



# NICMA AND UNITE REGISTERED CHILDMINDERS NI COVID 19 ENHANCED ASSISTANCE PROPOSAL

## THE FORGOTTEN KEY WORKER

#TheForgottenKeyWorker

Submitted to the office of Education  
Minister Peter Weir MLA.  
12 August 2020

NICMA and Unite Registered Childminders NI branch committee 2020

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## Preamble

On the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August 2020, the Unite Registered Childminders (from herein RCM) branch committee and NICMA met with Minister Peter Weir to discuss the proposals for enhanced financial assistance to the Childcare Recovery Support Fund for childminders submitted to the Department of Education in July 2020. These proposals were rejected by the department. During these meetings, Minister Weir requested that the both NICMA and Unite Registered Childminders submit “an evidence based business case” to the department. The evidence is based on four case studies, survey results of over 900 RCMs, as well as interviews and focus groups with RCMs in Northern Ireland.

## Introduction

Please find enclosed the “evidence based business cases” that NICMA and the Unite Registered Childminders committee have compiled to support our request for additional funding to be proposed to support our sector to reopen and practice safely within the Guidance from the Department of Health. We hope this meets fully with your request for a detailed and evidenced based plan. We reiterate the importance of supporting the entire childcare sector to reopen safely and the unfairness of the Childcare Recovery Support Fund award of £300 for 2 months to registered childminders. We believe this is not a fair and proportionate package to adequately support RCMs to get back up on their feet. We believe it is putting the predominantly female workforce at a disadvantage whilst trying to recover from the key and family restrictions whilst having little or no income.

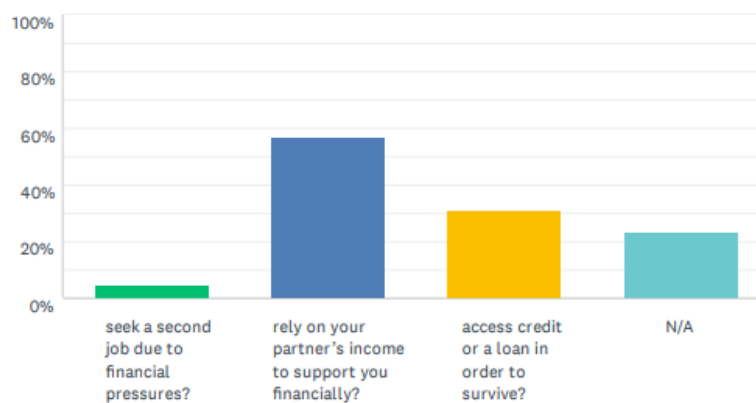
All the lists and restrictions have been lifted for the sector yet there appears to be a view that RCMs do not have added expenses or that they should be happy with the award. The sum agreed of £500 for the Childcare Support Scheme was calculated on overheads that RCMs had to continue to pay even if they were opened or closed during Covid-19. The sum was agreed but was only paid to those who continued to work. It was also announced that the payment would be broken down to £125 per child with a claim of a maximum of 4 children; it was also restricted to RCM's having to mind the child no less than 20 hours a month. Through NICMA's swift negotiation with the department the 20hrs restriction was dropped. The registered childminders that stayed open during Covid-19,

were restricted to 2 families a day and were under full capacity, therefore the majority of RCMs were never going to claim the full £500.

The amount offered in the Childcare Recovery scheme was unfairly calculated on the back of the average paid out in The Childcare Support Scheme of £331. This scheme did not take into consideration RCM's continued overheads and all the other equipment and processes they had to put in place to comply with the Government guidance and regulations due to Covid-19. This is why the original proposals sent from NICMA to the Department of Education outlined the reasons for the funding now being asked for. Again, this scheme failed drastically and to use an average as such to justify the recovery monies is unfair and unjust. RCMs cannot be held accountable for the failure of a scheme to support key workers through the peak of the pandemic period.

### Q9 Have you had to do any of the following due to Covid 19 (tick as appropriate)

Answered: 627 Skipped: 2

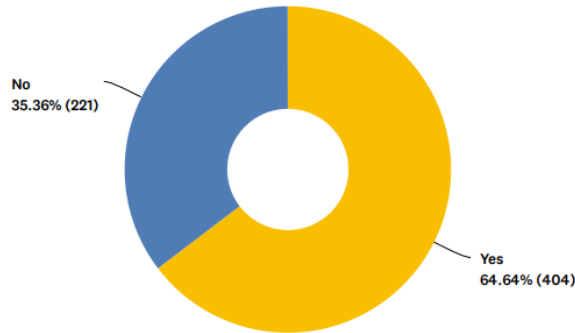


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
seek a second job due to financial pressures?	4.63% 29
rely on your partner's income to support you financially?	57.10% 358
access credit or a loan in order to survive?	30.94% 194
N/A	23.60% 148
Total Respondents: 627	

**Graph 1- Financial Pressure**

Q7 Have you permanently lost families/children due to covid 19 and the restrictions put in place?

Answered: 625 Skipped: 4

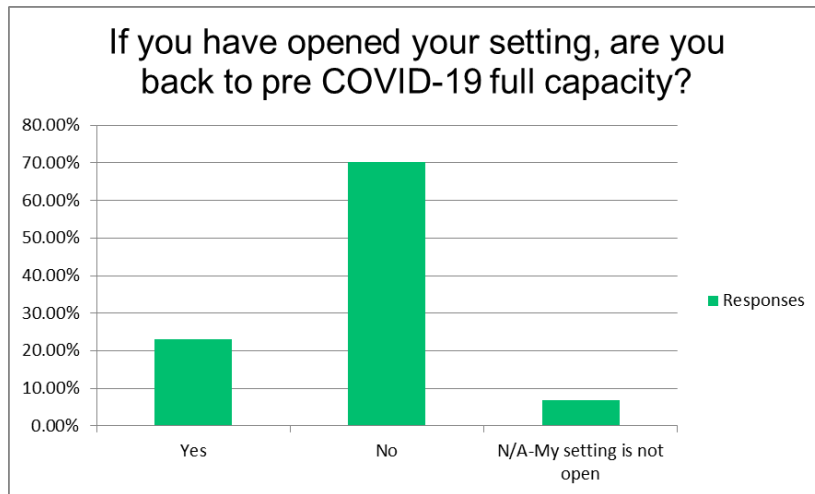


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	64.64%	404
No	35.36%	221
TOTAL		625

Graph 2- Loss of families

If you have opened your setting, are you back to pre COVID-19 full capacity?

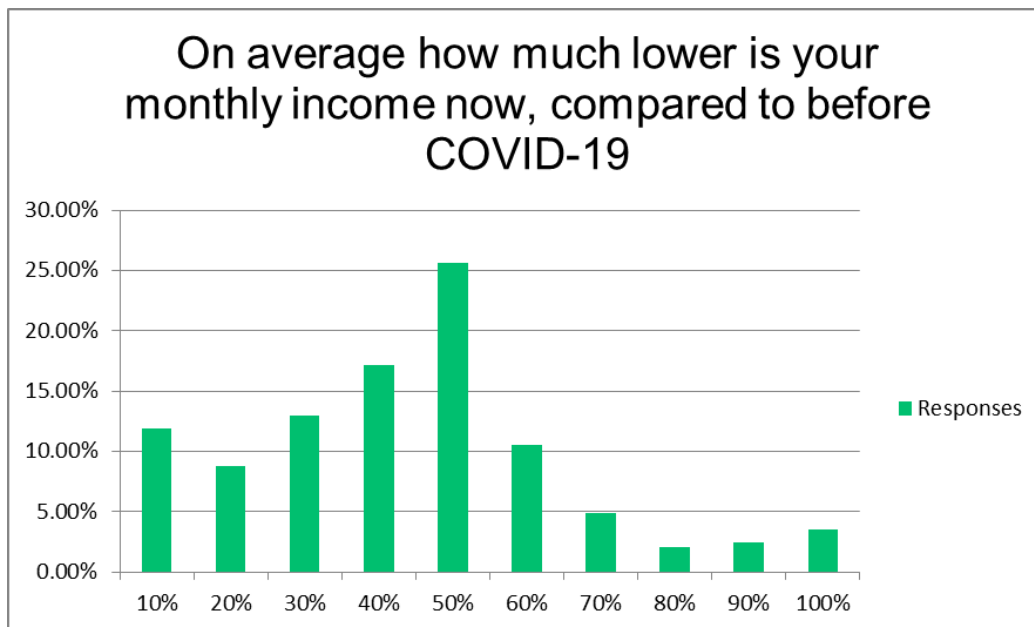
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	23.02%	67
No	70.10%	204
N/A-My setting is not open	6.87%	20
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>291</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>3</b>



Graph 3- Capacity levels in August

## On average how much lower is your monthly income now, compared to before COVID-19

Answer Choices	Responses	
10%	11.93%	34
20%	8.77%	25
30%	12.98%	37
40%	17.19%	49
50%	25.61%	73
60%	10.53%	30
70%	4.91%	14
80%	2.11%	6
90%	2.46%	7
100%	3.51%	10
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>285</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>9</b>



**Graph 4- Percentage Loss of income in August**

## Rationale for increased funding

Both Unite the childminders and NICMA have collected survey data through Survey Monkey from the middle of March and throughout this pandemic. These surveys were sent out via email to all NICMA members, the Unite branch and social media, with over 1,300 registered childminders completing these surveys. Graph 1 illustrates the reality of the pandemic for childminders. Over half of those surveyed have had to rely on their partner's income to support them. The UN Gender Equality Observatory states that this reliance makes this (predominantly female workforce) "vulnerable and economically dependent on others, who are in most cases men." (<https://oig.cepal.org/en>, n.d.)

The Northern Ireland Women's Resource and Development Agency states that "The statistics presented verify that gender inequality is prevalent in all aspects of society in Northern Ireland; including the public and private sectors. To address the structural barriers that women face, gender equality needs to be embedded at the core of all policy, legislative and budgetary decision making." (WRDA, 2020)

The Department of Education did not create gender inequality in Northern Ireland, nor did it create this pandemic. However, the already prevalent gender equality gap in NI has been exacerbated by Covid 19. It is arguable that this situation was avoidable. It is indisputable that it is within the power of the department to improve the situation for a significant group of mostly women in the community who provide a vital role in allowing the economy to restart, both directly and indirectly by enabling parents to return to work.

Graph 2 illustrates that 65% of RCMs have permanently lost income. We estimate that the average RCM has incurred a loss of earnings in the order of £900 per month up to and including July and August. As you can examine, RCMs have substantial mandatory costs attached to reopening and maintaining their settings in this post Covid-19 environment. These costs are analysed herein.

Graph 3 illustrates that by mid-August when restrictions to the number of families a RCM could care for had been lifted, 70% of RCM's were still not at full capacity.

Graph 4 illustrates that by mid-August the majority of RCM's had a 50% loss of income.

Through this analysis and conclusion, the RCM committee and NICMA believe that in order to address the financial burden that RCMs are facing right now, the

Department should act immediately to increase the funding to £500 per month for July and August.

## Evidence of financial hardship - Case Studies

In the next section we will examine the rationale for this amount and break down the extra costs incumbent on RCMs as a result of the guidelines laid down by the Department of Health in their Covid-19 guidance for Childminders V5 document, dated 29 June 2020. (DoH, 2020) We have taken two case studies as examples of the extra costs to a childminder who abides by the guidelines in an average setting.

### Case Study One

Childminder with 6 children in a setting with a garden play area.

<b><u>One-off costs*- Case Study One</u></b>	
Hand sanitizer station outside	£22
Indoor sanitizer unit	£15
Outdoor sink plus labour	£295
Stair gates (for sectioning off in case of illness)	£52
Separate coat pegs	6 x £7.50= £45
Shoe & bag box per child	6 x 6.50= £39.00
Paper	£12
Ink	£13
Forehead Thermometer	£40
Plates, cups different colour per child	£20 x 6 = £120
Hand towels	£40
Extra outdoor play equipment and labour	£408.50
<b>Total one off costs-</b>	<b>£1090.50</b>

\*Mandatory costs in yellow.



**Recurring costs\* per month- Case Study One**

Sanitizer	£54
Gloves	£48
Aprons	£21
Masks	£38
Antibacterial sprays, wipes, bleach	£66
1 of each item per child per bag -	
Bags x 6 -	£12
Mini sanitizer x 6	£12
Pack tissues	£5
Pack wipes	£6
<b>Total recurring costs</b>	<b>£262</b>

\*Mandatory costs in yellow.

The items above is not an exhaustive list of all the items that many RCMs find themselves having to purchase to ensure the children in our care are kept safe and entertained at all times.

It is clear from the costs breakdown from Case Study One that the average RCM will struggle to make up the one off cost of £1090 without having to access credit or pass on the cost to the families of mindees in their care. As you see from Graph 1 on page 4, 65% of RCMs have permanently lost families, so they would loath to increase their prices in such a volatile environment.

It is no exaggeration to say the long term viability of childminding as a profession is under threat in Northern Ireland right now.

## Case Study Two

Childminder with 4 children due to loss of families in a rural setting.

<b><u>One-off costs*- Case Study Two</u></b>	
Sanitizer Dispensers	£15
Forehead thermometer	£45
Separate coat pegs	4 x £7.50= £30
Shoe & bag box per child	4 x 6.50= £26.00
Paper	£12
Covid 19 decontamination service- car and house	£220
Ink	£13
Plates, cups different colour per child	£20 x 4 = £80
Hand towels	£40
<b>Total one off costs-</b>	<b>£481</b>

<b><u>Recurring costs* per month- Case Study Two</u></b>	
Sanitizer refills	£56
Hand soap	£9
Mini sanitizers x 2wks supply	£90
Aprons Disposable 1 box	£17
Masks 1 box	£20
Gloves 2 boxes per month	£52
Anti bac spray	£18
Bleach	£9
Dettol Spray	£20
Extra outdoor resources	£50
Extra Washing powder	£16
Disposable cloths	£18
Anti bac wipes	£18
Individual units for children's p care items	£20
<b>Total recurring costs</b>	<b>£413</b>

\*Mandatory costs in yellow.

## Case Study Three

<u>One-off costs</u>	
Outside wall mounted automatic hand sanitizer	£29.99
Forehead thermometer	£45
Separate coat pegs	6 x £7.50= £45
Boxes for child's items	7 x £6= £42.00
Paper and printer ink	£59.97
Printer	£53.39
Floor Steamer	£59.99
Sensor bin	£45
Play resources	£306.97
Uniform	£30
Plates, cups different colour per child	£20 x 6 = £120
Hand towels	£40
<b>Total one off costs-</b>	<b>£877.31</b>

<u>Recurring costs per month</u>	
Gloves	£15.90
Aprons	£45.88
Face Masks	£19.99
Visor	£7.99
Flash Refill	£31.96
Paper towels	£40
Hand soap	£48
Anti-bacterial spray	£18
Bleach	£9
Washing Powder	£15
Anti-bacterial wipes	£18
Car Deep Clean	£25
<b>Total recurring costs</b>	<b>£294.72</b>

## Total estimated losses, Childcare Recovery Support Fund shortfall and suggested enhanced assistance-

The estimated loss of earnings and shortfall are based on Case Studies 1 and 2 and the currently available assistance. Sections in green indicate the suggested assistance and adjusted loss if enhanced assistance is granted.

### Case Study 1

<b>Estimated loss of earnings-March-May</b>	<b>£2700</b>
<b>One off costs-</b>	<b>£1090</b>
<b>Recurring childcare costs July/August</b>	<b>£524</b>
<b>Costs + Loss of income</b>	<b>£4314</b>
<b>Maximum assistance in March-May-</b>	<b>£900</b>
<b>Childcare Recovery Support Fund July/August</b>	<b>£300</b>
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>£3114</b>
<b>Suggested enhanced assistance</b>	<b>£700</b>
<b>Adjusted loss</b>	<b>£2414</b>

### Case Study 2

<b>Estimated loss of earnings-March-May</b>	<b>£2700</b>
<b>One off costs</b>	<b>£481</b>
<b>Recurring childcare costs July/August</b>	<b>£826</b>
<b>Costs + Loss of income</b>	<b>£4007</b>
<b>Maximum assistance in March-May-</b>	<b>£900</b>
<b>Childcare Recovery Support Fund July/August</b>	<b>£300</b>
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>£2807</b>
<b>Suggested enhanced assistance</b>	<b>£700</b>
<b>Adjusted loss</b>	<b>£2107</b>

## Case Study 3

<b>Estimated loss of earnings-March-May</b>	<b>£2700</b>
<b>One off costs</b>	<b>£877.31</b>
<b>Recurring childcare costs July/August</b>	<b>£589.44</b>
<b>Costs + Loss of income</b>	<b>£4166</b>
<b>Maximum assistance in March-May-</b>	<b>£900</b>
<b>Childcare Recovery Support Fund July/August</b>	<b>£300</b>
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>£2966</b>
<b>Suggested enhanced assistance</b>	<b>£700</b>
<b>Adjusted loss</b>	<b>£2266</b>

As you can see from our two case studies, even with the modest proposal for enhanced assistance, RCMs are still incurring a significant loss of income. Without this enhanced assistance, many RCMs will struggle to continue to operate beyond September.

## Recommendations-

Our recommendations are as follows:

- A top-up of the current Childcare Recovery Support Fund of £700/ £850, to bring the total assistance to £1000 over the course of the two month scheme. There are 2700 RCMs in NI. The enhanced assistance equates to less than 30% of the total allocated funding to the sector.
- A commitment to accepting a joint submission from NICMA and Unite Registered Childminders, before any further funds are allocated to assist with any future closing of the economy due to Covid-19.
- Regular consultation with NICMA and Unite Registered Childminders branch representatives on decisions affecting the future of childminding as a profession in Northern Ireland.

## In conclusion

In the meetings with Minister Weir on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August, we expressed our concerns on the unfair allocation of the childcare recovery support fund. Of the allocated funding of £10.5m, nurseries and other day care facilities received 80%, RCMs received 15% when 5% went on administration. RCM's believe the grants awarded was not proportionately fair and has put them at a disadvantage whilst still trying to recover from all the restrictions that have been placed upon them throughout the pandemic.

These restrictions have already left many with no income, relying on partners income, seeking financial support from family or loans without having the added worry of how we can practice as safely as possible with limited financial support. "Now with trying to ensure our own homes are kept as safe as possible for our own families we are going the extra length to ensure we have adequate safety measures in place to protect the families and children we care and support. This all comes at a cost, a cost to our own family's income and a cost to the families we support to go out to work. "

It is important to remember RCM's stepped up to the mark at the peak of the pandemic, and delivered the majority of childcare services. Keeping their doors opened not just for their own key worker families but additional key worker families even though they were at a loss in their regular income and a failed Covid-19 scheme which did not provide adequate support and failed to reach those who needed it most.

It appears there could be the possibility of another peak with localised lockdowns coming into Autumn and Winter, RCMs are looking toward this and seeing the lack of support and value that has been placed on them thus far and are considering whether they will keep their doors open during a second wave.

RCM's have for too long been the forgotten workforce of Northern Ireland, during this Pandemic showing how they stepped forward to help, by putting themselves and their families at risk. Becoming part time teachers for those children in their care, with no support from the department of Education. Supporting those children through difficult times when often their parents came home exhausted, RCM's homes was a safe space and some kind of continued

normality in a strange time for these children. RCM's are no longer content to allow their voices be drowned out and their concerns be dismissed. Unite Registered Childminders and NICMA intend to fight for all childminders in Northern Ireland until their voices are heard and their demands are met.