

APPENDIX II

Children's Centre feedback: learning and employment barriers

Solihull MBC's, Learning, Volunteering & Employment team have wide experience in providing learning and employment advice sessions to parents at Children's Centres across the borough.

The issues outlined below are based on feedback provided by these families and situations which have arisen during the course of providing this learning and employment support.

- The Learner Support Fund (means tested) administered by FE Colleges can provide funding for childcare study purposes. For the past two years the fund available at Solihull College has not met the need of those who applied and were eligible. This has resulted in parents not being able to attend college courses which would improve their skills/qualifications and, in turn, improve their employability. In some situations parents started courses and placed their child/children in registered childcare. They were then informed that childcare funding was not available. This resulted in considerable debts with nurseries, in addition to having to leave their studies.
- Childcare funding provided through the New Deal for Lone Parents at Job Centre Plus has become much more restricted. For example no Hair & Beauty courses or IT courses are eligible for childcare funding, apparently as a result of labour market intelligence. They will not fund any Level 1 vocational courses in any field of work.
- Many parents in South Solihull are not eligible to access Learner Support Funds due to their household income but are not in a financial position whereby they can actually afford to pay for their childcare. The closure of the Childcare for Learning and Work scheme in August 2010 has increased the numbers of parents not able to afford childcare to enable them to study; this in turn impacts on their employability skills.
- Childcare funding is not available for parents wanting to undertake non-accredited community education courses. This is a natural next step for many parents who have attended college courses in Children's Centres (where childcare is free whilst taking part in a course) and is a barrier for progression to future accredited courses.
- Registered childcare provision is usually available on a Mon-Fri 8am - 6pm basis. Parents are therefore restricted to the jobs they apply for, many employers ask for more flexible working hours but childcare provision is not readily available outside of these times.

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- Many low skilled positions in warehouses / factories etc. are recruited for on a temporary basis through employment agencies. In this situation it is difficult for families to plan for childcare funding through the childcare element of working tax credit as there is no guarantee that their temporary job will provide sufficient weekly hours or number of weeks employment to qualify.
- Childcare funding is not normally available for those wanting to undertake voluntary work or work experience placements. This is a barrier to those wanting to gain work experience and references as part of their pathway to paid employment. A couple of employability programmes offer a maximum of 4 weeks work experience, taken as part of a wider course which lasts 20 weeks - in certain situations the Lone Parent Advisers at JCP can arrange childcare funding for this particular programme.
- Many parents hope to return to study / employment when their child is eligible to start government funded early years provision for 3 year olds. Most schools / nurseries arrange this on a morning only / afternoon only basis. This delivery pattern does not allow sufficient time for parents to attend college or work before they have to return to pick up their child/children. More flexible hours would be greatly beneficial.
- Whilst delivering the extended entitlement will be challenging for some schools, there has been (albeit a small number) who are delivering the entitlement across the whole of the day and it is anticipated that this flexibility will increase as settings become more comfortable with different delivery models and times.
- Some BME mothers have been unable to access learning and funding for childcare as they are unable to provide proof of household income, often because they are not privy to this information. This greatly affects employability prospects and as this includes restricting access to ESOL classes progression and access to accredited learning becomes even more difficult