



The Jersey Childcare Trust

Focus Group Report November 2012

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Jersey Child Care Trust (JCCT) Focus groups 2012

SECTION 1 Background

The JCCT commissioned some research to explore and develop the stakeholder's perspectives. The theme identified to be explored is 'What is life in Jersey like for your family?'. After a short consultation period it was felt that focus groups would enable identification of what people think as well as how and why they think that way. This would enable stakeholder's views to be ascertained and analysis could be undertaken to uncover emerging themes and therefore enable the JCCT to evolve to meet the requirements of Jersey's constantly changing population.

Focus groups have also been the chosen method of collecting data as they are non-discriminatory in terms of those who cannot read or write and also in an effort to facilitate the expression of ideas and experiences that may otherwise be overlooked.

Focus group work was undertaken with stakeholders during November and December 2012. A total of 5 focus groups took place. Participants were invited through a flyer and notifications via Facebook and through word of mouth. After initial poor uptake focus groups covering both full and part time working parents of both nursery and school age children were arranged. During the process of these focus groups a group was organized which involved expectant parents, this was in response to demand. All focus groups took place at 'The Bridge', other venues were considered and explored such as a town office and also at a nursery setting where extended care for the children would have been provided for the parents to enable their participation, however these were rejected due to lack of interest.

Some very rich data was elicited from the participants which has been categorised into 4 themes which show areas that have either been an issue for parents or are currently a concern for parents.

1.2 Recruitment and conduct of the groups

The JCCT handled the recruitment for all focus groups with the use of Facebook and contacts.

For each of the meetings, an agreed topic guide was used and the discussions were tape recorded during the session following verbal agreement from all participants. Tape recordings were transcribed by professional secretarial services. Respondents were

assured that the final report would be written in such a way that views could not be attributed to individuals and participants and their workplaces would not be identifiable.

The recruitment steps were as follows: the JCCT used a list of key contacts. The JCCT e-mailed a flyer to invite those on the list to attend a focus group. The JCCT also has a contact page on Facebook where the same flyer was placed. Where insufficient responses were received, JCCT followed up by telephone.

Each group meeting followed a standard format, with the JCCT delivering a brief overview of the reasons behind the research and the facilitator delivering a brief presentation of confidentiality and what was expected of the participants, before opening the meetings up to discussion and debate. A topic guide was also used by the facilitator in order to guide the discussion and ensure that all relevant issues were covered. Group members were offered refreshments whilst attending the meeting.

The recruitment and attendance for the focus groups is summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Table of recruitment

Participant	Children School	Children Nursery	Working (FT/PT)
1	2	0	PT
2	1	1	PT
3	0	1 (+ baby)	PT
4	1	0	PT
5	2	0	FT
6	2	1	FT
7	3	0	FT
8	1	0	FT
9	2	0	PT
10	2	0	PT
11	0	2	PT
12	2	0	FT
13	1 (+ baby)	0	FT
14	0	1	FT
15	2	0	PT
16	3	0	FT
17	0	1	FT
18	1	0	FT
19	1	1	PT
20	1	0	PT
21	1	0	PT
22	1	0	PT
23	0	0	FT
24	0	0	FT
25	0	0	FT
26	0	0	FT
27	0	0	FT

SECTION 2 Key Findings

This section summarizes the comments on the main topics made by each of the 5 groups, comprising both full and part time working parents of both nursery and school age children and expectant parents. The detailed reports for each group are contained in Section 3.

2.1 Note on qualitative research

Qualitative research provides a way to probe underlying attitudes and obtain an understanding of the important issues. It must be noted, however, that when interpreting these findings that they cannot be stated as statistical evidence. It is also important to note that we are dealing with perceptions, not facts. Although some participants may hold views based on incorrect information, the perceptions are reported in the following report without analysis or comment.

2.2 Emergent themes

Four themes have been identified through analysis of the interview transcripts. These are:

Affordability of Childcare

Accessibility of Childcare

Quality of Communication

Work / life Balance

Each of these themes will be developed with sub-themes in the subsequent sections, to show more specifically the areas within these themes that are issues for parents in Jersey.

2.3 Affordability of Childcare

Many of those who attended spoke of the huge benefit of having family in Jersey especially grandparents who helped with childcare needs and how invaluable this was. This also crosses over into 2.4 where there were accessibility issues and family stepped

in to help those struggling. Conversely others spoke of the disadvantage of being away from family who could be called on to help. The 20 hours of nursery care given free by the States of Jersey was felt to be an extremely helpful provision and it was especially commended for the fact that it is not income driven and is seen to be a real positive non-discriminatory extra help to all families. Issues around childcare cover in school holidays was also an affordability issue with the costs of activities and clubs also being high.

'I know a lot of people end up relying on their mum who perhaps isn't working to look after the children so that they can work to pay the mortgage' (3)

'my mother in law takes on 1 day a week....but without her I wouldn't be able to work. If I had to pay her there would be no way I could afford it' (4)

'I can't afford to work because I want to look after my baby and when you don't have family here, when you don't have family in Jersey then you are stuck' (5)

2.3.1 Cost of childcare

Childcare was unanimously seen as expensive, to the extent that some parents of school age children commented that private school education was a cheap option following on from nursery care. St Christopher's school was also mentioned as a cheaper option from the age of 2 1/2yrs and were reported to provide excellent wrap around care. In some circumstances childcare was costing near or even above the mother's salary and in some cases forced individuals to leave work.

Competition was felt to be lacking 'particularly because they (nurseries) are always full or full enough' (1)

'I'm actually the bigger earner so I would love to drop a day and I think with my work I could juggle it round and I could do it that way but I'm the earner so we couldn't afford financially for me to do it' (2)

'I would prefer to be at home with him but financially I don't have that option' (2)

'....so I pay half of my wages for 2 days a week at nursery' (4)

'We physically couldn't have afforded to live, to pay the mortgage unless I worked, but....going to cost between £36,000 and £48,000 in nursery fees for full time nursery' (3)

'all my salary went on childcare – my whole salary because I had 2(children)' (4)

'with a second child coming I don't think I can afford childcare' (4)

'part time is not really affordable' (5)

'we got charged a £75 administration fee when we spoke to the nursery initially. That's not even the deposit – they can charge for that as well...and fees to 'hold' the place' (5)

2.3.2 Childcare Tax Relief

The benefit of childcare tax relief was recognized but it was also noted that the child carers had to be registered for this to be received. It was also suggested that it is not well known and that some parents may be missing out on it. This overlaps with 2.5.

'No-one told us about childcare tax rates or anything like that' (5)

2.3.3 Healthcare costs

The cost of taking babies under 6 months to the GP was felt to be very expensive. It was suggested that free or a nominal charge for babies up to 6 months would alleviate a lot of stress for parents. Some even suggested that they would be prepared to wait at a clinic for free GP consultations.

2.3.4 Maternity entitlement

The lack of maternity law and variations in what parents are allowed to take in leave and the way they are paid during and after it does cause many issues for those who took part. It was suggested that 'things are improving for women' but there is still a lot of variation.

'14 weeks is allowed..... I extended it to 26 weeks..... I was on 90% pay which came in one big chunk and I only got the extra 10% that they had kept back until I had been in my original hours for 3 months' (2)

'I get 90% pay for 12 weeks and when I do go back to work they withhold it for 3 months.....that makes me feel as if I'm not trusted' (2)

'I think if you didn't have some savings you would seriously jeopardise your mortgage' (2)

'In my contract they gave me 3 months of which 6 weeks was paid' (2)

'I'm now getting 13 weeks' pay, they paid you the 6 weeks and then held over the 7 weeks until you return to work' (2)

'I wasn't entitled to that (maternity leave) either because I hadn't been with them for 2 years' (3)

'the contract says I have to wait a year for maternity leave' (4)

'there wasn't a lot of information out there regarding my care, maternity leave and that sort of thing' (5)

'There's no statutory protection whatever – it's still not unfair dismissal to be sacked when you are pregnant' (5)

2.4 Accessibility of Childcare

Childcare was felt to be of a good standard in Jersey and the information provided on the JCCT's website was commended. However, there was difficulty in finding a suitable childcare and also the flexibility of the childcare was felt to be an issue.

'It's finding the right childcare for the child, not just the family' (4)

2.4.1 Nurseries

Across the 5 groups, the use of nurseries were discussed either from a current use or previous use before children moved on to school.

Expectant parents expressed the shock when they heard by 'word of mouth' that they needed to get their nursery place organized in early pregnancy.

There was some agreement that nursery places were more difficult to obtain on a part time basis and anecdotal evidence that someone paid for a full time place to have their child at their desired nursery despite not needing and using the place part time.

'...the waiting lists were 2 years or so and I have left it too late....' (4)

Timing of places becoming available could also be an issue as it was suggested that places only came available in September, which could seem to follow children leaving to begin school.

2.4.2 Flexibility

There was a reported lack of flexibility with the suggestion made that there was the need for nurseries to have longer opening hours which allowed for parents with various working hours to be accommodated. A number of parents voiced the need for shift workers needs to be recognized in terms of opening hours for nurseries. There was also reported to be a difficulty in obtaining part time places in nurseries.

There was reported to be no choice for parents who needed to be at work before 9am as there was only 1 nursery group which offered an 'early' drop off.

'Nurseries closing at 5.30pm is not good.... I would prefer opening hours to be 7.30am – 6pm' (1)

'you can't always leave work at 5pm' (1)

'If they started at 6am – 8pm where the 6-8am and 6-8pm were flexible would allow more people to work' (1)

'I struggled to get into a nursery ...for 2 days a week' (4)

'I couldn't find nurseries that offered the hours I wanted' (4)

'...sometimes I have to work till 8pm we are going to have to try and juggle our work schedule around the baby' (5)

'...she told me they don't prioritise part time places' (5)

2.4.3 Nannies

Some parents reported using nannies as this form of childcare suited their needs better. Nannies were felt to be very 'dependable' and the benefit of them being accredited was also valuable to parents. However, nannies were generally felt to require full time work.

'we'll employ our nanny for a full year, full time, when we don't actually need her (school age children) but we can't afford to lose her because we have no help for the after school and holidays' (2)

'it is really difficult to get a part time nanny and I didn't want to go back to work full time' (3)

2.4.4 Illness

Problems of accessibility to childcare when children are sick is an enormous problem. Nurseries are unable to take children who are ill but some parents are under pressure to get to work and feel under enormous pressure as to what they can do in these instances. It was reported that some employers have a week that can be used by people or emergency days that can be used but that it is a very difficult time.

'If the children were sick, the thing about the nurseries is that they won't have them if they've got certain things, whereas a nanny or child minder will have them' (2)

'he (the child) had a couple of days when he was off and my husband and I played top trumps with our diaries' (2)

'my husband and I might have this stand off as to who's going to have them (sick child) that day. It's just so stressful and if I could find somebody who could cover sick days it would be such a concept' (2)

'I don't take sick days off for my child, I have to take them as holiday or I take the time off and then work on my day off to make it up' (2)

'It's the unforeseen that you don't have the capacity to work around' (2)

2.4.5 Wrap – around care

For parents of school age children issues around before and after school care are of great concern. The difficulties of wrap around care even have led to nannies being continued to be employed full time despite children being school age to provide for this and school holiday cover. School holidays are also reported to be covered by splitting parent's annual leave and using grandparents to help. Holiday clubs were felt to be helpful but again these can be costly and can also have issues with finishing times.

'It is a problem that school finishes at 3pm..... I actually got an au-pair because I couldn't even leave work at 5pm let alone 3pm.' (1)

'...an after school club which was good but that finished at 5pm' (1)

'...changes so that I could do school hours so I didn't have to worry about the wrap around care because people had told me it's really difficult to get reliable wrap around care' (2)

2.5 Quality of Communication

There are a lot of areas that affect parents that require communication and the quality of that communication is very important. Becoming a parent is a very stressful, life changing time and good communication at this point in time is of paramount importance. This should encompass all stages and areas but one initial area that was discussed was of the number of forms that need to be filled in that have a repetitive element.

‘There should be one form that basically covers everything that’s going to affect maternity – one form only’ (2)

‘You need a one stop shop where you would go to speak to whoever – this is what you need to do this week, this is what you have to do that week...’ (5)

‘The information you get when you are pregnant needs to be joined up’ (5)

‘you go on the States website and try to figure it out but it’s impossible’ (5)

The Chief executive of the States John Richardson in his ‘workforce roadshow’ said that he had found how much simpler things were done in the UK when registering a family death and instead of filling out a number of forms of personal information he was able to sit at a computer with an individual who filled out the required details and all forms necessary were then automatically generated. This sort of system would seem to be favourable to expectant mothers.

2.5.1 Expectant mothers care choices

Some mothers spoke of the lack of information available to them to be able to make choices on their care path whilst pregnant. Many felt they were reliant on their GP to guide them and due to GP care being charged per visit felt there was no choice but to choose hospital led care where there were issues concerning continuity of care and also time keeping of appointments.

‘It wasn’t clear about the hospital or midwife and that’s part of your care’ (5)

2.5.2 Expectant mothers necessary paperwork

Many spoke of the large amount of forms that were required to be filled in, many of which required repetitive details.

‘In my job I had to apply for maternity leave and fill in paperwork to say please can I have it?’ (2)

2.5.3 Social security

Social security contributions and how the boundaries are managed caused a lot of consternation for many of the mothers who attended the focus groups. Also the maternity allowance and when and how it is paid was also an issue for some.

'There was an issue as far as I was concerned in Social security contributions because in the period that I was being unpaid (maternity leave) obviously the firm weren't paying social security contributions and I wasn't paying, and because that straddled more than a quarter, the reality was because they were holding back 7 weeks pay and that wasn't reflected in terms of the social security contributions' (2)

'When I contacted social security about what benefits I'd get, I was told that I would get nothing.... That was a bit of a shock, because I thought Social Security was there to help you. I did get a pro-rated amount but it was affected, it was reduced because of the 6 months that I'd spent out of the Island (despite working full time in Jersey for 10years prior to this)' (3)

'There is no flexibility on their deadline policy' (2)

'The quarters move depending on when you actually go off' (2)

'It's not all transparent' (2)

'They talk in code' (2)

'Considering I've paid so much in Social Security over the years, it's not right that I have no say in my maternity allowance, and when it's paid' (5)

2.5.4 Maternity Aftercare

Communication between the health visitors and mothers was felt to focus too heavily on the baby and it was suggested that this would be a very good opportunity for mothers' needs and well-being to be given greater attention.

'it's up to you to ask the questions and finding out things.... I found they assume you know stuff, but you don't ...' (5)

Support was also felt by some to be necessary for parents of older children. It was felt that there is little psychological / well-being support in the Island for parents of children over the age of 7.

2.6 Work / Life Balance

Being able to balance the needs of their employers and the needs of their families is often a challenging and ever changing concept. The need to address a mothers wellbeing was discussed in a few of the focus groups as the mothers role is often central to family life and when the mother is unwell, depressed or stressed this filters through the family.

2.6.1 Employers

Employer flexibility varies dependent on individual company policies. Some companies were extremely accommodating whilst others seemed to find it difficult to accommodate the parental needs. There were varying levels of maternity and paternity leave from zero to 12months. Issues also arose where there is child sickness and this causes a great deal of anxiety for many parents due to employers being unable to accommodate their needs. Working from home and remote access to work was seen as a positive arrangement and worked very well for some but was equally recognised by others as difficult to achieve at times with young children. The lack of part time and term time work was highlighted together with some feeling that part time workers were under-valued and under paid, and their true value in terms of input, loyalty and commitment to the firms was not recognised. The issue of breast feeding in the workplace was also raised and the difficulties involved in continuing to breastfeed and return to work.

‘Going back on a part time basis wasn’t actually allowed (2)

‘They’re letting me do school hoursand it’s great. I feel like I won a bit of a battle there’ (2)

‘...being relatively small companies (in Jersey) they will always argue that they find that part time people are a problem.....they must recognize that their part time workers actually come to work far more often’ (2)

‘...a real bonus is if employers can have flexible working arrangements’ (3)

‘flexibility is far more valuable than any other bonus or anything else’ (3)

‘The company I work for was really good with me..... 3 months paid leave....and the option to change jobs to suit family life’ (5)

‘They put you in a different category without a shadow of a doubt, your career has changed direction and your priorities aren’t going to be the same’ (5)

‘I can go back part time which is great..... made me feel valued’ (5)

2.6.2 Childcare providers

Flexibility in terms of opening hours and also child illness is a huge issue. The lack of flexibility in nurseries in this area has made some parents feel forced into choosing different childcare providers. 'A nanny will still look after your child if it is sick' (2)

2.6.3 Family

Being able to spend time together as a family was also reported to be important but sometimes had to be sacrificed for the sake of either or both affordability and accessibility to childcare.

'...the husband works day and the wife works night shifts, is that good for the family as they're never together' (1)

'I wasn't giving 100% to either work or home' (2)

'We tended to split so that we don't take holiday together' (3)

2.6.4 Paternity leave

Paternity leave is another area for wide variations in the amount of time given, ranging from zero to 2 weeks. Some employers were reported to be very flexible, allowing leave to be taken either as a block or as individual days and were very accommodating. It was suggested that flexibility in when it can be taken is necessary so that it could meet the individual needs for each family giving anywhere up to the first 6 months to take the allocated leave.

'The policy initially stated that it had to be a week from the date the child was born'(2)

'I think there's pressure on men NOT to take it' (2)

'Paternity rights don't seem to exist.... They need bonding time and my husband was just devastated' (4)

'Dad's should definitely be given more time' (4)

'...if it was law that I was due a week off then they wouldn't have a choice' (5)

2.7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Life in Jersey for working parents has been shown by the participants of these focus groups to be not un-surprisingly a very complex one. There is not one specific area that is a concern for families, it is most certainly a number of often interconnected issues. There were four emergent themes identified which had a number of sub-themes within them, although these stand-alone many of the issues are also symbiotic and it would be best to look at the research in an holistic way.

There seems to be nothing to surpass the benefits of being 'local' and having family for childcare back-up but also as a source of information which highlights a need for greater information to be available. This would appear to be at all stages from expectant parent's right through to parents of school age children.

The collating of the information required from expectant mothers would not only make it simpler and easier for the individuals but also be environmentally friendly. A 'one stop shop' which individuals could register and provide their details which would then disseminate the information to the relevant and necessary third parties would provide a more efficient service for all concerned. This could also work to provide all of the necessary information back to expectant parents in terms of what they are entitled to and what is available to them in Jersey.

The financial burden of having children in Jersey begins with maternity and paternity entitlement but covers childcare costs from nursery to wrap-around care, school holiday cover and child illness. The lack of consistency of entitlement due to a lack of maternity law is of great dissatisfaction to most who took part. This coupled with the difficulty in accessing as well as affordability of care for children whether of nursery or school age is a great source of stress for working parents.

The need for a maternity law is evident. To address other issues, an audit of all childcare provision is suggested to enable a transparent snapshot of what is available in Jersey and give an insight into how well utilised it is. This would certainly be a useful resource and may be able to give an indication where growth and expansion is necessary or show a 'gap in the market' where new provisions could be beneficial to working parents in Jersey.

Although Jersey has an ever changing population and is a very multicultural community, these recommendations are seen to be of a general and wide importance to the population as a whole and it is hoped that they could have long term beneficial impact on working families in Jersey.