



**Minimum Standards for Day Care and Childminding for  
Children under 12**

Issued by: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

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Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP)

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## **1.0 Introduction WCRP**

### **1.1 WCRP Vision**

“Our vision is of communities where women are recognised and valued as equal partners working towards a future based upon shared values of equality, participation and inclusion.”

### **1.2 WCRP Mission Statement**

"To work in partnership to support and strengthen the voice of community based women's organisations"

### **1.3 Background**

The Women's Centres' Regional Partnership (WCRP) is a partnership of four lead regional women's organisations linking with fourteen frontline women's organisations across Northern Ireland to provide support and services to women living in disadvantaged areas.

**1.4** The four key lead partners of the Partnership are the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA), Women's Support Network (WSN), Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and The Women's Centre, Derry. The fourteen Women's Centres are spread across Northern Ireland with seven from the Greater Belfast and Lisburn area, four in the North West (one of which does not provide childcare), and three in Dungannon, Magherafelt and Craigavon. Together the WCRP seeks to develop and strengthen a regional infrastructure which will support community based women's organisations across Northern Ireland.

**1.5** There are four aims to the Partnership encouraging collaborative and strategic work on key areas such as influencing policy, identifying needs and gaps in relation to training, education and childcare services, improving communication on good practice and lessons learnt across the sector, sourcing potential sources of funding, etc.

- 1.6** The Women's sector has played a key role in building and promoting, social, economic and political change in Northern Ireland. A review carried out in 2001 highlighted that through its infrastructure, comprising regional support organisations, networks, women's centres and local groups engaged in a diverse range of activities, it has made a valuable contribution to promoting equality, social and economic inclusion, peace-building, and the development of the voluntary sector and volunteering of funding, etc.
- 1.7** The WCRP tackles women's inequality and disadvantage and supports community development in the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities and works for policy change. The principles of interdependence, co-operation, participation, representation and good practice will be at the heart of the partnership's work.
- 1.8** The WCRP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Minimum Standards for Day Care and Childminding for Children under 12* consultation.

## Response to Consultation

### Introduction

Overall, the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) sees this consultation on Minimum Standards for Day Care and Childminding for Children under 12s as an important step in showing government commitment to early education and care. It is a commendable attempt to ensure good quality standards for day care and childminding as these services continue to support the needs of many children and their families.

WCRP wishes to highlight the important role of community based women's centres, early years and childcare provision. Women's Centres are well established organisations situated within areas of social and economic disadvantage in Northern Ireland. A recent report by WCRP has highlighted a range of early years and childcare provision in the women's centres including free childcare places for women accessing education and training, after schools provision, places for social services referrals, Sure Start childcare, respite childcare and summer scheme childcare.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, there were 1364 individual children registered for childcare provision within the thirteen WCRP women's centres, 4914 childcare places and 9828 hours provided on a weekly basis. The majority of the thirteen women's centres support children in the age range of 0-4 years.<sup>2</sup>

Strong evidence exists to support our view that the first years of a child's life are critical in developing relationships and laying the foundations for positive physical and emotional development.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, WCRP urges the Department to ensure a continuum of support for the provision of child care by the community based women's sector.

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<sup>1</sup> WCRP (2010) Childcare Mapping and Research Report, Pg 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Pg 14

<sup>3</sup> Save the Children, Bringing Families and Schools Together: Giving poor Children the best start, Save the Children briefing September 2011

WCRP are encouraged that the Department has outlined the principles and values contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).<sup>4</sup> We strongly believe that children and their families should be recognized as rights holders.

To help inform this consultation response, WCRP developed a questionnaire and used this to interview Centre Managers and/or Childcare Co-ordinators of the 14 women's centres who are partners within WCRP. This is their overall response and feedback.

## **Section 1: Quality of Care**

### **Standard: Care, Development & Play**

WCRP agree with all the standards contained within this section. We can confirm that children who attend day care, after schools and crèche facilities within women's centres all experience a range of activities that contribute to their emotional, social, intellectual, language and creative environment. The Centres all strive to meet children's individual needs and promote their welfare. They plan and provide activities and play opportunities to develop children's emotional, physical and social capabilities.

#### **Comment/Consultation feedback:**

**Childcare facilities that do not have outdoor space may require support and resources to ensure that adequate physical play equipment is available to meet the minimum standard that "children have appropriate opportunities to be active indoors and out"**

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<sup>4</sup> Article 18. 2 For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

Article 18.3 States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

Article 27.1 States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

### **Standard: Health**

The health care needs of each child are always addressed appropriately. Centres all promote the good health of children and take steps to prevent the spread of any type of infection and take appropriate measures if children are ill by following their written policy on the 'exclusion of children who are ill or infectious.'

#### **Comment/consultation feedback:**

**While the minimum standards on page 12 state 'there is at least one member of staff with current first aid training present at all times' Our questionnaires identified the majority of staff currently working within a women's centre childcare setting possess first aid training.**

**Some centres agreed that "animals on the premises are safe and do not pose a health risk. Parents give written permission for their children to have access to the animal" However, a number of centres raised concerns about animals and child allergies. Some recommended that only goldfish should be allowed on the premises.**

### **Standard: Safety**

The care provided within a women's centre setting ensures children are in a safe and secure environment. For example, a number of centres operate a security camera entry system and conduct risk assessments of the premises; sometimes on a daily basis.

#### **Comment/consultation feedback:**

**All centres stated that they carry out risk assessments on a regular basis and the majority feel that "a risk assessment of the premises carried out annually" is not often enough. The centres recommended that the minimum standard should be that risk assessments are carried out at least quarterly.**

### **Standard: Food and Drink**

A majority of children do not stay in day care or crèche for full day sessions, negating the need for hot meals to be served on the premises. Where meals are served, the cook is qualified and complies with all regulations. Regular drinks and snacks are provided in adequate quantities for the duration of all

sessions. These are properly prepared by staff with a basic food hygiene certificate, are nutritious and meet all the dietary requirements of the children, including food allergies and cultural and religious requirements.

**Comment/consultation feedback:**

**In addition, a number of the Centres recommended that there should be a healthy eating policy in place. Centres also recommended that resources be provided to update training for staff to ensure the minimum standards are met.**

**Standard: Promoting Positive Behaviour**

All centres use positive strategies to promote children's well being, self-esteem and development. Written policies are in place on behaviour management, which states the methods used to manage children's behaviour. This is clearly understood by staff and discussed with parents and carers. Accident report books are in place, and incidents recorded.

**Comment/consultation feedback:**

**Centres emphasised the importance of developing practices that are not judgemental or embarrassing thereby creating a positive approach to implementing strategies for children's behaviour.**

**Standard: Working in Partnership with Parents**

Women's Centres have always worked in partnership with parents and carers and they are kept fully informed of their child's activities, achievements and progress. Policies and procedures are given to parents and carers while centres are aware of the need to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Staff try to ensure, as far as is reasonable, to meet the needs of children and their parents whose first language is not English.

**Comment/consultation feedback:**

**It was highlighted that there are resource implications to take into account the needs of parents who have a disability and whose first language is not English. This is challenging as it can incur costs for translators and for the translation of documents. Additional resources may be required to meet this standard.**

### **Standard: Safeguarding and Child Protection**

Parents can be confident policies and practices are in place to safeguard and protect their child. Child Protection policies are in place at all Centres to ensure that staff working and looking after children clearly understand their responsibilities and the process for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. All staff are trained in child protection and equipped to implement the policies and procedures

#### **Comment/consultation feedback:**

**The Women's Centres highlighted that they all have the standards in place as these are already requirements of their respective Health Trusts. Centres also highlighted the need for support to update policies in relation to the increase in new technologies including social networking sites.**

### **Standard: Equality**

Women's Centres, by their very nature actively promote equality of opportunity for all staff, children, parents/carers and centre users. They also positively value diversity. Periodic reviews of the equal opportunity policy are carried out and are consistent with current legislation and guidance such as Section 75.

#### **Comment/consultation feedback:**

**Again, centres highlighted that training would need to be in place to ensure a staff awareness of standards that goes beyond what is already implemented within the centres.**

### **Standard: Additional Needs**

As far as possible, Women's Centres provide for children with additional needs; however some feel they do not have the capacity or in depth training to develop an individual care plan for children with additional needs. Many centres work with occupational therapists or social workers to develop specific care plans or they refer parents to health visitors if a child has been identified as having additional needs. The welfare and development of the child is

paramount and any action will always be taken in partnership with parents/carers and other relevant professionals.

**Comment/consultation feedback:**

**Some centres commented that these minimum standards should also be incorporated into the equal opportunities policy. A number of the centres already work in partnership with health specialists and parents to meet the needs of children, therefore some centres may need additional resources.**

## **Section 2: Quality of Staffing, Management and Leadership**

### **Standard: Management and Monitoring Arrangements**

WCRP agree with all of the standards contained within this section. The facilities provided within a women's centre setting are always well organized and planned. There are regular inspections and reviews of the quality of service provided and staff employed use proper procedures and guidelines.

**Comment/consultation feedback:**

**Women's Centres agreed that parents should have access to work contact numbers to ensure parents can contact the centres at all times when their child is being cared for.**

### **Standard: Organisation of the Setting**

Best practice, relating to the ratio of adults to children, is followed within all Women's Centres. Students are not taken in to account within the ratios. Suitable contingency plans are in place to cover emergencies and unexpected staff absences.

**Comment/consultation feedback:**

**Childcare workers in the Centres stated that currently they do not include childcare placement/trainees within their staffing ratio. The majority of childcare facilities within Women Centres do not provide full day childcare, therefore they only need to provide healthy snacks that are prepared by those who hold food hygiene certificates.**

### **Standard: Out of Schools Club / Sessional Care or Crèches**

WCRP are concerned about the use of QCF Level 5 Diploma as the minimum level for the person in charge or deputy. We strongly recommend that NVQ Level 3 – QCF equivalent be set as the minimum qualification level. WCRP believe there needs to be more funding and training available to support the upskilling of the workforce and that prior experience should also be taken into consideration. We call for long term funding to support these changes.

#### **Comment/consultation feedback:**

**A number of centres were concerned about the practical issues around the implementation of the following standard: “The persons in charge or deputy have at least a qualification at QCF Level 5 Diploma in either Play Work or Childcare, Learning and Development or a relevant occupational qualification in early years”**

**Childcare workers highlighted that QCF Level 5 seems quite high - equivalent to NVQ level 4. The centre’s agreed that this would be good practice but highlighted that time and resources are limited. Therefore to implement this standard additional time and resources would be needed for staff training. There were also questions raised as to whether this could prevent promotion or temporary acting up duties for team leaders. Another suggestion was that an essential qualification should be in management.**

**We note that the Department for Employment and Learning has just launched a customised training programme aimed at reskilling employees within the business community. WCRP strongly advocate for a similar programme aimed at Women’s Centres and those who operate social economy businesses within women’s centres. This will ensure additional resources are available for childcare organizations to upskill staff.**

**On the minimum standard “The size of one group never exceeds 30 children” centres agreed that the size of any group should be limited.**

**However, it was recommended that 30 would be too high and this should be changed to a lower number of 25.**

#### **Standard: Suitable Person**

Parents and carers can rest assured that adults who look after children within women's centres are suitably qualified; checks are carried out and comply with all regulations including police checks. Any trainees working within the childcare setting are under close supervision at all times.

#### **Comment/consultation feedback:**

**Centre's recommended that all women's centre staff should be vetted including management committee members.**

### **Section 3: Quality of the Physical Environment**

#### **Standard: Equipment**

We agree that children should have access to furniture, equipment and toys that are appropriate and suitable for their needs. Some further resources may be required to replace outdated equipment and ensure it conforms to BS EN Safety Standards. All toys and materials used offer stimulating activities and play opportunities for children to increase their learning and development.

#### **Comment/consultation feedback:**

**There will be cost implications to ensure all equipment conforms to the relevant safety standards.**

#### **Standard: Physical Environment**

We can confirm that children are looked after in premises that are safe, secure and suitable for their purpose. Adequate space is provided; it is welcoming and a full range of activities are on offer. All areas are clean, well lit and maintained at the correct temperature. Where outdoor play space is not available (older buildings or location), children are safely taken to local parks and playgrounds.

## Section 4: Quality of Monitoring & Evaluation

### Standard: Documentation

A full range of records are maintained in accordance with legislative requirements and good practice. Any individual child records are kept secure and confidential.

### Standard: Complaints

All women's centres are confident that complaints are listened to, taken seriously and acted upon. Any complaint is handled in a confidential, sensitive and professional manner. There are accessible complaints procedures which are followed.

## Section 5: Policies and Procedures

The centres agreed to the policies as a minimum standard.

### Comment/consultation feedback:

**Centre's already have the policies in place where applicable. Centre's asked that DHSSPNI supply samples of each policy to ensure uniformity.**

### Conclusion:

WCRP welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We hope that the Programme for Government will set out the Executive's commitment to deliver quality, affordable and accessible childcare taking into account the needs of children and families from disadvantaged communities.

We are concerned with the requirement of using the QCF Level 5 Diploma as the minimum level for the person in charge or deputy. There are significant resource implications for women's centres which would not have the funding available to train staff to this level. There is also concern regarding job insecurity with the uncertainty surrounding the Women's Centre Childcare Fund.

WCRP call for a balance of any regulations with a need for flexibility always within the context that the wellbeing and safeguarding of children is paramount. For example, taking into account a childcare workers previous experience and the potential for accreditation for prior experiential learning is one area we would be keen to have considered for inclusion in the minimum standards.

We would ask that the Department provides example policies on all issues covered within the Policies and Procedures Section (Page 52). Women's Centres have also requested that detailed minimum standards should be developed relating to disability access to premises. This, we believe, is an excellent way of increasing uniformity in regulation.

Additional resources will be required to ensure childcare organizations can train staff, improve their premises/equipment and update policies to help them maintain the minimum standards highlighted in this consultation document. We would like to see measures to support these improvements.

This is a holistic consultation regarding minimum standards and WCRP will welcome its implementation in all health trust areas to maintain consistency throughout Northern Ireland.

WCRP has welcomed the opportunity to respond to this consultation document. We are happy to further discuss this response if required.

## **Appendix 1:**

### Lead Organisations:

**NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)**  
15 Molesworth Street  
Cookstown  
BT80 8NX

**The Women's Centre, Derry**  
Beibhinn House  
5 Guildhall Street  
Derry  
BT48 6BB

**Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)**  
6 Mount Charles  
Belfast  
BT7 1NZ

**Women's Support Network (WSN)**  
109-113 Royal Avenue  
Belfast  
BT1 1FF

## Partners:

### **Waterside Women's Centre**

170 Spencer Road  
Waterside  
Derry  
BT47 6AH

### **Foyle Women's Information Network**

The Walled City Community Partnership  
12-14 The Diamond  
Derry~Londonderry  
BT48 6HW

### **The Women's Centre**

Beibhinn House  
5 Guildhall Street  
Derry  
BT48 6BB

### **Strathfoyle Women's Centre**

12 Bawnmore Place  
Strathfoyle  
BT47 6XP

### **Atlas Women's Centre**

81 Sloan Street  
Lisburn,  
BT27 5AG

### **Ballybeen Women's Centre**

34 Ballybeen Square  
Belfast  
BT16 2QE

### **Falls Women's Centre**

256 - 258 Falls Road  
BELFAST  
BT12 6AL

### **Footprints Women's Centre**

84a Colinmill  
Poleglass  
Dunmurray  
BT17 0AR

### **Greenway Women's Centre**

19 Greenway  
Cregagh Road  
Belfast  
BT6 0DT

**Windsor Women's Centre**

136-144 Broadway  
Belfast  
BT12 6HY

**Shankill Women's Centre**

151-157 Shankill Road  
Belfast  
BT13 1FD

**First Steps Women's Centre**

21a William Street  
Dungannon  
Co Tyrone  
BT70 1DX

**Magherafelt Women's Centre**

The Learning Lodge  
27-29 Moneymore Road  
Magherafelt  
BT45 5JE

**Chrysalis Women's Centre**

520 Burnside  
Brownlow, Craigavon  
BT65 5DE