reduced the amount you get towards childcare to 70% so I would need to be able to find 30% of childcare costs which would involve nursery and after-school care fees which if I was on minimum wage I could not afford. I could not, I've sat down and it's all been worked out for me and I've been told that I just couldn't afford to go back to work. So I would need to be earning a lot, lot more than minimum wage.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

'[previously] the tax credits were giving us £150 a week which was phenomenal, it pretty much paid for it [childcare]. And then all of a sudden we got a letter, 'bang, right you're getting £70 a week' So we couldn't afford to put him in.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

Parents told us that compounding the cost issue was the fact that many childcare services required up-front payment to cover the first month, which was very difficult for those on low incomes to cover.

'It's the four week advance that's the biggest issue.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'...there's no point in finding a child minder if you've not got four or five hundred pounds to pay her because she's not going to take your child. You know, you need that month in advance, and a nursery's the same, they will want their money in advance...'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'... if you're wanting to start a job, how do you get the money first off? Like me and my partner save for a couple of months we'd have money...but what if the job opportunity that I want to go for would be still available, do you know what I mean?'

PARENT, INVERNESS

A clear message from many parents was that accessing childcare involved a number of additional costs, such as transport.

'The cost of the actual childcare and the travel to get to, if there is none local you would have to go farther afield, you know. So it's cost of travel and the childcare.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'I don't feel as if I'd have a choice because if (name of child) was going into council nursery I'd want to put him in the nearest one so I've not got any bus fares because I can't afford the bus fares.'

PARENT, DUNDEE

For parents with more than one child, the cost of childcare was an even greater problem.

'If you're paying for two in a nursery you're talking probably up to £80 a day so that's probably higher than the average wage. Most people are actually going to be losing money with two kids in that situation.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'I now have to consider three lots of childcare...so that's three separate lots of children, three lots of pickups, three lots of communications that have to take place and three lots of payments that I have to manage, not to mention actually finding the money to make the payments. So it's a bit of a quandary at the moment for me, to be honest, being unable to properly cover the cost of childcare from a part time wage so having to return to work full time in order to pay for childcare. Not going back to work is not financially viable either, what my husband earns isn't enough to keep us as a family but we're not entitled to any additional support either.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

One parent who had a very positive experience of using a childminder – who provided a trustworthy, reasonably priced and local based service – when she had one child, had to leave work when her second child arrived as she could not afford childcare for both children.

'I've got another wee girl who's two but I just couldn't afford the childcare, I had to stop working, couldn't afford for the two kids. Had to leave the job because of childcare. So expensive.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

A particular concern for parents with school aged children was the expense of after-school and holiday care which often involved trips and other extra-curricular activities which added to the cost.

'The after-school care does run during the summer holidays but it's not just the cost of the after-school care, if they go out on any day trips you need to fund that. You need to give them packed lunches...it's very, very expensive during the summer holidays to send them to after-school care.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

KEY MESSAGE 3:

PARENTS HAVE A STRONG DESIRE TO WORK – BUT FEEL TRAPPED BY THE COST OF CHILDCARE

A strong theme to emerge from the discussions was that a high proportion of parents – both those in work and those not currently in work – had a strong desire to work. However, lack of affordable childcare meant that simply wanting to work was not enough in itself.

'Most of us here do want to work...but with childcare support from the government reduced to 70%, you need extra money to pay for childcare, so you have to work longer hours, and sometimes travel further. All of it has a huge knock on effect. I have had to up my hours from 20 to 25 hours per week because working 20 and paying full rent and council tax has left me with nothing.'

PARENT, FIFE

'I've always worked since I was fifteen. I'd go to school and then work and it's just, I don't want to sit on the brew or sit in the house. You get bored. Give me something to do. Plus you need money and everything is just getting really expensive these days especially with kids as well. You don't want to just sit and just scrape by all your life. You want to be able to go and do things with them and stuff.'

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

'It's a vicious circle. It's not that we don't want to work, we are trapped in a sense.'

PARENT, FIFE

'I feel trapped, I don't want to be on benefits I want to be out working, and contributing properly, if you like... but I feel trapped and I don't like it. I don't like not being able to go out and work because...there's nobody there to help look after my wee one unless it's going to cost.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

A related point that emerged is that a great many of the parents that we spoke to felt they were the victim of stigmatising – by other parents, through the media and by society as a whole. In particular, parents resented the perception that parents who were not working had chosen not to work, or that they were ‘scroungers’ or ‘lazy’ if they were dependent on benefits.

‘... we do it all and we do it all standing on our heads because we are so good at doing everything but everyone just thinks we don’t want to work.’

PARENT, DUNDEE

‘If you are on benefits, automatically, it doesn’t matter what reason you are on benefits for you’re not wanting a job and all you want to do is sit on your arse all day. My partner suffers from depression so I care for her and help look after my daughter. I would love to have a job and I can’t just now.’

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

‘Just because you’ve got more money doesn’t make you a better parent.’

PARENT, INVERNESS

Stigma was a particular issue for single mothers.

‘... It’s to do with stigma, a lot of people think that, you know, lone parents prefer to live on benefits and I hate it. I absolutely hate it. I’m in the same situation, I want to work but childcare is a huge restriction for me.’

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

Some parents pointed to the media as a source of negative perceptions of single mothers.

‘Especially since the media puts it out that there is so much in place to help us but it doesn’t help... So everybody thinks that we have got these amazing chances and we are just sitting there going ‘no, I want to stay at home.’

PARENT, GLASGOW

‘It’s just this idea that if we were, if we were any kind of person we would have had a baby with somebody, be married to them and then we would get all the benefits because then we’d be good enough. And even in the papers it’s full of things, they’re married parents, couples, they’re better parents. It’s undermining us at every turn.’

PARENT, GLASGOW

Some parents shared their experiences and views of services designed to help them into work which they felt had a negative view of single mothers.

‘What I’m trying to say is the whole attitude, stigma, it’s not just newspaper, people that work, neighbours that look down on you because you’re not working, you’re a single mum and everything, it’s people that’s meant to help you at the job centre that make you feel like that. And they’re there to do their job to help you in any way and to make you feel supported and they’re not.’

PARENT, GLASGOW

‘I’ve noticed a big difference phoning up and saying I’m a single mum, than last year when I was married... peoples’ responses are really negative even people that are meant to help you.’

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

KEY MESSAGE 4:**THE HIGH COST OF CHILDCARE MEANS THAT PARENTS ON LOW INCOMES ARE OFTEN NO BETTER OFF IF THEY WORK**

For a great many of the parents we spoke with, the ultimate consequence of the high cost of childcare was simple – it no longer paid to work.

'I went back to work after my first one...I'm not going back to work this time. The cost of paying for three children at nursery is too much, especially because me and my partner are working so we wouldn't get any help. I'm better off at home.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'I'd be £3 better off after paying for childcare.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'When working 20 hours a week, I'd be £11 per month better off.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'Well I worked and I wasn't better off, that's why I packed my job in as well.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'It just feels wrong, doesn't it? For a society that's talking about getting people off benefits and not having a culture of people on benefits for generations, where's the incentive?'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

The high cost of childcare was a particular barrier for single mothers who wished to work.

'I would like to return to work but the government is making it impossible for single mums to go to work. I have had it all worked out for me. I'd need to pay nursery for one and after school care for the other. If I was on minimum wage I couldn't afford it. I can't get back to work because I honestly couldn't afford to. I wouldn't make enough to pay the 30% you now have to pay towards childcare. But I'd like to.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

Some parents described how the high cost of childcare made it difficult even to look for work or gain experience.

'How can we find the money for childcare to look for work in the first place? Unless we have that childcare we couldn't take a job, coz how could we pay upfront.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

KEY MESSAGE 5:**A LACK OF AFFORDABLE, SUITABLE CHILDCARE IS MAKING BALANCING PARENTING AND WORKING EVEN MORE DIFFICULT**

The complexity of arranging childcare and balancing formal and informal support with work was a source of stress for parents.

'It's just like a circle and see the stress that I've been dealing with trying to get childcare is unbelievable.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'I'm rushing around all the time between school, childminders, work.'

PARENT, DUNDEE

Parents told us how a lack of suitable childcare was making it increasingly difficult to balance working or studying with their parental responsibilities and desire to spend quality time with their children. Many parents felt that the combined pressure of working and family life was becoming intolerable, and that more help was needed to help them balance the two.

'I want to go to work but it puts so much pressure on you. You want to go and do a good job and be a team player and be conscientious, but you have the travel beforehand, after-hand, and you're worrying about your kids are they ok, if you are doing a however many hours a day job you can't then go home and be all happy and I'm going to be the totally brilliant mother you need. Come the weekend you are absolutely shattered and that's when they want to do stuff.'

PARENT, FIFE

A common phrase used throughout the conversations was 'Catch 22', particularly in relation to trying to find work and childcare. Parents found it difficult to determine whether it's better to try to find work without childcare in place first or to find childcare and then look for work.

One parent likened it to 'what comes first the chicken or the egg?'

PARENT, INVERNESS

'It's not the work. I can find a job but can't find childcare.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

Others went further – saying the cost of childcare meant that having a family and a career was not realistic.

'So you're either choosing have the career or have the baby unless you're lucky to have a big family.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

Parents also spoke about the difficulty of working and making the time for their children. Parents expressed their feelings of 'guilt' about being away from their children.

'So, there I will be, it will be again how to negotiate myself with my company how to balance between both of us, if I can have flexible time to keep one day with [childs name]. At the same time I look at the prices of the nurseries and think 'oof'...'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'And guilt does strange things to you, as a mother, you know, you either shut down completely or you're constantly beating yourself up and trying to over-compensate.'

PARENT, INVERNESS

There was a concern that working too many hours would be detrimental to their role as a parent.

'...you might have the money to do things and you might have enough money for childcare but you don't get that quality time with your child.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'I chose to leave [a job] because I wasn't getting enough quality time with [child's name].'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'And for as good as the nursery is, you know, the time you spend with your child is, to me, is more valuable. So you kind of sacrifice the money side of it in a way and it's just trying to get that, that balance.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

Generally speaking, parents expressed the view that the main benefit to working was not financial. Parents did not think it realistic that they would get a well-paid job that would significantly improve their income, especially after taking into account childcare costs. At best, parents considered any financial gain from working to be long term to maintain a career or a job later on in life.

'You don't earn any money. You just pay childcare. And it's to keep your job on for the future. And your sanity.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

Instead, many parents felt strongly that work was an important part of the parent's identity, boosted their self-esteem and provided a good example to their children.

'[be]yourself again, rather than just someone's mum.'

PARENT, HAMILTON

'Work is me time, not running about after someone else. Just me again like before I had children. But going to work and knowing that the kids are with someone safe so I can earn money to treat them... I'm not someone's mother, I'm me.'

PARENT, HAMILTON

'We want our kids to look up to us. We all want to be somebody.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'...you want to work for your own self-esteem but it also sets a really good example for your children. I know for my son, for him to see me going out and studying...it's really helped him to sit down and study for his standard grades and his Highers. You have got to be able to set an example for your children but it has to be an affordable example.'

PARENT, FIFE

It should be noted a number of parents we spoke with stated their preference for staying at home and looking after their children over finding work and felt strongly that this should be a viable option for them.

'Why do single parents not have the choice to stay at home, rather than being forced into work? Working should be a personal choice. Looking after children is a contribution to society.'

PARENT, DUNDEE

'I would be horrified if I had to leave my kids from eight in the morning to six at night. Why should that be taken away from me? I want to be their mum so why am I not allowed to? Why should you be pushed into doing more hours?'

PARENT, FIFE

C. FLEXIBILITY

Although cost was the major barrier identified by parents to accessing childcare, a lack of flexibility was another common theme in our conversations with parents and was a particular barrier in terms of gaining or maintaining work or study.

KEY MESSAGE 6:

CHILDCARE SERVICES MUST BE MORE FLEXIBLE IF THEY ARE TO SUPPORT PARENTS INTO WORK

Some parents were frustrated that the variety of hours that people work – shift work, weekend work and so on – was not reflected in the childcare that was available.

'There is no childcare available at weekends for the work that is available.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'There is no childcare available in Dundee at weekends. It's a living nightmare.'

PARENT, DUNDEE

'You are making all these brow policies to get people back to work, but why are you not balancing this with affordable childcare that is as flexible as employers are demanding in their expectations of an employee?'

PARENT, DUNDEE

A few parents spoke about 'sitter services', which provided a flexible solution, sometimes in the family's home. Although these services could be extremely flexible, parents spoke about how expensive they could be – often well out of the reach of parents on low incomes. Parents also felt that these services often lacked continuity of care with the same sitter which parents found could add to their emotional stress.

'...they actually come to your house, em, to look after the kids and if they have to stay late they will stay late. They're quite flexible but their rates are like £15 an hour.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

Free nursery provision for three and four year olds was generally welcomed, especially in terms of helping parents to meet the everyday needs of the child and their learning and development. It was significantly more limited in terms of helping parents to work, however, because of the brief nature (two and a half hours) of the sessions.

'That's not really giving you time to put them in if you had a job, you can't get a job for another two hours a day and still be able to go back and get them.'

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

'See a lot of nursery hours should be extended I think because kids are not getting that long in nursery. I feel as if I'm just putting her into nursery, going home and it's time to go get her again.'

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

'I'm hoping in those few hours I can do something, however, I'll then obviously come off benefits, do a couple of hours a day, but how's a couple of hours a day going to have, pay me my bills and look after me and my four kids?'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'Theoretically it [the increase in nursery provision] makes a difference to your ability to work but actually in practice...'

PARENT, GLASGOW

'...there are no jobs, really, very little that work between nine thirty and two, five days a week, and term time. You know, very little.'

PARENT, INVERNESS

'...if [child's name] starts nursery in January and it's two and a half hours, I couldn't even get a job in a café for that because... no way on earth I would be like 'oh well, right, I would love this job, I can only work two and a half hours Monday to Friday.'

PARENT, INVERNESS

Many parents described how a lack of flexibility in the way nursery hours were provided caused problems for parents if their circumstances changed.

'... when you sign the contract at the beginning of the term they can be quite difficult about changing it, like, even say mid-term you were looking to change, they'll basically tell you you have to wait until the start of next term before you can change again if your circumstances change.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

Increasing flexibility of the free nursery hours provided was popular amongst parents.

'We want more flexibility. It would be great if we could bunch together our nursery placements over full days [instead of half days]'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'See if they could group the two and a half hours more over two days or three days rather than five days so you get a lot more time.'

PARENT, WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE

'I think it would be good if you're given blocks of full days because a lot of mums need full days rather than half days.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'If you could use it [the nursery entitlement] as full days you could go back to work but because you're not allowed to use it as full days you can't.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

There was also frustration expressed by the parents we spoke to at the lack of link up between relevant policies that impacted on both working and childcare. For example, in order to qualify for support with the costs of paying for childcare through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit parents need to work at least 16 hours a week, while funded nursery provision is only available for between 12.5 and 15 hours a week.

'I've got a 2 year old at nursery 15hrs a week but that's one hour less than you need to work to get any of the working tax credit.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

One parent argued that instead of increasing the number of hours of free nursery provision it would be better for parents to have that provision available earlier.

'I think it'd be better taking it to age two and a half because... with nursery, they're not starting when they're three, they're starting when they're the term after. In my case, my daughter's three, was three in March, it's August before she starts. So you've got to, you know, you need that extra six months there to plan ahead...you know, that extra six months of paid childcare would definitely help. Even though it is just on a fifteen hours a week, it's still free childcare that does help. But from age two and a half it would make a big difference.'

PARENT, FIFE

KEY MESSAGE 7: EMPLOYERS NEED TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEEDS OF WORKING PARENTS

Parents felt that employers could be more understanding of the pressures and responsibilities faced by employees with children.

'I think some employers really need to sit down and talk about it and consider people with young children.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'I had a problem with my work place as they started putting me on some weekend shifts even though I said I couldn't work then because there is no weekend childcare. At first I had to get my mum to watch him. Then they just changed my shifts so I was in permanently on a Saturday. I just said I can't do this because you can't get any childcare on the weekends, and my mum couldn't cope.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

Parents described difficulties in finding childcare when there was an unplanned or unexpected event, for example their child was sick, teachers strike, or school closure. They had to either take unpaid leave, or use holidays. Some parents had 'carer leave' policies at their work which helped to cover childcare for unexpected situations, but this was viewed as unusual.

'I think a lot of employers could be a bit more flexible around, em, maybe not necessarily around the childcare issues but child related issues, as in, you might have to leave quite quickly if your child's sick. You might have to come in late because you have to take your child to the doctor or the dentist.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

One parent argued that employers should provide more childcare – for the benefit of both families and employers.

'I think I'd like to see a lot more employer based childcare, and I think that could make a big difference for people... and because the number of working days that must be lost because of childcare...there's got to be a gain for employers there as well if they were to consider these type of things.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

A small number of parents did have flexible working, although some worried that it would be removed.

'I do [have flexible working] and it is quite common in the culture of my company to have it. I'm off one day a week...but, you know, you are always thinking it could be removed at any moment.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

Others suggested more job sharing between parents as a possible solution.

'I think like another thing would be like, job-sharing, see if like me and [other parent] decided we wanted to work in a nursery and I could watch [other parent's child] on the days that I was off and she could watch [her child]...'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

The gendered nature of childcare was particularly evident in discussions around work practices. The perceptions of some mothers who took part in the conversations was that they felt that male employers did not fully appreciate the challenges of finding childcare for working women – as their experiences as men were significantly different.

'I think some employers really need to sit down and talk about it and consider people with young children because their wives are sitting at home with their young children so they've no worries if it's a man. But they've got to think about it.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

There was a view from some parents that the gendered nature of caring roles also impacted on men with childcare responsibilities. Some mothers described the cultural barriers their partners faced in the workplace in terms of balancing work with their role as parents.

'I think some employers are better than others in terms of understanding the flexibility required. However, I think it's more afforded to females than it is to males, and a bit of recognition there that actually the female, the male isn't always the main breadwinner, sometimes, it'll be that male, whatever position they're in, they need to change their working pattern and I still think that's quite frowned upon.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'Where my husband asked for the two weeks off and to take an extra week's holiday because I had a section and they gave him so much gyp. Not one person has taken paternity leave since he did it. Because they just frowned upon it so much and the guys just thought it's not worth it.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

D. AVAILABILITY

The final theme to emerge from the conversations was availability. Parents had a wide variety of experiences when it came to availability of childcare. Parents who wished to study faced particular challenges in this regard. The lack of available childcare is forcing many parents to rely on informal sources of childcare, usually family.

**KEY MESSAGE 8:
THE AVAILABILITY OF CHILDCARE
VARIES SIGNIFICANTLY**

Our conversations with parents revealed a remarkably high level of agreement as to what the main barriers to childcare were. That said, there was some evidence of local differences in provision, especially with regard to availability and accessibility of childcare services. For some parents, there were childcare services with plentiful places available nearby, while for others accessing childcare involved long waiting lists and long journeys.

A number of parents gave examples of how availability of childcare was a particular issue for them.

'All child minders around here are packed and the after school clubs are bursting at the seams, there is a real lack of investment and provision here.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'See the nursery I want [child's name] to go to, there's a really, really big waiting list and it's only the afternoons they take as well, or the mornings, you have to choose what one suits you.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'...our problem now is that many nurseries have a waiting list and you need to get your wee ones on it and hopefully you'll get a job at the same time. If I found a job, the first likelihood of us finding a nursery within two weeks would be very slim.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

On the other hand, many parents – often in the same area – did not have the same problems.

'Well, when we put [child's name] into [service name] it wasn't an issue getting him a place, it was a couple of weeks' notice, he was in. Which is good on that front.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'I think it's always went smooth with me, like, the three of mine went to [name of nursery], like they went in when they were three and there wasn't really a waiting list or anything. There was always spaces in there, so, and that was a brilliant nursery. So, never had any complaints.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

It was a similar story in terms of accessibility. For some parents, especially those in rural areas, there was a lack of local, accessible childcare services.

'I think up here in the Highlands, it's so far apart... [there is] after school care in Kilbochie but that takes in Och, and you're talking miles away. It's not like your city centres...'

PARENT, INVERNESS

'I had to get two buses to the childminder, and there's the paying for the childminder and then for the travel and if anything was wrong it's just a long way to travel in an emergency because I don't drive.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'I have to walk 45 minutes to take my three and a half year old daughter to nursery.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

On a related point, some parents said that it is difficult to find information about what childcare is available locally without access to a computer or the internet.

'I didn't really know where to start. Aye, you get the odd advert typed or something in the shop windows and that but where else do you look?'

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

'I found, to be honest, the same with all the parents, it's very difficult to find information. At least if you are very, very proactive...you have to work, really researching for information and nowadays there is so much information that it is difficult to filter, you cannot find it.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

On the other hand, some parents felt that information was plentiful but this didn't improve their situation.

'[It is] easy enough to find out what the options are, it's just about none of them really meeting my needs and none of them are really that financially accessible. It doesn't matter how many places you can go to give you advice, it doesn't change those facts.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

KEY MESSAGE 9:**THERE ARE PARTICULAR CHILDCARE CHALLENGES FOR PARENTS WISHING TO STUDY**

Parents spoke of a number specific challenges – distinct to those associated with working – in accessing childcare when studying or training.

Several parents talked about their desire to further their skills by taking up college and other education places. However, difficulties accessing childcare to enable parents to take up places were described as a key barrier, making it very difficult or even impossible to pursue further education.

'I tried to get back to college about a month ago – it was just barrier after barrier. They told me I had to secure childcare first and then apply for the course, before I knew whether or not I was accepted.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

'I don't get help with tax credits because I'm a student and my husband works full time, so we don't get any help with our fees that way. So it is a bit of a struggle because basically you've got your student loan to live on and pay nursery fees. But the nursery fees here have been okay. Before my daughter was here I'd looked to two private nurseries to put them in and I was quoted £1000 a month. And it was like, well, there's absolutely no way I can go to university because I can't afford to pay £1000 a month in childcare fees but luckily, you know, the fees here are a lot cheaper so that has helped out a lot as I struggle, it's always a struggle. ... I'm going to university to try and better myself but you know, there's no way I can pay £1000 a month in childcare, but what other option would I have? '

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'I was meant to start college but I never had childcare and the college [nursery] was full. I had the social care course, meant to start in the beginning, well, 17th August there. But I never had childcare and my mum couldn't do it because she's not well...plus she's a full-time carer for my brother so that was it. Out the window... I got the place at college but I just didn't have childcare.'

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

At one level, parents spoke positively about the childcare available to them to engage with further education and entry level courses. However, there appeared to be less childcare available the higher the qualification available.

'As soon as I went on to do HNC [Higher National Certificate], they wouldn't cover the cost of my childcare... I found that second year a bit of a struggle; my mum had to help me quite a lot. I didn't complete the course as my mum got unwell and was unable to help me.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

'I want to do my Bachelors. The main concern is that you can't get childcare for university...If you want to further your education, you've no hope. Unless you can pay £350...a week for private nursery all day.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

Parents spoke about their experiences of the highly variable practice, provision, costs and experiences of trying to access childcare while in further education.

'Some [colleges] provide it [childcare] but you never know...and getting the funding is a real stress.'

PARENT, GLASGOW

Once again, the issue of cost was raised in relation to childcare and studying with some college childcare services being very expensive.

'Well, I know, the [name of college], that's £42 a day for your kid to be in there. You wouldn't even make that a day. Well, I wouldn't.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

One of the biggest issues that parents described as a barrier to finding suitable childcare whilst studying was that course hours are often not announced until the first week of term, leaving parents grappling with beginning a course and trying to get family and friends to look after their children until they can arrange childcare for the rest of the term.

'You don't know what your hours will be until you start, on the day of the induction.'

PARENT, FIFE

'Well, I started college there on Monday but I can't get childcare until I get my timetable, and then trying to get funding for childcare, people are telling me all different stuff and I'm just so confused.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'Going to college, childcare is proving to be a bit of an issue in that I've found a child minder, however you don't know what your hours are going to be until you start college, you then don't know if your childcare is going to be funded because it depends on the college pot.'

PARENT, FIFE

Parents also spoke of the demands that undertaking further education placed on them. Even where parents have childcare to attend their course, unless they had informal childcare from friends and family, they were unable to study for exams or assignments until after their children were sleeping. This added to the stresses and demands of daily life, and was cited a number of times as a reason for dropping out of education.

'At night, doing your essays, studying and things is hard with the wee one. I lived on my own and had literally no-one to sit there with him while I did my essay.'

PARENT, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

Once again, the 'catch 22' of childcare was highlighted, this time with regard to improving job prospects through studying.

'...because without your qualification you might not get the job you want, without the job, you can't pay for the childcare...'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

KEY MESSAGE 10:**MANY PARENTS HAVE TO RELY ON FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOR CHILDCARE THROUGH NECESSITY RATHER THAN CHOICE**

Our conversations with parents lifted the lid on a reality where a lack of suitable childcare meant that parents had to rely more than they would like to on informal support in the form of family and friends to supplement what formal services they were able to access.

'I still need to use the nursery full time and rely on my family because I work shifts, so there isn't a nursery out there that would be open to work, like cover the hours that I work because I do early shift, backshifts and nightshifts. So I still need to, my mum works Monday to Friday as well, like during the day so I need to wait for her to come in. In fact, (cousin's name) has to take (child's name) home to her house, then my mum has to pick (name) up from (name's) and take her home from there because (name's) actually my cousin, so, it's family.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'I've got to get my 82 year old father up on the train from Glasgow to look after one of the weeks for [child's name]. Do you know, and it's not fair, but it is the only thing you can do.'

PARENT, INVERNESS

For parents who did not have a large network of family and friends nearby, for instance if they had only recently moved to the area, childcare options were even more limited.

'I want to go back to work but I can't get both of mine into childcare. Other people can ask their families to help, but I can't.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

Even for those with family and friends close at hand, relying on these informal sources of childcare was far from ideal, not least because those family and friends have their own responsibilities.

'When the situation I was in where my own parent was looking after them two days a week but my mum works full time nightshift so essentially she was looking after them all day on a Monday, going to work a nightshift on the Monday night, working all night Thursday nightshift and taking them straight on a Friday having not slept. I just think that's unsustainable.'

PARENT, RENFREWSHIRE

'Why should they [family] be looking after your kids? Why should they have to? I've got family but they all work'

PARENT, GLASGOW

'... my mum works full time and I've got young children so I can't rely on them, see what I mean?'

PARENT, INVERNESS

Parents also recognised that relying on family and friends was not a sustainable, long term solution to childcare problems.

'You can't rely on your pals all the time you know what I mean, or family because they're not always going to be there.'

PARENT, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

With so many parents reliant on family to help with childcare, there was strong support for more formal recognition – preferably financial – for the role that family plays.

'I definitely think it'd be good if we could somehow either recognise that network of extra carers, grandparents, and do something for them, you know, have something that acknowledges what they do and how they do it.'

PARENT, EDINBURGH

'Because that's what my mum used to say, "if I could stay in and look after the weans I would, if I got paid for it."

PARENT, GLASGOW

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

This report sets out the views and voices of parents about their experiences of childcare. It highlights their ability to speak directly about major policy issues affecting their lives and the lives of their children.

There is not one single factor that makes finding childcare difficult for parents. Rather, there are a number of different and often overlapping elements that vary in importance depending on the specific circumstances and needs of individual families. What is clear, however, is that parents living on low incomes are facing specific and identifiable challenges when it comes to finding suitable childcare that provides opportunities that can aid their children's growth and development and allow them to successfully balance the demands of work or training with raising a family.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the conversations we had with parents is the level of consensus that emerged. Families are facing very similar barriers to accessing childcare wherever they live, most pertinently expensive and inflexible provision. Parents also want similar things from childcare provision, namely high quality care that benefits their children and is easily affordable and accessible.

LISTENING TO FAMILIES ABOUT CHILDCARE

Our report, *Give us a hand with childcare*, sets out the experiences, views and voices of parents in Scotland about childcare. It highlights their ability to speak directly about major policy issues affecting their lives and the lives of their children. Save the Children believes that the voices of parents, particularly those living on low incomes or with experience of poverty should be at the heart of the local and national government drive to improve early learning and childcare in Scotland. Parents are passionate about giving their children the best possible start in life. The insights they have shared with us reinforces our conviction that all parents have a valuable contribution to make in shaping the future of Scotland's childcare system. With the right support and opportunities all families can achieve great things and every child can thrive.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

Katie McSherry, Campaigner (Scotland)
 E: k.mcsherry@savethechildren.org.uk
 T: +44 (0)131 572 8232

- i In the context of this report, we are referring to childcare in the broadest sense – encompassing early learning and care, out of school care and both formal and informal types of care.
- ii Throughout this report 'parent' refers to anyone who has responsibility for bringing up children.
- iii The term 'work' in this report refers to paid employment. We have used this term as it is the language that was predominately used by parents used during the conversations.
- iv See Childcare debate, Scottish Parliament, 8th May 2013:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=8455&mode=pdf>
- v Equal Opportunities Committee (2013) Women and Work:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/64971.aspx>

Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.
We help them fulfil their potential.

savethechildren.org.uk/scotland



Save the Children

Save the Children
2nd Floor, Prospect House,
5 Thistle Street, Edinburgh EH2 1DF

Registered charity England and Wales (213890) Scotland (SC039570)