

Review of the Importance of Dublin 15 Community Childcare Services and of some of the Challenges they face

This Paper was compiled by representatives from the Community Childcare Services in Blanchardstown, Barnardos, Blanchardstown Area Partnership and the Blakestown and Mountview NYP to highlight the challenges facing the services in Dublin 15, demonstrating the importance of these services to the local community.

June 2010

D15 Community Childcare Services

In 2000 Community Crèche's nationwide began getting core funding nationally under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) through the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform. It was the first substantial national funding programme for childcare in Ireland. The aim of the EOCP was to enable parents to avail of training, education and employment opportunities through the provision of quality childcare supports. From 2006 to 2010, the implementation of the successor to the EOCP was the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) which is funded through the Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs.

Community childcare is a vital element of social support for disadvantaged communities. It supports parents to work, learn and access services. It supports families' social role and provides children with a safe, secure learning environment, giving them the advantage of a pre-school education. It also provides the local community with employment and training opportunities. There are few services that offer so many valuable outcomes for children, families and communities.

The Community Crèches have increased supply, improved the quality of early childhood care and education services by providing part-time, full-time care. There are 6 community crèches and 1 Homestart programme in Dublin 15. These services have also supported families in breaking the cycle of disadvantage. The delivery of the childcare centres in Blanchardstown is around the needs of the child.

The Community Crèches in many ways have provided affordable and accessible childcare options available to parents of children who live in more disadvantaged areas.

Profile of Dublin 15

Blanchardstown is the fastest growing area in the country. In only four years the population has risen 24.73 per cent to reach 63,120 persons.¹ As a result Blanchardstown's population is now larger than several Irish counties such as Sligo and Monaghan.

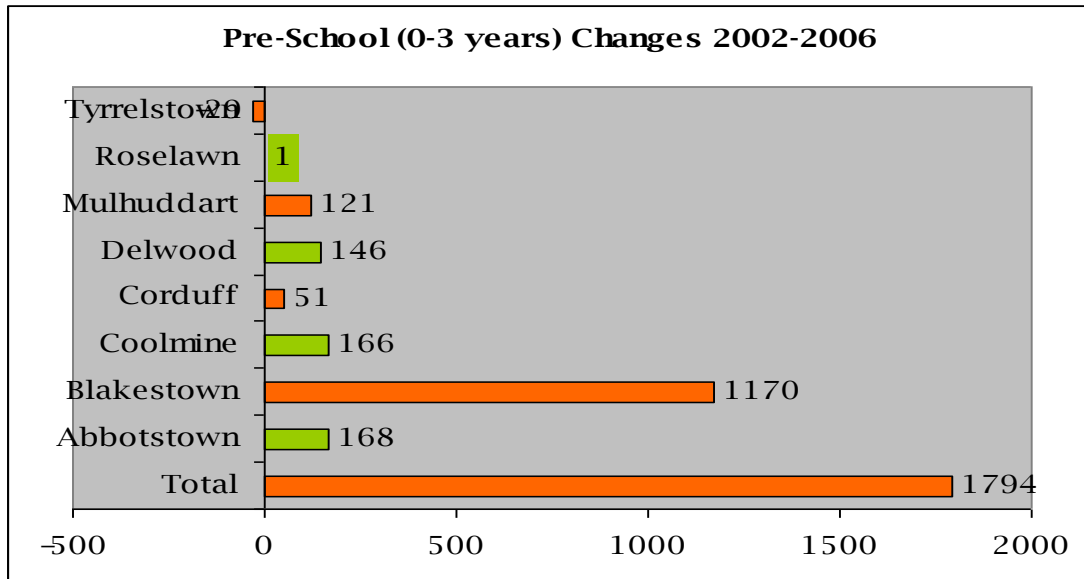
The second most striking feature about Blanchardstown is its extraordinary high youth profile. The pre-school population (0-3 years) of Blanchardstown rose forty nine per cent (1,794 children) since 2002. This will have immediate consequences not only for the delivery and location of crèches / Montessori's but also new primary schools and community centres within a few years.

Pre-School Population (0-3 year olds)

The pre-school population of Blanchardstown rose by forty nine per cent or 1,794 children. The percentage of the overall population therefore falling across these age cohorts in 2006 was 8.66 per cent, which is higher than the 8.34 per cent recorded in 2002. Once again the majority of the net increase occurred across the Blakestown ED (+1170).

This massive increase in the pre-school population will place additional pressures on the already overstretched local community and private childcare crèches, and Montessori, which have waiting lists.

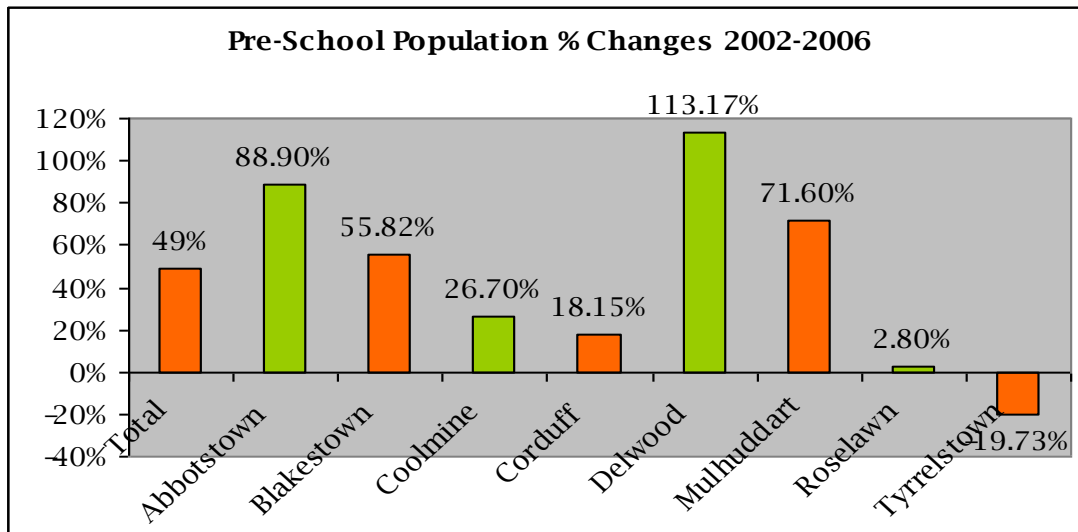
Bar Chart 1



Source: BAP analysis of small area population statistics 2006

¹ Ryan, C (2008) *Socio-Economic Profile of Blanchardstown*, Blanchardstown Area Partnership

Bar Chart 2



Source: BAP analysis of small area population statistics 2006

Labour Market

Since 2002 the total number of people at work in Blanchardstown increased significantly. An additional 7,231 persons are now in employment and consequently the labour market participation rates for Blanchardstown rose from 69.1 per cent to 74.50 per cent. Women's labour market participation rate increased to 66.13% of the workforce in comparison to 83.03% for men.

Despite the large increase in the local workforce the level of unemployment across Blanchardstown also rose from 9.8 per cent up to 11.13 per cent of the labour force. Unemployment levels remain significantly higher in Blanchardstown than the national average of 8.5 per cent or vis a vis Dublin's overall rate of 7.03 per cent.

There have been significant changes in the live register figures in the past 2 years at the Blanchardstown local social welfare office. There were 3,014 more people signing on in October 2009 compared to October 2008 figures, with the highest frequency of persons signing on in the 25-34 age band.

Ethnic Mix

Another notable factor in Blanchardstown's rapidly altering social and economic landscape has been the growth in the number of foreign nationals coming to live in the area. A new question on ethnic or cultural background was introduced specifically for the 2006 census to help collate such data.

Foreign nationals accounted for almost 22% per cent (13,620) of all residents, which is more than double the State average of 10% per cent. Indeed 65% per cent of the increase in Blanchardstown's population over the past four years has been composed of residents who indicated that they had a nationality other than Irish. Nigeria, Poland, and Lithuania and were the top three countries of origin.

467 Irish Travellers were enumerated in the Partnership's catchment boundaries 203 fewer than four years ago. The reduction was most pronounced in the Abbotstown and Mulhuddart ED's. Nevertheless Travellers constitute 0.74% per cent of Blanchardstown's overall population and are a large ethnic group in their own right.

Youth at Risk (0-14 years)

One of the most recognisable features of Blanchardstown is its highly visible 'youth population'. The most recent census data consolidates the impression that many residents have held. In the past four years Blanchardstown experienced a large net increase in the recorded 'youth at risk population' (+3291). As a result Blanchardstown still has a much higher youth age profile in the 0-14 range of 24.36 per cent than Dublin's 18.3 per cent and the States 20.4 per cent.

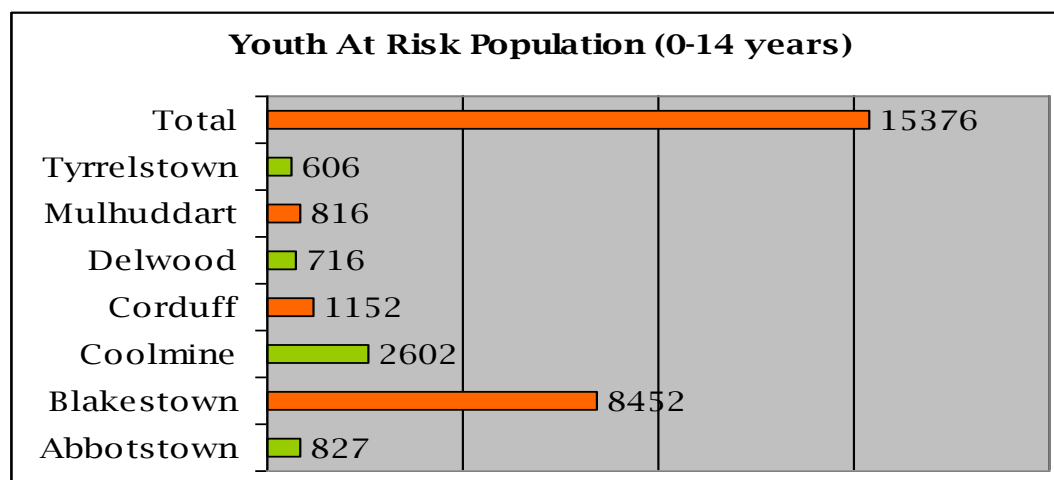
The overwhelming majority of this youth population explosion increase occurred across the Blakestown ED (+2319) because of the huge estates and apartment blocks built in former green field sites. Tyrrelstown (38.97 per cent) and (Mulhuddart 29.29 per cent) continue to experience the largest percentage presence of disadvantaged youth. Once again this trend is in keeping with data findings from the 2002 census

Without the proper supports many children living in disadvantage simply don't have the resources they need to get an adequate education. Early intervention is key in supporting these children and giving them the best hope of learning and staying in school.

Childcare plays a key role in enabling parents to engage in employment, education and training. It has been shown to be very beneficial for children as it helps to promote their social, psychological and educational development. The benefits gained by children at a young age will endure to adulthood and will be garnered, not only by individual child, but by society as a whole.

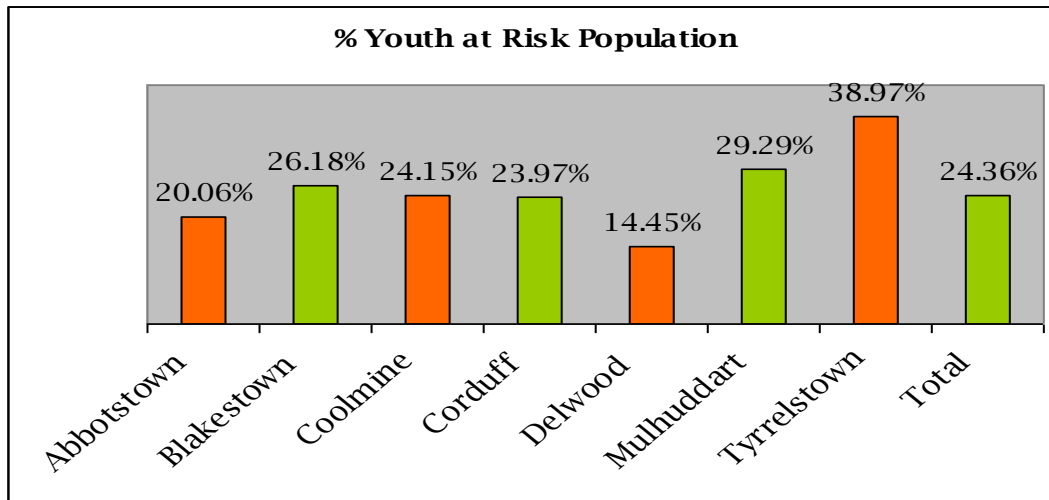
Minister for Children Brendan Smith 9th Nov 2007

Bar Chart 3



Source: BAP analysis of small area population statistics 2006

Bar Chart 4



Source: BAP analysis of small area population statistics 2006

Lone Parents

Lone Parents for all children now head 28.63 per cent of all households in Blanchardstown. The overall Blanchardstown figure exceeds the national average of 25.2 per cent but is lower than the Dublin equivalent of 29.9 per cent. Tyrrelstown with 59.6 per cent and Mulhuddart with 42.2 per cent have the highest concentrations of lone parents respectively.

Lone parent are not a homogeneous group but include many different types of families involving unmarried, separated or widowed parents (male and female) bringing up children alone. Unfortunately in many of the ED's where there are large concentrations of single parents the local service provision is poor, which only further isolates lone parents residing there. The lack of affordable childcare is having the effect of marginalizing single parents even further. Because many single parents cannot access affordable childcare the result is that they find it difficult to access employment related training, personal development programmes or employment.

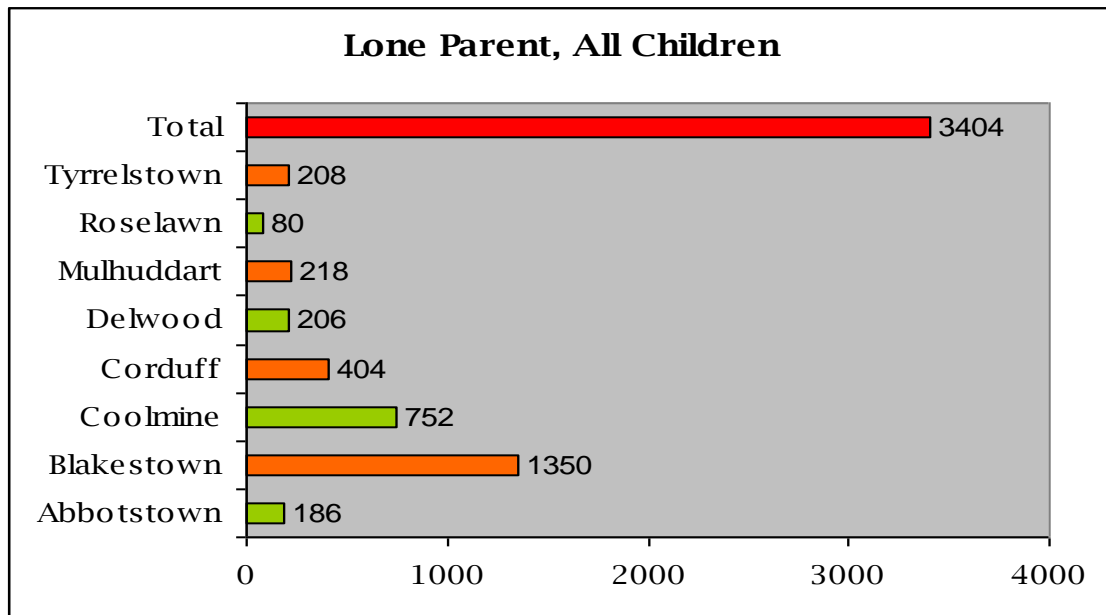
The inability to access crèche and other childcare facilities results in the children of single parent families missing out on quality pre-primary education affecting their educational attainment at a later stage and making the goal of equality unrealisable.

Research suggest the following²

- On average lone parents households have a higher than average risk of poverty, and single mothers have the lowest incomes (Millar, 1992; Nolan and Callan, 1994)
- A tendency for early school leaving and a concentration of low educational qualifications exists among young single mother (National Economic and Social Forum, 1997)
- Lone-parent families tend to be clustered in the public housing sector (McCashin 1997)

² Murphy, P (1998) *Parenting Alone in Blanchardstown*, Blanchardstown Area Partnership

Bar Chart 5



Source: BAP analysis of small area population statistics 2006

Drug Mis-users

Local Drugs Task Force's were set up to ensure an integrated response to the problems associated with drugs factoring in the needs of those areas suffering most. They are a central facet of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008.

The Blanchardstown Local Drugs Task Force (BLDTF) was established in 1997 along with 13 other designated areas because it was identified as having amongst the highest levels of drug misuse in the country most especially heroin misuse. The BLDTF like BAP consists of representatives from the Community, Voluntary and Statutory sectors.

Community Crèches play a vital role in supporting parents with additional needs. Children that attend the community crèches allows parent to access other supports without having to worry about childcare. It also supports parents in their road to recover by providing a safe and friendly environment for their children.

Family Support Services in Blanchardstown

In November, 2006, Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP) conducted an audit of supports for families³ available within the Dublin 15 area. One of the key aims of this research was to identify where the gaps in support are and whether there is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of these services. A total of 28 services were identified which offer some form of family support in the area. The following are some of the gaps identified by various organisations who participated in the research:

- Lack of services to meet the needs of the large number of children presenting with behavioural problems, speech delay or Autism type behaviour.

³ Clarity Ltd (2006) *A Matrix of Supports for Families in Dublin 15*, Blanchardstown Area Partnership

- A central agency to link between all agencies to ensure families get the best services available.
- Insufficient Services for Families with Children Under 12 Years
- Early Intervention, Support and Preventative Measures are needed.
- Inadequate Crèche Facilities while parents attend support services.
- More Childcare needed so that working mothers can come to training, parenting and information classes.
- Gap in area of Child Counselling and Family Therapy.
- Structured support and childcare for young women, participating in Drug Detox and Rehab. Programmes may run for the required 6-8 week period.
- Services needed to monitor and support children from vulnerable families at various stages of education, e.g. more follow through after Pre-School level.
- Co-ordination between services in relation to work being done with individual family members in different services.
- Access to counselling services (on demand) for parents/young people in relation to addressing issues when they come up, rather than having to wait weeks/months, when perhaps the motivation for engaging may have reduced.
- Resources to work with young mothers aged 16+ in the Greater Blanchardstown area. Such young mothers tend to be an isolated group of young people who need specific targeting and resourcing in order to engage them effectively.

Profile of Community Childcare Crèches Dublin 15.

The community childcare services in Blanchardstown 15 provide a quality community childcare service that is child centred. These services meet the needs of parents and families availing of employment and educational opportunities.

There are 7 community child care providers in Blanchardstown 15. Six community crèches and one Home start project took part in completing the Hardiker Level for the children attending their services. This is to highlight the level of need of children that are attending these services.

The Hardiker model is recognised throughout the United Kingdom and internationally as a robust and flexible tool for planning services to meet children's needs. It is used to capture the services/supports provided by any sector for example (by families, community, voluntary and statutory agencies, both locally and regionally). The tool provides a framework for enhancing the assets of children, young people and families, at different levels of need. Some families because of a variety of circumstances require more support than others.

The Hardiker model highlights the level of need of the children and families that are presenting to the community crèches. The children were placed between level 1, 2, 3, and 4 depending on their needs. They can enter the crèche at any level and move between levels as their needs change.

- Level 1, respond to families where there are few or no problems presenting.
- Level 2 interventions respond to specific needs that are common to most families i.e., parenting courses day care and other support groups.
- Level 3, interventions target families children with severe difficulties including risk of harm.

- Level 4, essentially address a diverse range of issues and problems where a crisis has occurred, families are in chronic difficulties or where children have perhaps been separated from their families.

The results from the Hardiker level from the children attending the Community Crèches are:

- 56 children presented at level 1.
- 55 children presented at level 2,
- 25 children presented at level 3 and
- 16 children presented at level 4 on the Hardiker level.

As indicated above, a total of 96 of the above listed children are presenting with additional needs that require specific supports to help them to reach their chronological developmental milestone. The community crèches play a vital role in supporting these children to reach these milestones and link and work closely with a number of agencies in the Blanchardstown Dublin 15 area and beyond in the best interests of supporting these children and families.

Only 37% of the above listed children present at level 1 of the Hardiker model and do not require these additional supports whereas 63% of these children present at level 2-4 of the model and need direct support from the community crèches to access more targeted and specialised supports to meet their needs. The community crèches work closely with Public Health Nurses, Social Workers, Speech Therapists, Child psychologists, Aistear Beo, Barnardos, Temple Street, Primary Schools, St Vincent's and many more. Some of the children presenting to the crèches are in the universal side others present with social work involvement, with parents whom have addiction and mental health issues, some children in care of guardians/foster care.

While we cant emphasise the importance enough of community crèches in Blanchardstown and the level of need that presents from the Hardiker model of the children attending these services the subvention scheme is not working or does not always `fit` to fully meet the needs these children are presenting with. As the subvention scheme has a set funding fee for each child it does not accommodate when a child has the additional aforementioned needs that require increased supports and as a result funding. For example children needing increased staffing supports as in a higher adult to child ratio to appropriately support their development in the community crèches setting.

The importance of Early Education, research shows that quality provision in the area has a very positive impact on the future educational, psychological and social development of every child. International experience suggests that early intervention is by far the best way of dealing with personality and learning difficulties. Good quality early education can also help to level the playing pitch for children from economically and social disadvantage to move towards greater equity in society.

In a recent press release Fergus Finlay CEO of Barnardos said the inability of low income families to pay for childcare has a real impact on children living in these families. It is well established that education is a proven route out of poverty and that quality early education and care helps to prepare children for primary school. If we are to ensure that all children have equality of opportunity in relation to education, then the provision of quality early education and care is vital.

International research has demonstrated a return on investment in the early years of children's lives of between €4 and €7 Euros for every €1 euro invested in early year's

development services and programmes. `The difficulty is that this (the childcare subvention scheme) is an extremely blunt way of means testing people and it can only serve to reinforce the peoples dependence on welfare payments` Chris Andrews T.D. The Irish Times November 2007. Rather than focusing on the needs of the children, it focuses on the income and entitlements of parents. The way in which community childcare is funded, needs to be fundamentally overhauled. By the end of 2010, community childcare should be placed firmly high in relation to the education continuum.

Dublin 15 Childcare Case Studies based on the Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS)

Band A Case Studies

1. Child 18 months.

This child has three older siblings their Mother is only 25 years old. The mother was suffering from post natal depression and there was no support from the Father who is a chronic drug user. When a Crèche becomes available the Mother got a place on a Community Employment Scheme, through this she has gained a recognised qualification and is back in Leaving Certificate standard Education. All of this is only possible because of the low cost of Community Childcare.

If the Community Crèche in this area is forced to close this young Mother/Family will be forced back to isolation and depression. Even with the Parent being on Band A she still struggles to pay the fees. She is under pressure to meet these fees each week.

2. Child is four years and six months old.

This is a four-year-old girl who has four immediate siblings and two step siblings. Her parents are separated. Her mother is a lone parents and her dad has regular visits. The child is the third child in her immediate family; both her older siblings have learning difficulties and attend additional resource classes in the local primary school.

Because there is such a large family the child's needs are often overlooked. She would be a child that comes across very reserved and finds it very hard to cope with any form of conflict within the crèche settings. The child's development is slightly delayed in some areas such as emotional and social. Academically she has not reached her developmental milestones appropriate for her age. Her needs are that she requires a lot of one to one attention, and currently benefits greatly from this. The child is currently classed as band A, however the increase in the fees has left the family under pressure financially and could result in the child leaving the crèche in the near future.

3. Child is 3 years old

The child is the third child in a family of four. Her mother is a single parent and her father visits the children regularly.

History: The family have been moved from house to house because of the father's unsocial behaviour and domestic violence towards his partner. Her two brothers

attended this crèche and social services were asked to visit the home on several occasions by concerned crèche staff. Both the boys showed extreme levels of aggression towards the staff while in our care. The child's mothers suffered a brief mental illness and while she was in hospital all three of the children were taken into care. The child's mother moved into private accommodation without the child's father. Situation at present: The child's mother is receiving lone parent allowance and no support from the father of the children. She is still paying for privately rented accommodation, she has two children in school and two at home. She frequently attends her G.P. for her depression. The situation within the family is still very volatile. As her father can still show aggression when he calls to see the children. After his visits the child can be very aggressive and disturbed in her behaviour.

4. Family with two children, whose ages are, 3 ½ years and 6 years.

The family are living in RAPID area. The 3 ½ year old attends the Crèche four mornings a week since September 2008. The child has Downs Syndrome and has a Special Needs Assistant who works solely with him. We receive funding from the HSE Disability Department for the SNA. The Child's mother is in training and is studying FETAC Level 5 Special Needs Assistant. The Dad currently stays at home.

Band B Case Studies

1. Child 3 years

This child was taken from his Mother by Social Services when he was 1 year old. The reason for this was emotional/physical neglect. He was placed in the care of his Father who worked full time. The child's Grandmother helped with the child unfortunately she had a severe stroke. The child's father contacted us and fortunately we were able to offer the child a place in the crèche. This child's Father had to take financial responsibility for his Mother, including a sizeable mortgage, without affordable Community Childcare this man would have had to stop working lose his Mother's and child's home.

The child has severe speech problems and attends speech therapy. The Crèche offers huge support to this child around his social and emotional needs, due to the circumstances in his Family.

2. 3 year old child

Single parent of three children. Husband deceased. Living in RAPID area. 3 year old attends the Crèche since summer 2008. Child attends four afternoons and one full day per week and his place in the crèche is paid for by the HSE as he was a referral to our service. Child also attends Speech and Language therapy for delayed speech.

Band C Case Studies

1. Four-year-old child.

The child lives at home with both his parents; there are ten children in the family. His father is a self-employed taxi driver and his mother is a homemaker. Seven of the children are in school. The child's development was slightly behind other children of his age and his speech was slow in development. Under the new subvention rates,

the child had to leave the crèche in December as he was classed as band C. His parents could not afford the new much higher fees. The crèche would be aware of the family situation and understood that the current system failed them, as financially they still struggled. More importantly, it failed the child in his development and educational needs.

2. 3 year old child

Family with 3 children, whose ages are:3 years, 8 years and 10 years. 3 year old attending the Crèche since November 2006. Child attends three full days a week as her mom works full time and her dad is in training. Child used to attend five full days but can no longer afford to pay the full week fee on Band C.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Community Childcare Services in Blanchardstown have an important place in the community of Blanchardstown. They provide much needed affordable childcare in areas of disadvantage where families are unable to avail of the private childcare facilities. They provide early-years education and intervention for children who would otherwise not benefit from any form of pre-school learning and would therefore be already at a disadvantage to their peers when they start primary school. Research shows that good quality early education can help to level the playing pitch for children from economic and social disadvantage and to move towards greater equity in society. They take referrals from the HSE where children have been identified as needing early intervention to aid their development or where families are in need of a few hours respite when their children are being taken care of. They also enable parents to participate in training which helps improve their opportunities for employment.

These childcare services are not for profit organisations and many of the children they accommodate would not get a place in a private crèche facility. The survival of these services in Blanchardstown is crucial and continued support is needed to ensure their viability.

Recommendations to consider

- **The subvention scheme does not focus on the needs of the children but rather on the income and entitlements of the parents. The way in which community childcare is funded needs to be overhauled. In order to build on what they have achieved over the last number of years it needs to be maintained and sustained.**
- **Under the subvention scheme families who are just above the subvention Scheme threshold will not be able to afford the increase fees which the community crèches will charge in order to be viable and sustainable.**
- **The level of need of children attending the community crèches is evident from the Hardiker level. More funding should be given for Community Childcare services in disadvantage areas.**

“Good quality pre-school education and childcare improves outcomes for children and Families”

