

REPORT TO: DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 16 April 2001

REPORT ON: SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

REPORT NO: 226-2001

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This Report seeks approval for the provision of funding to support the Dundee Sitter Service, Homestart Dundee and the Scottish Pre-school Play Association (SPPA)

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Education Committee note the contents of this Report and approves the provision of funding to Dundee Sitter Service (£52,500), Homestart Dundee (£29,000), and SPPA (£18,533)

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The provision of external funding will cost £99,533. These proposals represent a key element of Dundee's Sure Start Strategy and will be fully funded from funding made available to Local Authorities by the Scottish Executive.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 These proposals will enrich and enhance the learning and development of young children in Dundee. Additionally the proposals will establish effective supports to families with young children and will therefore contribute to enabling everyone to play a full part in society.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 These proposals will contribute towards ensuring that all children are effectively supported through the early years of childhood, enabling them to make best advantage of future opportunities. The proposals will also increase the provision of effective supports including childcare, for working parents or those in further or higher education. The proposals will further support partnership and collaboration with the voluntary sector in Dundee.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 The Scottish Executive has made funding available to Local Authorities to support the development of services for children aged 0-3 and their families. The national initiative is known as Sure Start Scotland and a range of strategies have been developed in Dundee to make use of the funding

available. These are outlined within the Dundee Early Years and Childcare Plan 2000–2003, which was published in May 2000 and approved by Committee on 17 April 2000 (refer to Report No. 264/2000).

6.2 The Scottish Executive issued Guidance on the local implementation of Sure Start Scotland to Local Authorities in June 2000. This Guidance emphasised the need for Local Authorities to work in partnership with voluntary sector organisations in developing their services. We have in Dundee two voluntary organisations that play an important role in delivering services to families within the local communities – Homestart and Dundee Sitter Service. Of further importance, the Scottish Pre-school Play Association (SPPA) is an umbrella voluntary organisation which supports pre-fives provision such as Parent & Toddler Groups and Pre-school Playgroups.

7.0 PROPOSAL

7.1 Dundee Sitter Service

7.2 The Dundee Sitter Service has been operating for nearly 2 years, providing childcare to families at times when no other childcare is available. Users of the Service fall into 3 categories – work (65%), education (24%) and respite (11%). Parents in employment may use the service for economic reasons or because no other form of childcare is accessible due to their hours of work, i.e. shift work, evenings or early mornings and weekends. Those requiring respite sits are either families of children with special needs or who are under stress, or the children have been placed on the child protection register.

7.3 A recent survey of users sought their views of the Service and all highlighted the value of the service and their dependence upon the childcare provided, for example:

“Without the Service my whole life would be affected, I may even have to give up my job as I start early in the mornings”,

“Without the Service I would have to give up my course as I couldn’t afford other child care and I have no relatives to look after my son”,

“We couldn’t cope, it would be such a struggle”

7.4 To date 161 families have registered to use the Service with 101 having been allocated a Sitter at some point. Children under 3 years of age account for 45% of the total hours provided to families by sitters. There is a current waiting list comprised of 26 families who have specified hours they require for childcare that can not be provided by other childcare facilities.

7.5 Apart from the flexibility of childcare, the Service makes a significant contribution to supporting families on low incomes. Families pay on a sliding scale according to household income with charges ranging from 50p and hour to £6 an hour. As the average generated income is 97p per hour, this indicates that the majority of families require subsidised childcare.

7.6 The service has recently been successful in receiving funding from the New Opportunities Fund. This will contribute to the Service’s further expansion particularly in providing home based out of school care for children aged 5 – 12 years. The uniqueness of the Service was a significant factor in it attracting this funding.

7.7 The funding being sought will enable the Dundee Sitter Service to continue to provide flexible, affordable childcare to families on low incomes and respond to a growing waiting list.

7.8 HomeStart

7.9 Homestart Dundee is a voluntary organisation providing a unique service. It offers support to families in their own homes by volunteers often themselves parents, who are vetted, trained and then matched to families whom they visit regularly, usually once a week. Volunteers may offer a listening ear, help with children, a break for parents, practical help and reassurance. They may encourage families to make effective use of local resources or keep appointments with clinics, hospitals, etc. Visiting will continue for as long as the family feels it appropriate.

7.10 Parents who are being supported feel that they are coping better and this often has a spin-off effect on all members of the family, particularly the children who start to enjoy a happier home life. Evaluation reports highlight the benefits of the service to families include an improvement in health (especially mental well being) and a large increase in the uptake of community facilities. Currently, 26 families with a total of 63 children (29 of whom are under the age of 3 years) benefit from the service

7.11 Homestart Dundee currently has a waiting list of 21 families who between them have 19 children under 3 years of age. 7 new volunteers were recruited in October 2000 and a further 4 in January 2001 with more recruitment campaigns planned to meet demand for the service. The funding being sought will enable the organisation to appoint an assistant part-time co-ordinator. This will be necessary to ensure that volunteers are provided with adequate support including training, thereby ensuring that the families to whom they are matched receive an effective service.

7.12 Scottish Pre-school Play Association (SPPA)

7.13 SPPA have provided support a fieldwork service to pre-fives groups in Dundee for over a decade. Currently member groups are comprised of:

- 13 pre-school Playgroups
- 18 Parent and Toddler Groups
- 3 Independent Family Support Services (operated by Churches)
- 7 Private Nurseries

These services are representative of in excess of 500 families the majority of whose children are under the age of 3 years. The groups provide significant support to families especially lone parent families and those who suffer from isolation. As such they are an important community resource in promoting children's development, health and welfare from an early age and combating the effects of social exclusion.

7.14 Support from the fieldworker includes regular visits to groups, support in all aspects of running the group including committee work, finance, employment, curriculum issues and identification of training needs. SPPA is also represented on the Dundee Early Years and Childcare Partnership and it's working groups. Membership of groups also provides a degree of quality assurance, as

membership requires the adoption of SPPA’s ‘Code of Good Practice’. Furthermore, in the case of pre-school Playgroups, the senior playleader is required (by Dundee City Council’s Standards for Registration) to have a recognised qualification - the SPPA Playleader’s training course being the minimum acceptable. Groups who are not members can access the support of the fieldworker on an ad hoc basis.

7.15 The funding being sought would enable SPPA to deploy a Development Worker who would provide an enhanced service to member groups and promote the benefits of membership to other groups. This would also allow for the operation of the SPPA Quality Assurance Scheme within pre-school Playgroups, complimenting existing strategies for curriculum development in pre-school services. The enhanced level of support would also provide more time for working with traditional Parent & Toddler groups and other groups supporting very young children and their families. These groups tend to not attend, or want, traditional training but need the informal ‘alongside’ input to help them move on. As Parent & Toddler groups are recognised as a key resource in the local Sure Start Strategy, this input will make a significant contribution to improving the outcomes for young children and their families.

7.16 Following Committee approval, detailed agreements of the level of service to be provided by each organisation will be drawn up. In the case of SPPA, an additional action plan will be established to focus upon specific targets within the Dundee Early Years and Childcare Plan. Ongoing evaluation to assess the impact of the funding will be conducted by the Early Years and Childcare Partnership Team.

8.0 CONSULTATION
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9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

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Director of Education

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Date