



National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative

Mr Roderic O’Gorman TD
Minister for Children, Disabilities, Equality & Integration
Block One, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

16th September 2020

Dear Minister,

The National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative is writing to highlight a serious issue that is facing some of our most vulnerable children and families across the country. We have been informed, through the services we work with, of the several challenges in accessing sponsor referrals for children under the National Childcare scheme. This has created significant concerns regarding access to ELC and SAC services for the most disadvantaged children and families.

With the announcement of the National Childcare Scheme, the provision of sponsor arrangements for some children and families was a particularly welcome measure to ensure continued access to ELC and SAC services for all children. We were informed that ‘families with high levels of need, who required childcare for child welfare, child protection or family support reasons’ could be referred for subsidised support by a sponsor body.

Services were assured that the move from the Community Childcare Subvention to the Community Childcare Subvention Plus would have no impact on the level of funding to parents who had previously availed of the CCS and that the eligibility criteria would be identical. This is not the case. Under the CCS, parents could access a Band A subsidy through a Public Health Nurse referral. This eligibility has now been removed from the CCSP Saver Programme and instead the only option for some parents is to secure a sponsor referral under the NCS. For many, they can no longer access a PHN referral for their child as under NCS their child does not meet the age criteria as they are aged four years or older.

Services have reported many difficulties identifying sponsor referral agents within the designated statutory agencies. In many cases referral agents have informed parents and providers that they have not received training on the NCS and do not know the process for making sponsor referrals. We have been told of children living in direct provision who have not been able to access ELC and SAC services as they do not meet the criteria for sponsor arrangements. At a time when services are already working under extreme pressure, the added stress of supporting parents, many of whom are themselves living in very difficult circumstances, to navigate a challenging sponsor referral process is unfair on everyone.

Members: Barnardos, BLÁTHÚ Steiner Early Childhood Association, Childminding Ireland, Early Childhood Ireland, Gaeloideachas, National Childhood Network, St Nicholas Montessori Society

As a collaborative, we are committed to advocating for the provision of accessible, diverse and high quality Early Years and School Age Services for the benefit of all children and families. As such, we must stress that the current situation is denying access to ELC and SAC services for those children who would benefit most from attending.

We are asking that the provision for vulnerable children and families under both the CCSP and the NCS be immediately reviewed and the necessary steps taken to address the challenges and gaps that are preventing access to ELC and SAC for disadvantaged children.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. B. Orbinski Burke'.

M B Orbinski Burke
Chairperson NVCC