

Social Impact Report



Foreword

I used the foreword to last year's Social Impact Report to reflect on an incredible twenty years for Employers For Childcare, looking back on some truly remarkable highlights. Given how unexpected some of our experiences over the years had been, I vowed not to make any predictions for the next twenty years, and I'm glad I didn't – because who could have predicted, just a few months later, we would be faced with a global pandemic, a country wide lockdown and the closure of many schools and childcare settings.



This last year alone has been marked by some of the proudest moments in Employers For Childcare's history – winning 'Social Enterprise of the Year' at the Social Enterprise NI Awards, supporting the establishment of a new All Party Working Group on Childcare at Stormont, watching children's eyes light up as we welcomed them to our brand new social enterprise indoor adventure centre – High Rise, and hearing from a parent whose child had severe additional needs about how High Rise, with its Changing Places accessible toilet and sensory room, had "changed their world" by enabling them to socialise together as a family. But unfortunately, we have also had one of our saddest moments – temporarily closing the doors of High Rise, not knowing when we would be able to reopen and welcome our guests back.

However, what this report demonstrates, is that a combination of hard work and dedication from our amazing team, and investment from far-sighted employers choosing to use their purchasing power to 'buy social', can deliver great results and make a positive difference in the lives of so many. While social distancing may have kept us physically apart, our mission to support parents, children and the childcare sector right across the UK, has brought us more together than ever. So I am proud of the impact that the Employers For Childcare team has delivered as we have worked to help, advise and advocate for parents, childcare providers and employers during this most challenging of years. In commending this report to you, I would like to thank everyone who has made our work possible - and for your patience as we have all adjusted to a new way of working.

I will close with one prediction. Employers For Childcare, along with our colleagues in the broader Social Enterprise sector, will 'build back better' and continue delivering our positive social impact – a community helping to make the world just that bit better.

Marie Marin, Chief Executive

Charity Number 101176



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Build back social and build back better!

2020 has been a year unlike any other we have experienced at Employers For Childcare, and that is the message we have heard from countless parents, childcare providers and employers. At the start of the year, we thought this would be because of our exciting new social enterprise business High Rise – instead, the world has experienced the impact of the COVID19 pandemic. But at a time of immense challenge brought about by this virus and the associated lockdown, the team at Employers For Childcare has continued to deliver vital social benefit.

Since 2008,
we have invested
£6.8 million
into helping working
families across
the UK

We are proud to be part of a broader movement of social enterprises – businesses set up to change the world for the better – meaning that, as we seek to rebuild our economy and society, we are committed to building back social and building back better.

Delivering social impact and supporting families, childcare providers and employers during COVID19

Through continuing to invest in our charity, we have:

- secured direct savings for parents and identified support they are entitled to at a time when many have been made redundant, furloughed or found their hours of work or income reduced
- assisted childcare providers to draw down financial support and supported the operation of a Bespoke COVID19 Approved Home Childcare Scheme
- helped employers to be more family friendly, providing advice and guidance on how to support their staff to work more flexibly, and adapt to the changes brought about by lockdown requirements.

In 2019/20 we
invested almost
£200,000

in our charity through our Social Enterprise
and charitable activities

We identified collective financial
support of almost
£12.6 million

for callers to our Family Benefits Advice
Service

That means for every **£1 invested** in our charity,
we identified a **direct saving for parents of £63**

This work is only possible because of the income generated through our social enterprise activities including operating the UK's only Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher scheme, and our new indoor activity centre, High Rise.

Award winning social enterprise

Before the challenges of COVID19, this was a celebratory year for Employers For Childcare!

November 2019: awarded 'Social Enterprise of the Year' for our contribution to the sector in Northern Ireland.

December 2019: Marie Marin, our Chief Executive, was named Woman of the Year at the Social Enterprise UK Awards in London. She also received a prestigious Honorary Fellowship and was admitted to the Social Enterprise Hall of Fame.

March 2020: named 'Best Social Enterprise' at the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council Awards and 'Best New Business' for High Rise.



Building back better with High Rise

Having opened our doors in October 2019, we have been thrilled with the impact that High Rise – our newest social enterprise business – has already had on so many. Having involved the local community in the design of this exciting new, fully accessible indoor activity centre, it has been amazing to watch as a **community has been created within High Rise** – with many guests becoming regular visitors.



It was with a heavy heart that we had to temporarily close the centre due to the COVID19 pandemic. While we are not yet in a position to re-open, we will keep the situation under review and will be excited to welcome everyone back again in the future.

Thank you to each and every one of our lovely guests who supported us in the six months from when we first opened – we enjoyed every moment with you and it was a joy to see the centre filled with families having fun and people of all ages creating wonderful memories together.

The impact of High Rise has already been immense...we can't wait to **build on this in the future** as we **build back better** and **build back social!** In the meantime, we are delighted to share the impact you have already helped High Rise to achieve. In just six months we welcomed:



15,000+ climbers to the largest Clip 'n Climb arena in Ireland!



6,000+ little ones to our exciting soft play!



1,000+ guests to our innovative sensory room!

And that's not including almost 500 parties and corporate events!



High Rise is different because we use 100% of profit generated to support the work of our charity. So every time you visit, as well as enjoying a fun day out, you'll be making a difference to families who need it most!

Social Impact

When a family of four visits our Clip 'n Climb arena, and enjoys pizza in the café it enables us to...



Help one family identify financial support they are entitled to through a call to our Family Benefits Advice Service.



When a primary school comes for a class visit to soft play it enables us to...



Maintain our accessible Changing Places facility for one whole week



When a company books a corporate away day in our Ocean Suite it enables us to...



Deliver a Family Benefits Advice outreach session to a group of families and childcare providers.



When a charity reserves the Sensory Room for a series of six exclusive sessions it enables us to....



Distribute leaflets on our services to local Sure Start centres, raising awareness of our services.



High Rise is a community – we are delighted to share some of the lovely feedback we have received



"Each and every one of our pupils can't wait to go back and often show us the flyer to see when we're going again!"



"I had my daughter's birthday party with High Rise yesterday for 12 children in the soft play area. I just wanted to say how impressed I was with the establishment. The children enjoyed every minute of it. The staff were amazing. The food was hot, fresh, and absolutely delicious. High Rise is definitely miles ahead of any other child soft play area. Great value for money. Clean and extremely professional and nothing was too much hassle."



Childcare Vouchers - #SocialVouchers

Buy Social to support your staff during COVID19

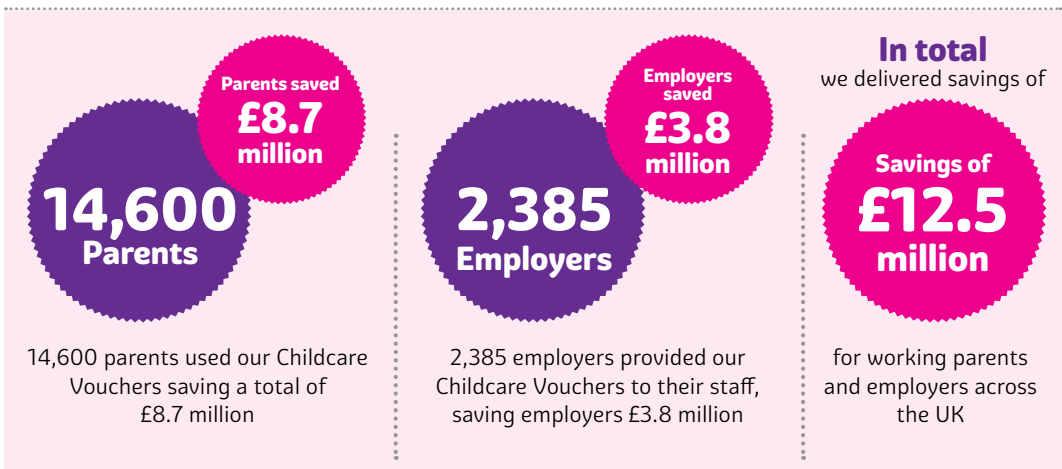
Employers For Childcare operates the only social enterprise Childcare Voucher scheme in the UK. Employees can save up to £933 per year and employers also save on Employer's National Insurance Contributions. We reinvest all profit to create positive social change.

We operate the only Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher scheme in the UK.

When you buy social - society benefits!

At a time when many employers are considering how they can better support their staff to work more flexibly as a result of COVID19 - Employers For Childcare can support you. Whether in offering online advice sessions for staff, assisting in the development of family friendly working policies, or in practical support with childcare costs – all of this is made possible by employers who use Employers For Childcare as their Childcare Voucher provider.

How much parents and employers using our Childcare Vouchers saved in 2019/20:



What is the impact?

For every member of staff that an employer signs up to use our Childcare Vouchers, as well as generating a saving to themselves and their staff, the employer also supports the work of our Family Benefits Advice Service helping them deliver free, impartial and confidential advice to families across the UK.



Feedback from our clients

Feedback from the employers we work with

- **100% of employers** rate the service they receive from Employers For Childcare as 'excellent' or 'good'.
- **96% of employers** plan to continue using Employers For Childcare as their Childcare Voucher provider.

"EFC made the process simple and very user friendly by providing invaluable support. The implementation and ongoing administration of the scheme is effective and efficient saving the Company and employees time."

"Friendly helpful staff made it easy for us to offer our employees an attractive opportunity to save some money on childcare costs."

Feedback from parents using our Childcare Vouchers

- **98% of parents** told us they rate the service from Employers For Childcare as 'excellent' or 'good'.
- **97% of parents** told us they find the online E-Vouchers system 'easy' or 'very easy' to use.

"Excellent service. So simple and easy to use! I have been using it for almost 4 years and nothing is ever a problem...all is managed promptly and effectively. Thank you for a stress free service!!"

"Very friendly and professional staff, willing to help with any part of the process so it's right for me. Really impressed with the service and have recommended to family, friends & colleagues."

Our charity's impact

Our charity works directly with parents through the Family Benefits Advice Service, and for parents through our research, policy and lobbying work.



8,000

Almost 8,000 people helped directly



14,300+

Over 14,300 people helped indirectly, including partners and children



5,100+

Over 5,100 calculations for parents and queries answered



240+

240+ outreach sessions scheduled



120,000+

Total number engaging with our services in person, online and by telephone

Delivering impact through the Family Benefits Advice Service

100%

...would recommend our services to other parents



100%

...rate the quality of the service as excellent or good

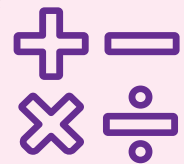


What difference did we make?



Where we identified **financial support** was available for families, the average amount identified was

£4,267
per family



In **2019/20** we identified collective financial support of

£12,600,000

for families who received a calculation from us



"Hi, I was speaking to an advisor on the phone yesterday. I've spoken to him a few times in regards to my work situation etc and he has always been really helpful. Yesterday he definitely excelled in his assistance. I was calling on behalf of my neighbour, he's from Slovakia and struggles on phone. Anyway I just wanted to say how impressed I was."

"Childcare benefits are such a minefield to understand and every time I have contacted EFC all of my questions have been answered, I leave feeling so informed. The service is second to none and the advisors are all so knowledgeable and able to understand my situation and advise me accordingly."

What does this mean to parents...

"The advice I received helps me a lot to make the right decision about the benefits I am entitled to apply for."

"It has really helped me to understand if I increase my hours and salary what option would be best for me."

"Excellent and friendly service. Free advice. Treated with dignity & respect at all times. It has helped make financial situations clearer and help us as a family make informed decisions."

"It made the support available to me clear and I was able to make an informed decision around my working."

"You were able to tell me in one conversation exactly what I would be entitled to for a number of scenarios and although it wasn't the news I wanted I was so happy with the service."

"I have found the service invaluable as a single working mum. It has been great to talk through queries about universal credit. Without your advice I'd have been none the wiser. In short, you are fab, thank you!"

Pilot supporting families who have a child with a disability

During 2019/2020 we participated in a 'pilot' project working with colleagues in the sector to enable parents who have a child with a disability to access childminding services and, in so doing, to support children's development, inclusion, peer interaction, and integration within local communities, as well as facilitate parents to return to training and employment. As part of the pilot, we delivered information presentations to parents and childcare providers, and provided one to one advice to the parents on financial support they are entitled to.



We identified an average per family of
£559 per month in increased income
 (£6,708 per year)!



This made a real difference for parents, many of whom had no idea of the support that they were entitled to – whether with childcare costs or more broadly.

"I wanted to thank you for organising the session with the advisor. She gave me invaluable advice on our situation and I'm now waiting to hear are we going to receive Tax Credits and a *backdated* sum!! This will make a massive difference for us! I'm on statutory maternity pay at the moment, that stops in November so it was going to be bread and water for the foreseeable! With the extra money we could avail of the childminding service. My husband has just enrolled to go back to study part time so this will help us juggle all that."

Supporting those impacted by COVID19

2020 has been a year like no other, for so many of us due to the impact of COVID19. On 20 March 2020, Employers For Childcare temporarily closed our offices, and our staff began to work remotely, in line with Government guidance. While these were challenging times for the team, we knew that some of the greatest challenges were going to be for those who we are dedicated to supporting.

Parents, who were concerned about losing their job, or trying to juggle working from home while caring for children and home schooling. Others were key workers struggling to access childcare and anxious about bringing COVID19 home to their families.

Childcare providers, many of whom had no option but to close, but many also who went above and beyond, remaining open to ensure that they could provide care for the children of key workers.

Employers, trying to support their staff and concerned about their own future sustainability in the face of lockdown.



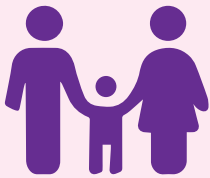
Advice and guidance

While we had to stop delivering face-to-face presentations and outreach events, our Family Benefits Advice Service continued to provide support through our Freephone Helpline and have moved into the world of 'online' advice sessions using Zoom, Teams and Facebook Live...

With changes to support as a result of COVID19, and many families experiencing a change in circumstances, our team has never been busier! Through our website, social media and regular newsletters we have kept parents, employers and childcare providers up to date on developments, trying to ensure that everyone could access financial support they were entitled to and assisting employers to support their staff at this time.

Our team continued to work remotely, adjusting how we did things to ensure we could provide all of our services, including our charity's Family Benefits Advice Service and the processing of Childcare Vouchers.

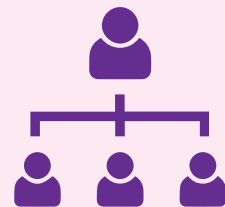
Through our helpline, in just over two months from the start of lockdown to the end of May 2020, **we helped almost 600 people directly impacted by COVID19:**



480 parents
including relevant key
worker parents with
increased childcare costs



**100 childcare
providers**



**20
employers**

"I have had constant contact with Employers for Childcare, on behalf of service users since lockdown...they have consistently responded with current, clear and helpful advice."

"As a single parent of three young children the advice and support made a MASSIVE change to me. Excellent customer service, knowledge and information, even through challenging Covid19 times - outstanding!"

Evidence based policy and lobbying for impact

We have continued our work, together with a range of organisations from different sectors, to drive the Childcare For All campaign forward and establish a Cross Party Working Group at Stormont, focusing on early education and childcare. We were delighted when, with the restoration of the Assembly, the **'New Decade, New Approach'** deal formally



recognised the vital role of childcare and committed the Executive to: ***"publish a Childcare Strategy and identify resources to deliver extended, affordable and high quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4"***.



In March, one of the early actions of the restored Northern Ireland Assembly was to pass a motion proposing to introduce a Childcare Strategy supported by legislation and provision for 30 hours free childcare for 38 weeks a year for 3 to 4 year olds.

Despite lockdown, we have continued to progress our lobbying work on behalf of parents and the childcare sector, securing the establishment of a new **All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare** for which we are delighted to provide secretariat. This is a critical development and will play a key role in driving policy and legislative development, promoting best practice and delivering on the long overdue, and much needed, **Childcare Strategy**. The Group has already received a presentation from the Education Minister, as well as senior officials from the Departments of Education and Health, and is proving to be a constructive forum both to inform and to hold to account. During the year, we also engaged with policy makers and others through a range of consultations and events including:

- UK Government's 'Good Work Plan'
- Joint inquiry into Northern Ireland's welfare policy
- Westminster Work and Pensions Committee: 'Universal Credit: the wait for a first payment'
- COVID Conversations: The Right to Childcare

We have strong, constructive working relationships across all parties, and within Government Departments, and are recognised as a key organisation on issues relating to childcare, flexible working policies, financial support for families and social enterprise.

Evidence based policy and lobbying vital during COVID19

Childcare has been a critical issue throughout the COVID19 pandemic and has – rightly – received significant public and media attention. Its role in the reopening of key sectors of the economy, and in allowing people to return to work, has been clear. From the beginning of lockdown, we worked tirelessly to highlight the vital role of our childcare infrastructure in the economic and societal recovery from COVID19.



We presented to the Education Committee at the Northern Ireland Assembly and were asked to join an expert **Childcare Reference Group**, tasked with advising policy-makers at the highest level of Government to ensure childcare was accessible for those who needed it, and that childcare providers were properly supported at this difficult time. The group's membership includes senior officials from the Departments of Health and Education, the Health and Social Care Board, Trusts, membership bodies and sectoral stakeholders.

The expertise of the group has informed the Executive's response to childcare issues during COVID19. Two rounds of funding were secured, an initial **COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme** and a £10.5 million **Childcare Recovery Support Package**. The Group continues to make the case for further support for this crucial sector and we continue to advocate the need for support for parents too, at this critical time. Additionally, our Family Benefits Advice Service was commissioned by the Department of Health to provide advice and guidance on a new **bespoke Approved Home Childcarer Scheme**, targeted to support key worker families to access vital childcare, in their own home, at the beginning of the pandemic.

Delivering impact through research

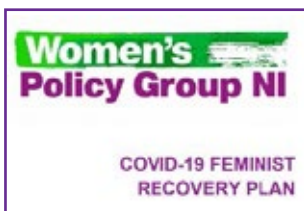
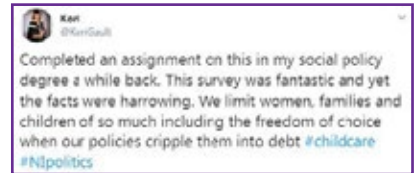


Annually Employers For Childcare carries out research providing up-to-date information and a robust evidence base to lobby government on childcare and work related issues. This year, we launched the 11th in our annual research series, the **Northern Ireland Childcare Survey**.

3,300+
responses to our
2020 survey – thank
you to everyone
who shared your
time and
experience!

Each year, we engage directly with thousands of parents and childcare providers. The difference this research series makes is clear in our discussions with elected representatives, policy makers and others – and in the important policy developments that have taken place this year. It is the most comprehensive research carried out into childcare in Northern Ireland.

We were also pleased this year when a student of social policy reached out to us on social media to highlight the benefit of the research to her when she was completing a university assignment.

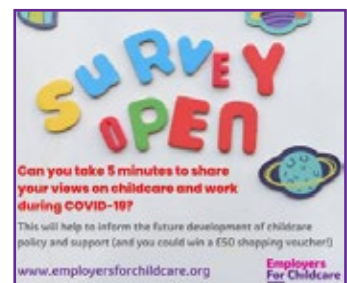


Our annual survey also informed elements of the COVID19 Feminist Recovery Plan produced by the Women's Policy Group in Northern Ireland. Specifically, the challenges experienced by women in particular who faced stark choices between their work and childcare commitments, as school closures and limited access to childcare settings created significant difficulties for families.

The impact of COVID19 on access to childcare

We will be publishing the findings of our annual research later in the year, and will be adding a unique 2020 addendum – sharing the views of parents on childcare and work during COVID19.

We will seek to use this research to inform the future development of childcare policy and support, including through the important work of the All Party Group. We all know that childcare has been a key issue for parents, employers and policy-makers throughout COVID19. As we relied on key workers across all sectors to be able to go to work, providing essential services in healthcare, retail and many other areas of the economy, those who were parents often struggled to find the childcare they needed – with many providers required to close and grandparents and other family support not available.



Effective communications and engagement

Over the last 12 months, and particularly following the introduction of the COVID19 restrictions, we have sought to use effective media engagement to raise awareness of issues impacting parents, childcare providers and employers. We have delivered insight, analysis and guidance through radio and television interviews as well as in newspaper articles and online podcasts.



In a continually evolving environment, with many childcare providers required to close temporarily due to COVID19 requirements, as access to formal childcare was ever more vital to key workers, we used our media engagement to provide clear updates and guidance to stakeholders, while maintaining pressure on the Government to provide much needed support.

Parents and childcare industry require urgent support: charity

BY CLAIRE McNEILLY

A CHARITY representing local childcare providers has called on the Executive to support parents and the industry.

Employers For Childcare (EFC) made the plea after families raised concerns about possibly having to continue to pay for childcare after schools close.

EFC policy and information manager Aoife Hamilton said the closure of schools had "reinforced just how vital our childcare infrastructure is".

She added that parents should talk to childcare providers about whether they have to continue to pay fees and check the contracts they have with their provider.

"A contract may state that no refunds will be given should the provider be forced to close for reasons beyond its control," she said. "It may be that some childcare providers may refund fees, or not require payment, if these issues are covered by their insurance or if they receive funds from the Government, but this is something parents would need to address with their provider."

Ms Hamilton called on the Government to ensure financial support was provided.

"This is essential to mitigate the severe impact the temporary closure of childcare settings will have on families and the economy both now and when social isolation measures are no longer required," she said.

"We would encourage all parents to ensure they are receiving the best form of financial support for their family.

"Our family benefits advice service can provide guidance and personalised calculations over the phone on 0800 028 3008."

We also use our regular e-newsletters, our website and social media platforms to ensure that parents, childcare providers and employers are kept informed on key developments.

"Employers For Childcare provide advice which I have been able to use and their newsletters are great at providing information."

"Useful information in newsletters on what is being done through Stormont to make lives of working parents better regarding provision and affordability of childcare"

Coronavirus Job Retention Fund: Important update for employers

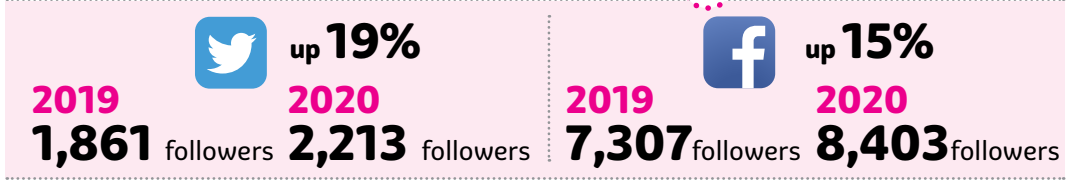
Press Release
17th April 2020

Implications in relation to treatment of Childcare Vouchers when staff are furloughed.

How does the furlough scheme impact on family-related leave and pay?

Press Release
24th April 2020

Important guidance for employers and for anyone currently on family-related leave, such as maternity leave, or planning to go on family-related leave.



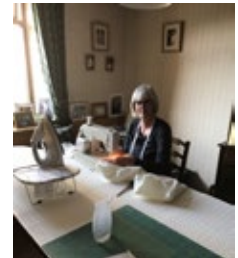
Our wider social and environmental impact

This Social Impact Report highlights the impact we as an organisation have made in delivering our social purpose, supporting parents with dependent children to get into, and stay in, work and addressing childcare as a labour market issue. We also reflect on what we do as an organisation more broadly to ensure we contribute to a world that is fairer and more sustainable.

Commitment to staff

We are committed to ensuring that staff are valued, supported and invested in. We offer dependents leave, flexible working, a private healthcare package and Childcare Vouchers. Additionally, our social committee regularly organises events, lunches and activities that allow staff to enjoy social time together whilst raising money for charity. During lockdown, we have used online platforms to ensure we are keeping in touch and looking after each other every day.

We have also been proud of the commitment of our staff, for example our colleague Carole who volunteered her time to making these fabulous scrubs for our amazing key workers – **thank you Carole!**



Commitment to 'Buy Social'

We have chosen to 'buy social', ensuring that we use other Social Enterprises in our supply chain and include social clauses in our tenders.



Commitment to our ethical and green values

Working from home has definitely helped in our commitment to our ethical and green values – we have reduced the amount of time spent commuting, whether to the office or to meetings, outreach sessions and events.

Thank you!

Finally, thank you to everyone who made our work possible over the last year, and for your patience as we all adjusted to a new way of working. This year in particular, we would like to thank all of the childcare providers who went above and beyond during the initial days of lockdown to ensure our key workers could do their vital jobs in the knowledge their children were being well looked after! We welcome comments and feedback on this report so please get in touch at **hello@employersforchildcare.org**

Since 2008,
we have invested
£6.8 million
into helping working
families across
the UK

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