

JERSEY CHILD CARE TRUST

Speech to the Standing Committee on Women's Organisations Monday 14 July 2008

First of all, apologies from Fiona Vacher for not being here. She is on annual leave so I am afraid that in her absence you get the Chairman of the Trust.

Let me start by saying a few words about the Trust and its activities before turning to why child care and early years education is so important, and then what is needed for the future.

The Trust was formed in 1997 with remit to coordinate, promote and facilitate the expansion of high quality and affordable child care in the Island. The Trust has a small team of four core staff under Fiona. The Trust has a Board of Trustees which currently totals ten in number of whom three are appointed as representatives of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and the Ministry of Social Security.

The Trust receives a grant of just over £160,000 from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture and attracts private funding through bodies such as Lloyds TSB Foundation, BBC Children in Need, and local businesses which last year totalled around £100,000.

Much of the private funding is obtained in support of two of the Trust's key projects. There is the Special Needs Inclusion Project which provides for one to one support for children with special needs enabling them to access mainstream early years child care. Two local charitable trusts have also helped fund the Supported Places Scheme where children who are unable to access a free nursery class place receive financial support if they are referred by a professional for a social and/or developmental reason and meet strict criteria. This project ensures that the children concerned receive some early years education and care before commencing formal schooling.

The Trust provides grant support to private nurseries to help them improve their facilities. The Trust also provides an information service for parents and providers of child care.

The Trust runs a nanny accreditation scheme which professionally recognises qualified nannies meeting strict quality criteria. We organise a family friendly employer of the year award and we support training and last but not least we compile a list of approved baby sitters who are police checked and referenced to assist parents with a flexible form of child care in the child's own home.

Why do we do all this? We do it because we have a States remit to perform. But more particularly we do it because we are committed to the principle enunciated in the States of Jersey Strategic Plan 2006-2011 that all forms of investment in the Island's children from the earliest years is an important and necessary investment in the Island's future.

We believe that there is a continuing and urgent need to address issues impacting on the ability to provide adequate, high quality and affordable child care in the Island. We see a need for a public/private sector partnership in child care provision and we see a need for equality of treatment of parents and children according to their needs.

We are also seeking to ensure that there is both a general understanding and an acceptance of the real benefits that are obtained from an investment in children from their earliest years. These benefits include –

- improved academic performance;
- enhanced social skills;
- reduced requirement for supporting special needs;
- a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour;
- improved life skills and job satisfaction.

Research and experience in other countries has shown that many of the problems surrounding the activities of young people have their roots in the lack of adequate investment and support made available to children in their formative years.

Many parents who wish to work can be disincentivised by the high cost of child care. Enabling parents to support their families through work rather than through benefits is an important objective to secure from which the economy as well as the children and their parents benefit.

There is an excellent standard of child care provision at the present time through public and private nurseries but there is growing evidence that through the high cost of child care there is a real risk of child care being provided in situations where the required standards are not met.

The present policy of providing States funded nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds at no cost to the parents while of benefit to those able to enjoy this facility has had a detrimental affect on the viability of private nurseries. This has had two consequences. One has been the need for the private providers to increase child care fees; and the other is an increasing difficulty in providing affordable child care for the 0-3's.

Not only is there a lack of equality in the fact that some seeking child care have the opportunity to obtain this at no cost while others are faced with the increasing cost of private sector provisions. In addition, there is no certainty that all those enjoying the free facilities provided by the public sector will be those in greatest need of such a free service.

The Trust does not wish to see the present inequality responded to by introducing charges for the States funded nursery classes. In the view of the Trust, investment in children from their earliest years should be viewed as being as important for the children, and as beneficial for the community at

large, as investment in children in their later years, and should be equally freely available for all concerned.

Last month the Jersey Child Care Trust brought to the Island Dr John Bennett, an adviser to the international body, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Some of the key points that he made during his two day visit to the Island were -

- from birth to 3 years is a privileged age for brain development, physical and motor development, concept and language acquisition;
- there is evidence that for the first year to 18 months a one to one relationship between parents and children in the family home is preferable. Clearly this is difficult if both parents have to work. What the Nordic countries have done is to offer paid parental leave of about one year. As a result in Sweden it is rare to see a child below the age of 18 months in a Swedish early childhood centre. This policy also avoids the financing of costly infant services;
- what experience elsewhere has also shown is that when we talk about equality of treatment we have to realise that this does not mean giving the same treatment to all. Children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds need more than those from more advantaged situations. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds will often need -
 - more services (health, nutrition as well as early education);
 - higher quality services in terms of the best teachers. Research has shown that whereas children aged 3 in higher social economic group families would have a vocabulary of over 1000 words, for those in the lower social economic groups of the same age the vocabulary would be less than 500 words;

- a greater intensity of service provision in that they are more likely to come from families where the parents will be working all day. They will need an earlier start frequently in child care provision and will need child care provision of daily duration;
- those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds will also often require more specialities. They will often come from immigrant families and require language teachers, their housing conditions etc, they will call for more medical screening and more social work.

In the Netherlands for example the funding support for child care facilities embodies extra funding for disadvantaged children so one financial unit of grant per child becomes 1.2 units for a disadvantaged child, and 1.5 units for a disadvantaged ethnic child;

- research has shown that the level of qualification of the staff in child care facilities is important. The research in Norway has shown that the more qualified the staff the better the results;
- as indicated, for the first 12-18 months of a child's life giving support to parents through good maternity and parental leave is preferred. After 18 months there is strong evidence that children benefit from services and interaction with other children and professional adults (e.g. Pathways leading to Nursery at Samares;
- there are a range of requirements from those families who are looking for part-time child care – that is just mornings – and others who require child care throughout the day. While it is possible to provide day long services through wrap around care, whereby formal nursery care is supplemented by play groups etc, research elsewhere shows that there is great advantage in a child developing within a single environment;

- there is a need to move away from the division between care and education. All education should have an element of care and all care setting should contain some education.

Looking to the future, what are the options? As you know we have just had a consultation exercise and we are digesting all the helpful comments and conclusions coming out of the consultation exercise held on Thursday evening 3 July. The majority felt that the best way forward would be for the States to invest in a partnership between the public and private nursery organisations with free places at private nurseries as well as at States ones.

While providing 3 and 4 year olds with an entitlement to say 30 hours of care per week for 38 weeks a year free of charge within both public and private sector nurseries would be a big step forward, it has to be recognised that this in itself is not sufficient. This does not address the issue of how to provide for child care for the 0-3 year olds. Also it still leaves many parents, particularly those with relatively low incomes, having to pay for child care because they want more than the hours covered by a standard scheme.

What we need is a general acceptance that what we provide for children from their earliest years is of fundamental importance for their future and the future of the Island. We readily accept that education beyond the age of 5 should be free and yet the benefit obtained from that education is greatly affected by how much care and early years education is provided for those aged 0-4. This has been well recognised in many other jurisdictions. It can be argued that we have got our priorities wrong. We are making funds available in support of education up to the age of 18 and on into university education but we are neglecting the position of those aged 0-4.

We want the best. This requires quality nursery staff, it requires good quality accommodation and other facilities, it requires adequate support to be extended to those from poor and socially disadvantaged backgrounds and it

needs a range of opportunities to cater for the different needs of the families involved.

We want the States to give greater priority to Child Care and Early Years Education in the allocation of States resources. We want more resources allocated and more encouragement given. Children are our future.