

How to get the best out of your childminding business



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES INFORMATION SERVICE

Introduction

Childminding can be a rewarding and enjoyable career. You can pretty much be your own boss, work flexible hours that suit your lifestyle, enjoy numerous activities with energetic, enthusiastic children and most importantly, know that you are making a valuable contribution to the educational, emotional and social development of the children in your care.

As a childminder you are also given the chance to take advantage of additional training courses (other than those that are mandatory as part of your registration), join the National Childminding Association (NCMA) and access various other services and opportunities as part of your professional development. All of these can help to enhance your business potential and fill vacant childcare places, as parents will be looking for high standards of quality care.

The main support contacts for childminders are the NCMA, Children and Families Information Service (CFIS) and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP).



Childcare Advice and Support Team

The Childcare Advice and Support Team (CAS) is part of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and Sure Start and Extended Schools Team. They provide advice, support and training in all areas of early years and childcare, including matters relating to Ofsted registration and inspections. This advice and support is available to all prospective and registered childcare providers, including those delivering daycare and childminders.

If you choose to start your own childminding business and register as a childminder, you will need to attend an initial briefing and then a five day, week long pre-registration course run by the Childcare Advice and Support Team.

This course will include two sessions that will provide you with the information you need to apply to become an Ofsted registered childminder. Additional sessions will focus on *Safeguarding Children, Inclusion and Anti Bias, Introduction to Special Educational Needs* and basic computer skills training.

The advice and support on offer from the team will continue after registration and you will be able to access help with your preparation for the first Ofsted registration visit, and each subsequent Ofsted inspection. A childcare adviser

within the team will be available to visit you at home prior to your inspection to provide further advice.

The team is also responsible for organising all childcare courses including first aid training. Regular training information and booking forms will be made available and you will be updated on any new publications, legislations and/or regulations.

The range of advice and support provided covers the following areas:

- pre registration training, advice and support for all prospective childcare providers
- training, advice and support for all existing and registered childcare providers in meeting the EYFS Welfare Requirements
- training and support in relation to Self-evaluation and improving the quality of care
- guidance and support for implementing Ofsted action plans
- pre Ofsted inspection advice and support to achieve good and outstanding outcomes
- identification of training needs



- safeguarding children matters
- recruiting, training and supporting community childminders
- advice and guidance for childminders implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- advice and support in relation to concerns and complaints
- childcare advice and support visits to all settings including childminders'
- advice and support over the telephone

The team is managed by Adetutu Shobande and their roles and responsibilities are as follows:

Adetutu Shobande
Childcare Advice and Support Manager
Tel: 01582 54 81 24
(available Monday to Friday)
Email:
Adetutu.Shobande@luton.gov.uk

Adetutu has overall responsibility for the team and functions. She is the Early Years department's lead and designated officer on concerns and complaints including child protection, and is also a member of Luton's social services resource panel.

Childcare advice & support officers (part time)

Martina Timoney

Area: south and east

Tel: 01582 54 89 95 (available

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday)

Email: Martina.Timoney@luton.gov.uk

Melanie Field

Area: west and central

Tel: 01582 54 89 96 (available

Monday to Friday)

Email: Melanie.Field@luton.gov.uk

Lucy Riches

Area: north and central

Tel: 01582 54 89 97 (available

Monday to Thursday)

Email: Lucy.Riches@luton.gov.uk

The principal responsibilities of the childcare advice and support officers include providing advice, support and guidance relating to Ofsted registration and inspections for all childcare providers. In addition, they provide advice on the registration process, good practice, and ensuring that regulations and quality standards are met. They also work closely with the Early Years Advisory Teachers and other EYDCP partners.

Anya Cusack

Childcare Advice and Support Assistant (part time)

Tel: 01582 54 80 59 (available

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday)

Email: Anya.Cusack@luton.gov.uk

Anya provides administrative support to the team and is generally the first point of contact for any queries from childcare providers. Anya is the main contact for checking the availability of courses or to book a place on a course. She also can obtain any publications you may require to support your provision.

The Childcare Advice and Support Team also have a generic email address. You can e-mail any general enquiries to childcareadvice@luton.gov.uk

If your Ofsted registration visit or inspection is due you can contact the Childcare Advice and Support team now for help and advice. Additional support through home visit is also offered by the team to get you ready for your Ofsted inspection.

Financial support

The Early Years and Childcare Partnership can provide financial assistance to registered childminders who live in Luton. The financial assistance available includes:

Childminder Start-up Grant

This grant is aimed to help you to set up your childminding business and become registered. The start-up grant is £450 and is available for new childminders until March 2009. You can use the grant to pay for:

- registration fee
- safety equipment
- business pack - includes insurance, record books, fire blanket



- training:
- introducing childminding practice
- food hygiene;
- first aid.
- purchasing toys and equipment.

Sustainability funding for childminders

To help sustain childminders during periods where there is a vacancy and they are experiencing financial difficulties due to the reduction in numbers, there is a grant available. This sustainability grant will fund up to 80 per cent of the average local weekly payment **to a maximum of £100 per week**, for a total of one separate five-week period in a single year. It is paid after a childminder has had an unfilled vacancy for more than two weeks and the vacancy register is required as proof of evidence.

For more information about this funding, or to apply, please contact Abdul Munim, Early Years Business and Financial Support Manager on 01582 54 80 79.

Luton Children and Families Information Service (CFIS)

When you become registered with Ofsted, your details will be passed to Luton Children and Families Information Service (CFIS) who will then contact you by letter to request your full details for their database. You will also be sent a provider agreement form, which you will need to complete in full and sign, paying particular attention to the section that asks where you want your details advertised. Once you have returned the form to the CFIS, your details will be added onto the database by the CFIS data administrator.

How your details are given to parents looking for childcare depends on what consent boxes you tick on your provider agreement form.

In writing - by choosing *in writing*, you will ensure that your details will be sent out to parents if they ask for a list of childminders that covers your particular postcode area or ward. The list consists of your name, road name, ward, contact details (e.g. telephone numbers and email addresses), the age range you cater for, your opening hours and brief details of services offered.

Childminders who keep us up to date regularly will appear at the top of these lists, therefore it is advisable to contact the CFIS on a regular basis if your details have changed. Unfortunately we cannot record everything on our lists so you will need to be prepared to answer a range of questions from parents or carers.

On the internet - if you consent to have your details advertised on the internet, then your name will appear as part of an on-screen list held on the childcare link website – www.childcarelink.gov.uk. The more information you provide about your service, the better the impression given to parents when they click on your name. For example the parent may be given useful information such as school pick-up's and drop-off's, special needs provisions, cultural provisions, the hours that you can care for the child and the facilities that you can offer. However, the fees that you charge, your telephone number and your address will not be published on the internet. If the parent wants to contact you they will then call Luton CFIS for your details, either over the phone or in writing, depending on what you have consented to. They will also be able to provide much more detailed information about the services and facilities that you can offer.

Over the phone - if you give your consent to have your details given over the phone, you will have your name and telephone number given out verbally to parents who contact CFIS. The parent's details are taken when they contact CFIS. This is useful if a parent is looking for emergency cover or has viewed your details on the internet and wants to speak to you.

The Children and Families Information Service is committed to impartiality and confidentiality, and is bound by the Data Protection Act 1998 . Under no circumstances will information officers recommend a childminder or show preferential treatment to any particular childminder above another. Staff have no control over the way lists of childminders are printed, or how they appear on

the internet or the database, and will only give out childminder names and telephone numbers in the order they appear on screen.

Each year the CFIS carries out the Childcare and Foundation Stage Education Audit. This will inform them about any changes to your circumstances. However the responsibility is with you to inform CFIS as, and when, vacancies are filled or arise. You are encouraged to update the service of any changes in circumstances to ensure that details provided by CFIS is as up to date and accurate as possible. CFIS want to ensure that the service provided is of the highest quality for the parent and the child.



National Childminding Association

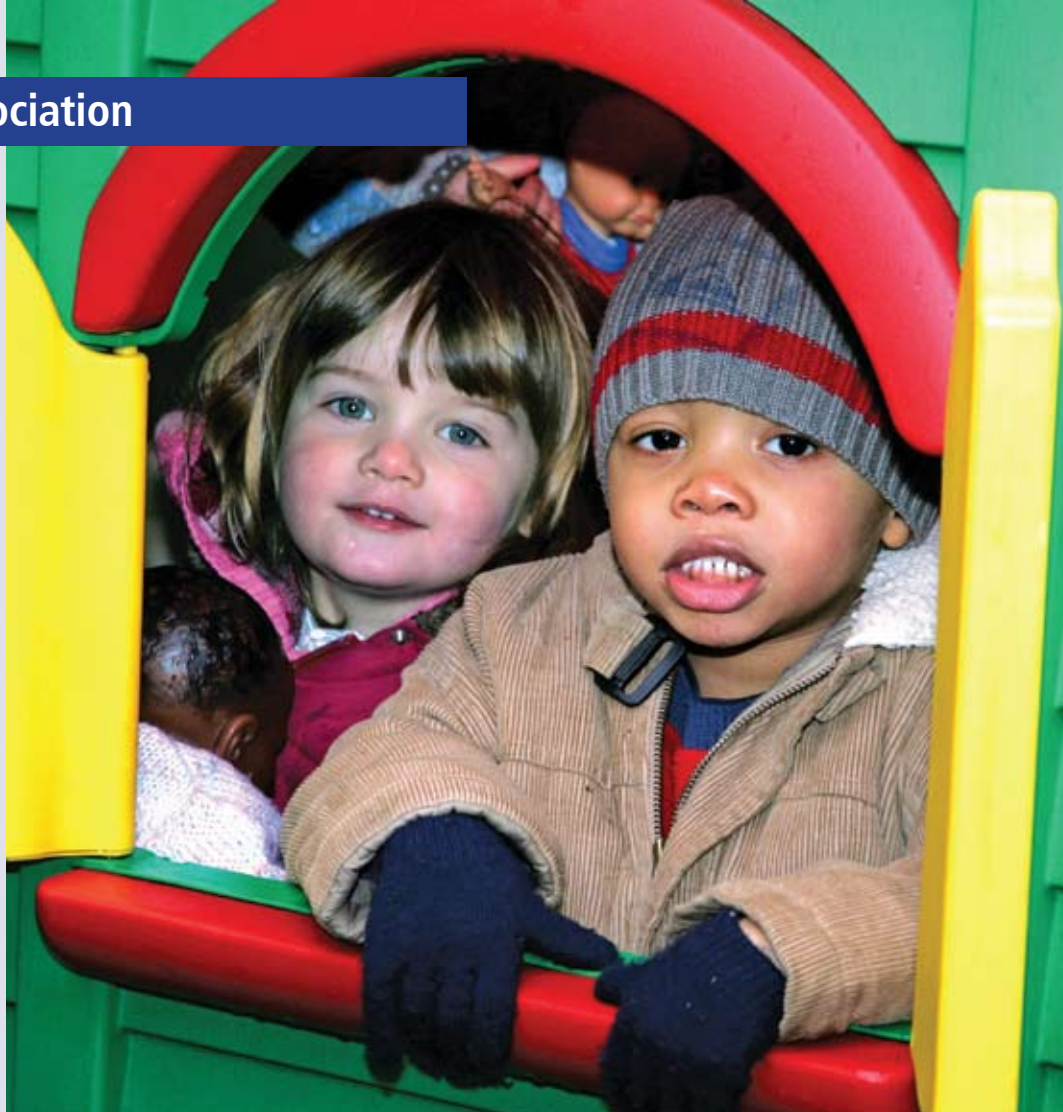
If you are a registered childminder you are encouraged to join a 'children come first' childminding network through the NCMA. This network is approved and accredited by the NCMA and offer a number of benefits to childminders:

Peer support - joining the network will also give you a great opportunity to meet with other childminders in your area. Support from your peers can be extremely helpful as a way of talking through concerns or issues and learning about things that have worked well.

You can also attend the NCMA childminder drop-ins, either as a brand new / newly registered childminder or an experienced childminder. This gives you the chance to be linked to an experienced network childminder and draw on their expertise and knowledge.

The experienced childminder will be able to advise you on practical issues such as filling in forms, attending drop-in sessions and finding training courses. They are able to offer you lots of practical ideas for working with children, and are happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have.

"Being part of the support group gives you the opportunity to discover what's new i.e. places to visit, and new training opportunities, and allows you to share different ideas and to make new friends,



especially with those who share your interest in children. It can offer guidance and support with any obstacles that may be encountered and is especially useful to new childminders who can find their first year quite daunting," Michelle Tibble, Support Childminder, Stopsley.

Training - research (2003 - 2004) conducted by Sue Owen of the National

Children's Bureau has shown that childminders on approved networks undertake much more training than those not part of a network. Effective training is vital for improving quality and will really help you to develop your childminding career. Your network coordinator can advise you on the best training to suit your needs and put you in touch with the training providers.

The Luton NCMA has a rolling programme of business support workshops e.g. 'The Guide to Good Practice' comprising of six individual two hour sessions: accounts made easy, record keeping, working in partnership, portfolio building, marketing your business, how to show your business to Ofsted. You can choose which sessions suit you.

The workshops are designed to explain the fundamental part of running a successful and professional childminding business and is suited to childminders who are both newly registered and for those who are experienced but would like to brush up on their technique and learn new ideas. To find out when the next workshop is being held, and to book a place, contact any member of the NCMA Team.

Quality assurance - the Luton come first 'approved' and 'accredited' network is an easy way of showing parents you offer a very high standard of care for their child because the network has been quality assured. NCMA children come first is also endorsed by inventors in children, the government scheme designed to help parents find good quality childcare.

For all enquiries about children come first networks, please contact Elaine Ainsworth on 01582 73 08 28.

For all enquiries about NCMA childminder drop-ins, please contact Lyn O'Callaghan on 01582 59 10 31.



Childminders seeking further qualifications - childminders interested in gaining a level three qualification in childcare can access further training by enrolling on the DHC. It is formatted into units, which you can pursue in any order. For further details of courses, venue and funding please contact Lesley Paterson at Luton Adult Education on 01582 49 00 33.

Support from a network coordinator - network coordinators are on hand to help you make the most of your business. They can offer practical help with filling vacancies, arrange alternative care for children should you fall ill or go on holiday. They also operate an equipment loan service to the network childminders, coordinate childminder drop-ins in all areas of Luton, assist with local childminding groups and facilitate funding when available.

More importantly, they can help you develop your service to get the most from your childminding career. Not many self-employed business people have the opportunity of having a mentor to turn to who can offer training, one-to-one support and advice.

You can use the visits from your network coordinator as a selling point when talking to parents (as you can easily show that the service you offer is regularly checked which can be a reassurance to parents.)

New opportunities - many childminding networks offer services over and above straightforward childcare, providing support to families and the local community. For example childminders who belong to an NCMA Children Come First network can offer government-funded early education sessions.

Networks will be working as a central part of local schools, extended services and integrated children's centres. Joining a network is a very good way of getting involved with these exciting new initiatives.

Other networks offer different services, depending on the local demand in their particular area. At the moment there are networks which:

- care for children of teenage parents whilst they return to full or part time education
- specialise in caring for disabled children
- offer care during unusual hours for parents working shift patterns, i.e. airline or hospital staff
- develop experienced network childminders who mentor new childminders during their first year after registration.

Additional support from the NCMA – all childminders in Luton, can access additional support via the telephone, or face to face through local drop-ins at various venues in Luton.



Contacts

Luton NCMA Childminding Network and Development Officers:

Elaine Ainsworth -

(Barton Hills, Biscot, Bushmead, Icknield, Limbury, Saints, Wardown)

Tel: 01582 73 08 28

Email: elaine.ainsworth@ncma.org.uk

Debbie Bulteel -

(Central, Dallow, Putteridge, Stopsley, Wigmore)

Tel: 01582 48 65 46

Email: debbie.bulteel@ncma.org.uk

Lyn O'Callaghan -

(Challney, Downside, Hockwell Ring, Lewsey, Marsh Farm, Sundon Park)

Tel: 01582 59 10 31

Email: lyndsey.o'callaghan@ncma.org.uk

Liz Bayram, Chief Executive of the NCMA said: "This research (National Children's Bureau) proves that NCMA's Children Come First (CCF) Networks are key in providing parents with the assurance of high quality but flexible childcare. These quality-accredited networks are committed to providing all childminders with the opportunity to achieve a level 3 qualification within five years of registering. Networks are also committed to working in partnership with local children's centres and schools in working towards achieving the government's Extended Schools Initiative.

"The NCMA aims to change the myth that childminders are less professional than other forms of childcare. Quality assurance schemes such as our Children Come First Networks, which are endorsed by Investors in Children help to build confidence in childminder's professionalism. Quality Assured childminders who belong to CCF Networks, have the advantage of being able to access the Nursery Education Grant and can therefore provide a full compliment of services for children and families."



Marketing tips for enhancing your business

Children will leave your services for a variety of reasons and it is important to attract new parents and children quickly to avoid a shortfall in your income. There are a number of techniques that you can use to encourage new clients to use your services.

Think ahead - make sure that when drawing up a contract with a parent, you agree a suitable notice period, which will allow you time to find a replacement child.

Use the grapevine - this is probably the quickest way to let parents know that you have a vacancy - word of mouth spreads fast.

If the parent of the child who is leaving your care has friends who need a childminder, they can put you in touch with them. They will already trust you with their child and the message they tell their friends will be a positive one. Ask your friends and family to spread the word to their own friends and family. Ask if they can advertise at their places of work for you, as there may be someone in desperate need of a childminder who would be ideal.

Use the NCMA - the National Childminding Association has over 25 years of expertise and also offers a legal helpline. They provide workshops and tips on how to market your business

and supply tools of the trade at discount prices to members. Contact any member of the Luton NCMA team for further details. (See pages 10 to 14).

Use the CFIS - Luton Children and Family Information Service will provide parents with your details. Contact CFIS for more details (see pages 8 and 9).

Work together - speak to other childminders who you are in touch with. Parents looking for a childminder may contact a fellow childminder who has just filled all their vacancies, or they may not be able to do a particular school pick up which means they would be unsuitable. If they know you have vacancies, they can refer the parent to you.

Get noticed - contact Luton CFIS to make sure that your details are included on the database. Advertise your services by putting posters on your own windows. Cards in newsagents or on public notice boards can be a handy way of advertising your services to the public, although some may apply a small charge. Ask staff if you can advertise in your local doctors' surgery, library, community centre, village hall, children's centre, sports centre, school or bank. These are all useful places to advertise. Think about what other public buildings are in your area where you could advertise.

Ask for advice - you'll need to think carefully about what you write on your card or flier. Ask fellow childminders or parents to read what you've written and give you feedback. Have you covered the most important details about the childminding service you offer i.e. school pick-ups and drop offs? Have you remembered to put your contact details on?

Dare to be different - think about what you can do to make your card or flier stand out from the many others being displayed. What will make you unique and more desirable to the parent? Add details about your qualifications, your childcare experience and whether you speak any additional languages. Can you do emergency cover that other childminders are unable to do? Do you have specialist training that could be beneficial to parents who have children with additional needs? These are all things that will make your business stand out.

Advertising - you can place an advertisement in a range of publications including:

- local newspapers the three Luton papers - The Luton News, Herald & Post, and Luton on Sunday, however there is a charge for this
- Yellow Pages - you can advertise for free by calling 0800 555444 and choosing option two, the advisor will then take you through the process for advertising your childminding service

- Thompson Directory - you can advertise for free under the childminders section of your local directory if you are a registered childminder; your name, address and telephone number will be taken and you will also be asked a number of data protection questions. Your details will also appear on the Thompson Directory website. Call 01252 55 55 55 between 9am and 5pm
- Luton Children and Families Information Service - see page eight and nine for further details of how this service can help publicise your business.

Build the parents trust - be prepared. Filling a childcare vacancy starts with a phone call from the parent. Good communication sells and they will expect you to be clear about what your childminding business can offer them. If you've impressed the parent with what you've told them on the phone they will want to visit your home and chat about your services, and this is your chance to win them over. When giving them a tour of your house point out all mandatory safety features and explain any safety steps that you've taken. i.e. Locks on door, stair gates, fire guards, plug guards, etc. If you plan to use your garden show that it's secure. Don't just show the parent the basics though; show off any extras that will encourage them to use you. Do you have a designated reading area for example?



Talking about the activities you involve the children in is also recommended. Parents will want to know what their children will be doing whilst they are with you and what food they will be eating. Mentioning any additional services that you can offer will also benefit you. Show any books and toys that you use to encourage learning through play, and tell the parent about any trips you take the children on, such as to the park or the library.

Setting up a customer reference book where parents can write comments about the care you have provided for their children will be a useful addition

to standard references. Good references and comments make a big impact and you'll need to show the parent your registration and insurance documents as well. You could also show parents any training certificates you have. If you have appeared in *Early Days* magazine or the local paper for achieving your Quality First award, this will be beneficial as well. But remember, parents will also be looking at your personality and attitude, so try to build a rapport with them during their visit.

Ask the parent questions such as what is their child like? What do they enjoy doing? You need to gauge whether you feel comfortable with the child as well as the parent as you will be building a long term relationship with both of them. Lastly, leave the parent with a good impression.

To view the research conducted by the National Children's Bureau , go to www.ncma.org.uk and click on downloads in the left hand navigation bar. Scroll down to NCMA publications and click on Children Come First: The role of approved childminding networks in changing practice - Executive Summary.



