

Social Impact Report



Foreword

This year marked an incredible milestone for Employers For Childcare. **Since 2008, when our Family Benefits Advice Service began, we have now identified over £105 million in financial support for families across the UK.** It's a huge amount, and it has only been possible as a result of our social enterprise business activities – enabling us to invest £7.4 million in our charity during that time.



While simply helping families have a bit more money in their pockets is important in itself, we know the impact goes much further. We hear the sigh of relief from the dad who can now go and fill the oil tank and keep his family warm this winter, knowing he has a little extra coming in each month. The excitement of the new mum who didn't think she could afford to go back to work, but can now take on a part time job while her baby benefits from quality childcare. The anxiety lifting from the parents who care for their child with a disability that they will be able to afford the vital additional support that she needs. If that doesn't get you out of bed in the morning, I don't know what will!

But while that might get me out of bed, there have also been the sleepless nights. Though inflation is starting to fall, the cost-of-living crisis continues to impact on families who are struggling to make ends meet. Northern Ireland remains without its long-overdue and much needed Childcare Strategy – pushing childcare providers and parents to crisis point. And the continuing political impasse means we are without a Government, adding further to the delay in the new Strategy and piling on the pressure to already buckling public services. It is hard not to feel frustrated and despondent when it feels, as a society, we are regressing – and letting down this and future generations of children as a result.

What helps on those sleepless nights is knowing at least that social enterprises such as Employers For Childcare are at their best when facing challenges and looking for solutions. From working constructively with colleagues across the sector to press for ambitious investment in the new Childcare Strategy, to looking for new ways to reach families who are struggling, we won't give up. As long as the need is there, I am confident that we, and many organisations like us, will continue to work to make a real – and lasting – positive impact.

On a lighter note, I will say it would be hard not to have a good night's sleep after burning off some energy with a visit to our newest social enterprise – High Rise – which re-opened this year! Having been closed for more than two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been a joy to welcome guests back to our centre for Clip 'n Climb, soft play, a visit to our innovative sensory rooms or lunch in the café. The smiles and laughter of all those taking part – young and old – are a real antidote to everything else that is going on in the world. We have been privileged to share in birthdays celebrated, the end of exams marked, family get togethers, corporate days out, date nights and even graduations from the Sensory for Babies class of 2023! And we hope the smiles of all our guests are enhanced by the knowledge that their visit is helping to support the vital work of our charity now and into the future.

So here's to the next £100 million in financial support identified for families - and a heartfelt thank you to all of you who have made the first £100 million possible.

Marie Marin

Chief Executive

Charity Number 101176



Our Social Impact at a glance 2022-23

Our Family Benefits Advice Service helped over **11,000** people directly and provided more than **4,400** calculations for parents...



...and identified over **£12 million** in financial support for families



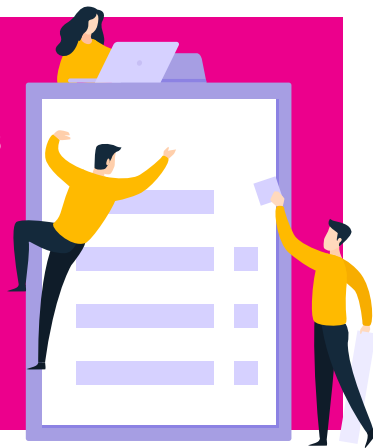
We provided the secretariat for the **All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare...**



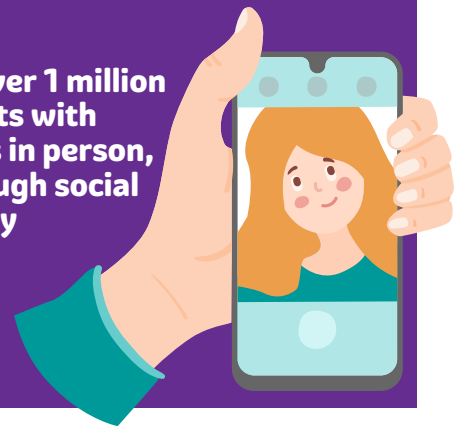
...and continued our vital policy and lobbying work



We enabled working parents and employers to save **£4.9 million** through our **Childcare Voucher** scheme...



...and had over **1 million** engagements with our services in person, online, through social media and by telephone



We re-opened **High Rise**, our newest social enterprise business – an inclusive and accessible indoor adventure centre...



...and welcomed thousands of guests to **Clip 'n Climb**, soft play and our innovative **sensory rooms!**



Helping build a better economy and society

Employers For Childcare comprises a **Social Enterprise** and a **registered charity**. 100% of the profits from our Social Enterprise businesses – a Childcare Voucher company, a recruitment service for childcare providers and High Rise (an indoor family adventure centre) are invested into our charity.

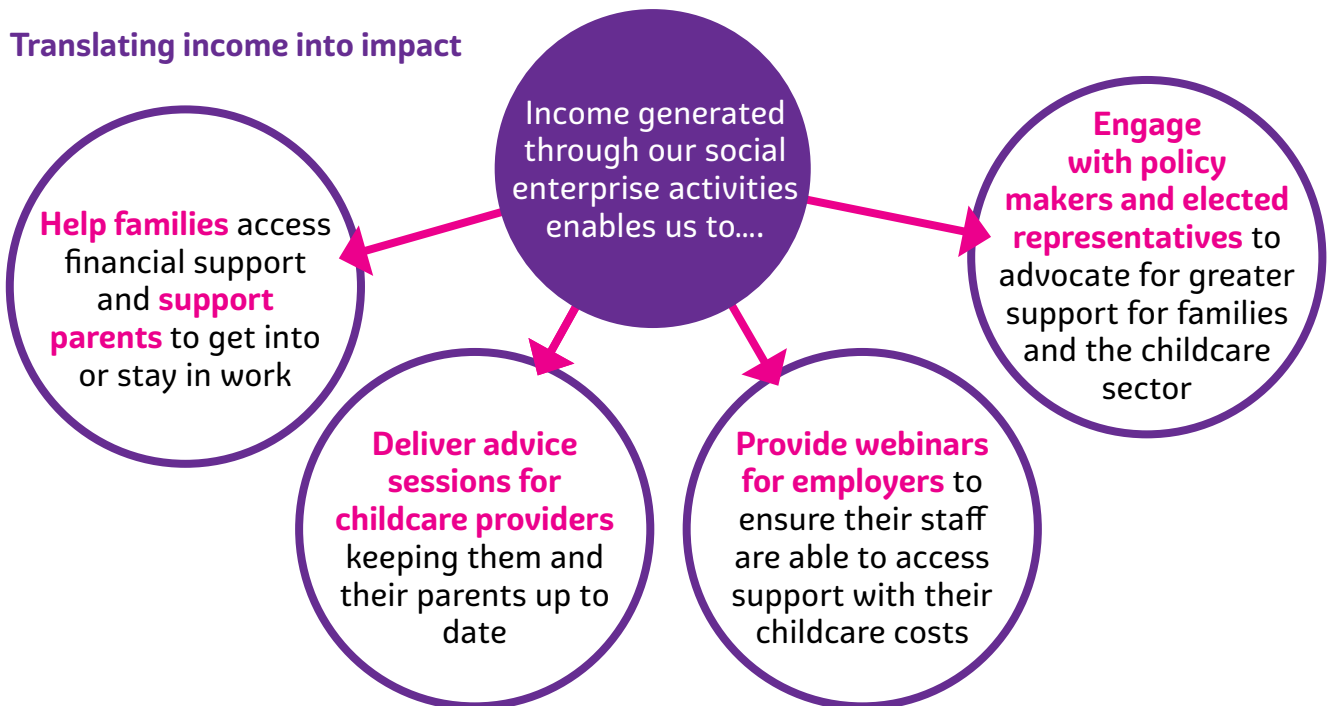
Since 2008, we have invested **£7.4 million** into helping working families across the UK

What is a Social Enterprise?

Social enterprises – like Employers For Childcare – are businesses with a social or environmental purpose. They demonstrate a better way of doing business, where profits are invested to deliver positive social change. Embedding social value in how all of us do business is a real opportunity to do things differently – to do things better.

The profit generated through Employers For Childcare’s business activities is invested in our charity. It is only because of the income generated through our social enterprise activities that we can support parents with dependent children to get into work and to stay in work and help families access all the financial support they are entitled to.

Translating income into impact



Since 2008 we have:

Invested **£7.4 million** in our charity through our Social Enterprise activities

Identified over **£105 million** in additional financial support for callers to our Family Benefits Advice Service

For every **£1 invested** in our charity, we identified just over **£14 in direct savings** for parents

Welcoming guests back to High Rise!

Having re-opened the doors of High Rise in July 2022 we have been absolutely thrilled to welcome back guests – and to see the impact our fabulous indoor adventure centre has had on so many people. We have loved seeing so many familiar faces, along with the new ones.

It has been truly rewarding to **rebuild the High Rise community this year**, to see the centre filled with families having fun and people of all ages creating wonderful memories together.

We're also proud to be providing quality jobs within the local community. By the end of the year, we had 33 staff employed in High Rise – and have continued to invest in their development through training and support. We were delighted to renew our prestigious Autism NI Impact Award, reflecting our commitment to ensuring High Rise is inclusive, accessible and **welcoming for everyone**.

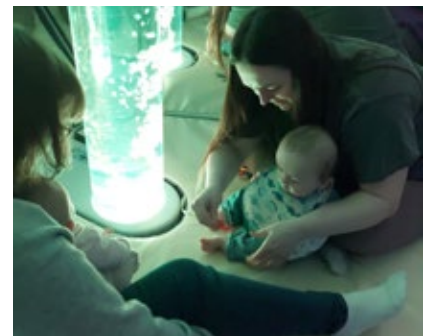
In our first year since re-opening we've welcomed...



11,000+ climbers to the largest Clip 'n Climb arena in Ireland!



4,300+ little ones to our exciting soft play!



1,000+ guests to our innovative sensory rooms!

Across the year we've rolled out party packages, corporate events and sensory for babies classes, and expanded the menu in our lovely café. But we have even more developments to come! Sign up to the High Rise newsletter to keep up to date with all that is going on in the centre.

A fun day out with impact

And of course, as a social enterprise, when you visit High Rise not only will you have a fun day out, but you are also helping us to invest in the critical work of charity, supporting families across the UK.

High Rise is proud to be a Social Enterprise

100% of our profits are invested in supporting parents, through the work of our charity. This means...

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



#BuySocial



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






So thank you to all our guests, and a warm welcome to those who join us over the coming year!

Feedback from guests

We are delighted to share some of the lovely feedback we have received from guests.

- ✓ **94% of guests** rated their experience as excellent or good
- ✓ **97% of guests** said they would recommend High Rise to others

“We recently brought a large group of families to High Rise. The staff were incredibly nurturing, kind and friendly. They went the extra mile to meet the specific needs of the group. Communication before, during and after the event was excellent. The venue was clean and the equipment was exceptional. Processes to ensure safety were clear, thorough and accessible for each member of the group. Adults and children alike had a wonderful time. We can’t wait to be back! The final word goes to a 9-year-old who said, “I was so nervous to go up the big walls and the giant slide but I did it and it was amazing! I felt like I was flying!””

Fostering Network NI



Stephen McGarry @steviemcgarry · 18h
 Super session this afternoon @highriseni but couldn't let the kids beat me to the top of the dropslide 😂
 Another excellent example of innovating #SocialEnterprise



Sean O Sullivan @SeanTheBawn · 2h
 Can't say enough good things about @highriseni and their staff. Brought the kids yesterday and had a brilliant experience again. Will be back at Christmas guys! 👍

"Absolutely amazing place to visit! We travelled 1hr 25 minutes to go, the staff were so amazing and super friendly. I didn't realise that all profits went to charity which makes it even better. Definitely be back with a larger group."



PIC•COLLAGE

Accessible and inclusive

In designing High Rise, we were passionate that it should be a place where all families could come to enjoy quality time together, no matter what their ability or their needs. Too often families who have a child with additional needs have told us they have to 'separate out' to enjoy activities with their children. High Rise is different, High Rise is for everyone with:

- Innovative sensory rooms
- A Changing Places accessible toilet facility
- Autism tailored Clip 'n Climb and soft play sessions
- Staff training in recognising and working with individuals with additional needs.



Changing Places at High Rise

“We had a brilliant time and our daughter could use the Sensory Room and join the party. An inclusive experience and fun for everyone. So good to have the Changing Places too. So few places have this facility and it's so important to our family.”

HIGH RISE

“Brilliant quiet ASD session and staff were absolutely brilliant with the kids, will be back for next month's ASD session.”

“Thank you so much for everything. You have been absolutely fantastic and on behalf of the Trust I would like to extend our appreciation. The lengths High Rise have gone to, to accommodate this young man with learning disabilities and ASD, were outstanding.”

Occupational Therapist, HSCT

Delivering savings through Childcare Vouchers

Employers For Childcare operates the only **Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher scheme** in the UK. Not only do working parents and employers benefit directly from using the scheme, all profits are reinvested in our charity creating positive social change.

We operate the only Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher scheme in the UK.
When you buy social - society benefits!

In 2022/23



What is the impact?

For every member of staff who uses our Childcare Vouchers, as well as generating a saving to themselves and their employees, they also support the work of our Family Benefits Advice Service:



And importantly, supporting parents to access financial support with the cost of childcare assists them to remain in or progress in work. This is good for employers, helping them recruit and retain the staff they need, and good for working parents, helping them maximise their income.

Feedback from parents using our Childcare Vouchers

- **95% of parents** rated the service as 'excellent' or 'good'

"First class customer service. Friendly and helpful staff who always have a quick response to any query."

"Service is so easy to use. Website is very useful for keeping track of balance and payments. Any changes and/or queries have always been dealt with very quickly and with minimum fuss. Really appreciate everyone's efforts to provide this very slick and much needed service."

"First class service when I have had any questions and never any problems at all if wanting temporary changes to payments. All conversations very helpful. Thank you."

Feedback from the employers we work with

- **100% of employers** rated the service as 'excellent' or 'good'
- **95% of employers** would recommend Employers For Childcare to another organisation

"Easy service, polite staff that reassure, informative staff that are very easy to deal with."

Mary Comac, Joseph Walls Ltd

"We have been using Employers For Childcare for over 13 years. And on the few occasions that I have had to contact you with a minor query the query has been explained or sorted immediately and professionally."

Assumpta Dynes, Dynes Flooring Contractors & Interiors Ltd

"A flawless, easy to use system and although I haven't needed help often, when I have, the staff are very knowledgeable and helpful. Also no issues with the childcare providers or employees. Overall fantastic service."

Jennie Cochrane, McDowell + Service Dental Laboratory

**AccessNI Umbrella
Body**

As a registered Umbrella Body for AccessNI, we can make applications on your behalf.

Supporting childcare providers with Access NI Checks

In 2022/23, we completed **197 Access NI checks** for childcare providers, an increase of 11% on the previous year. At what remains a difficult time for the childcare sector, we have been delighted to provide this service offering convenience and cost-savings.

Delivering impact through the Family Benefits Advice Service

Our Family Benefits Advice Service provides support for parents through our Freephone Helpline, outreach service offering online and face-to-face presentations, and sharing information through our website, newsletters and social media. This service has never been more important. While inflation is starting to fall, the cost-of-living crisis continues to impact families and the lack of an Executive in Northern Ireland has put public services under more pressure than ever. Northern Ireland remains without a childcare strategy and the families and childcare providers our team supports are at crisis point.



11,000+

Over 11,000 people helped directly



4,400+

Over 4,400 calculations for parents and queries answered



224

224 face to face and online outreach sessions



1,000,000+

engaging with our services in person, online, through social media and by telephone

We've enjoyed working with a wide range of organisations and groups across the year. We have continued to deliver a contract of services through the Childcare Partnerships (Department of Health), delivering advice and guidance to some of our most vulnerable families. The feedback on the service is excellent.

✓ **97% of parents** would recommend our services to other parents

✓ **97% of parents** rate the quality of the service as 'excellent' or 'good'

"Employers For Childcare is my "go to" place when I need advice on economic-family issues. They are also caring and patient and always helpful."

"Very well organised and should definitely be offered to all families as the benefits system is so complicated so good to have someone explain it all to you in a language you can understand."

"So helpful. In minutes you were able to provide answers to questions I've been trying to figure out through .gov website for months. Thank you for this opportunity!"



Supporting parents to get into work

We followed up with parents who contacted our Family Benefits Advice Service when they weren't currently working, and found that:

- 43% had either subsequently found work or felt better prepared for finding work
- 75% felt better informed about their childcare options
- 72% felt more confident in their decision making.

What difference did we make?

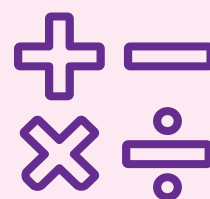


In **2022/23** where we identified **financial support** was available for families, the average amount identified was

£5,669 per family

This equates to average savings **per family** of

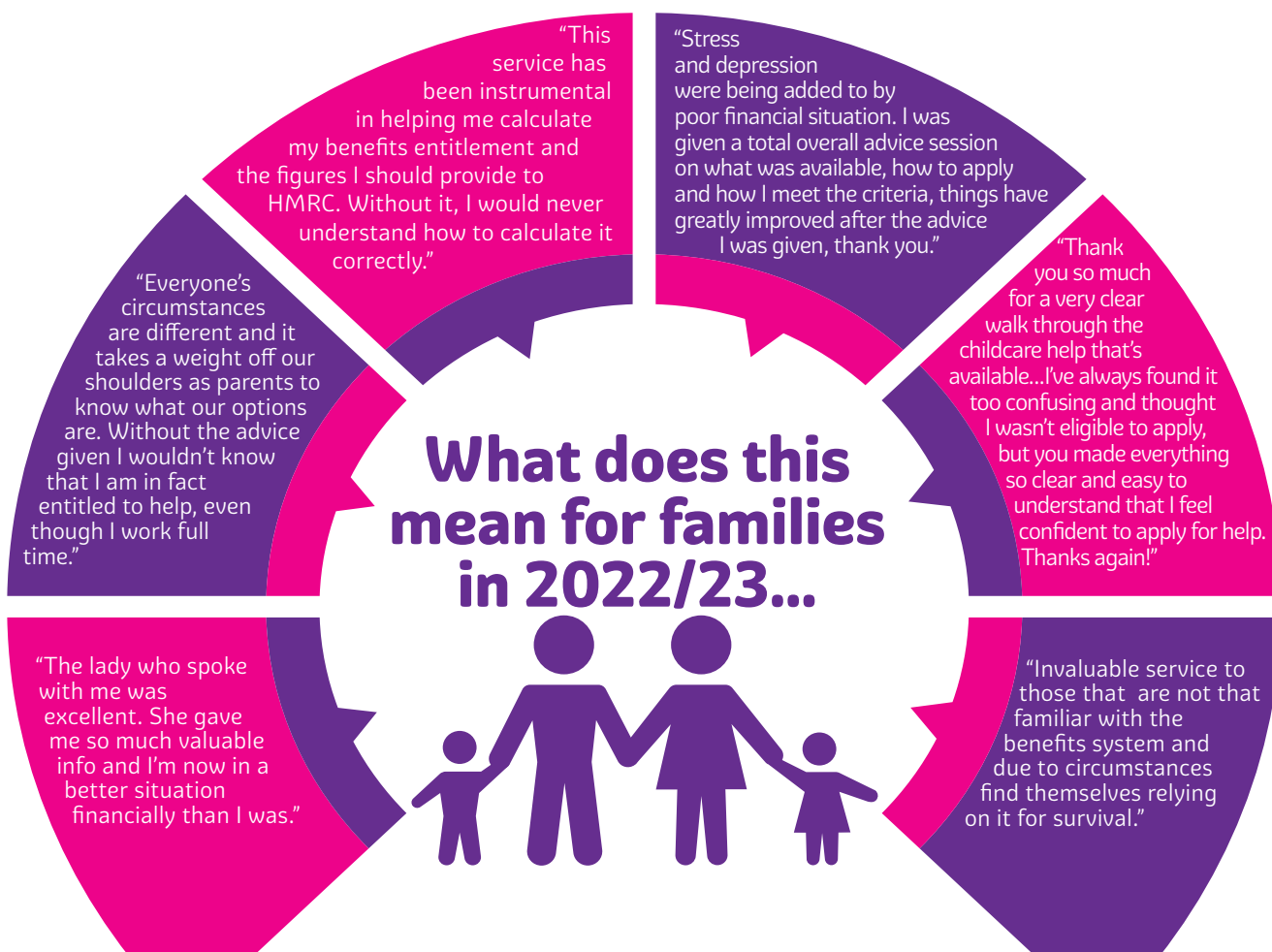
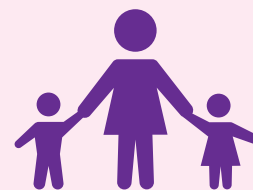
£109 per week



In **2022/23** we identified collective additional financial support of over

£12,000,000

for families who received a calculation from us

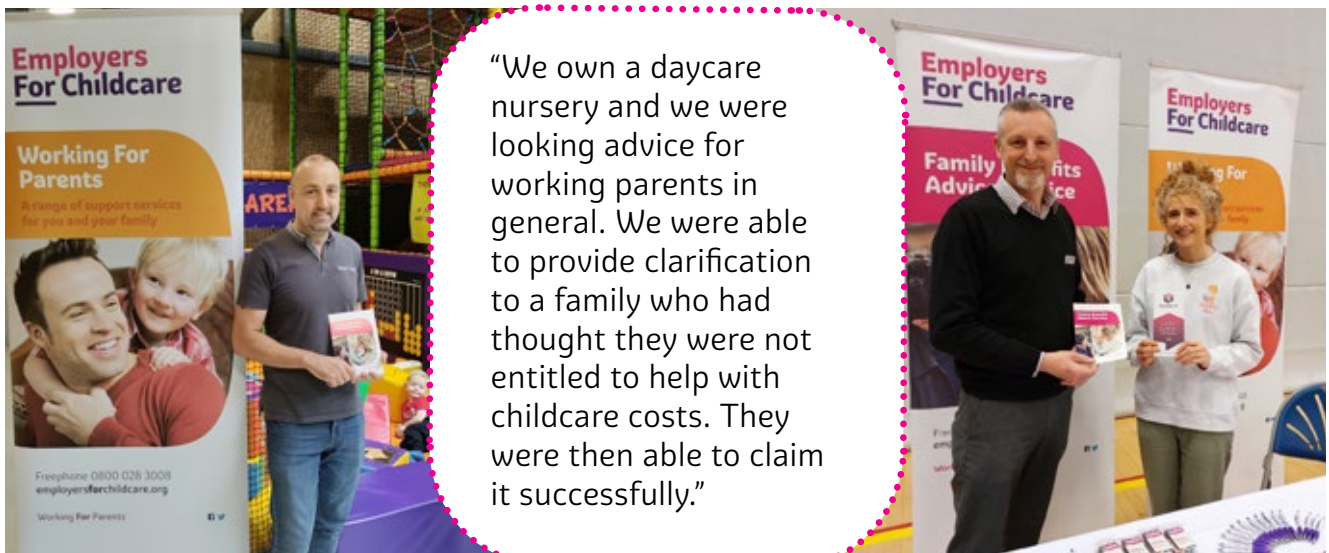


“ They (the Family Benefits Advice Service) helped me understand the benefits available for my family. It was such a huge help. Without it I don't know how we would have gotten answers to some of the questions we had. ”

Employers For Childcare

“ Confirmed that I was much better off on Tax-Free Childcare instead of Childcare Vouchers but also looked over Universal Credit as an option that I hadn't considered. Result leaves me significantly better off as a single parent with two children and about £1600 of childcare fees each month. ”

Employers For Childcare



“ Top class service, no judgement, advice given in a caring and friendly manner. I would highly recommend to anyone seeking guidance, thank you. ”

Employers For Childcare

“ Advised me on benefits I could still access after being made redundant and helped me navigate our family finances at that time regarding childcare. ”

Employers For Childcare

Evidence based policy and lobbying for impact

This was an important year for our policy and lobbying, with work progressing on a new Early Learning and Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland. We have provided briefings to Departmental officials, political parties and elected representatives pressing for ambitious investment in our vital childcare infrastructure – for the benefit of families, the sector and our wider economy and society. While progress is slow and, frustratingly, a new Strategy remains overdue, we are now in a position where there is clear and widespread recognition that childcare will be a top, day-one priority for a newly restored Executive.

We are delighted that our work in this regard is recognised by parents and childcare providers:

“This is a fantastic organisation doing vitally important work. They are central to the childcare strategy for NI and need to be listened to by politicians.”

“The service has been a source of knowledge in a sector where there is not much other support, especially when the government is at a stalemate. I appreciate the work you do to support and fight for working parents.”

All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare

We continued to provide the secretariat for the All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare, which has proved to be an active and effective forum for engagement between elected representatives, senior departmental officials, stakeholders and those with lived experience of accessing or providing childcare.

Incorporating in person and online sessions with expert speakers, learning from international best practice, updates from senior Departmental officials and presentations from parents and childcare providers, meetings are well attended and generate significant learning for all involved.

It was at the first in-person meeting of the All Party Group in September 2022 that the Department of Education provided a substantive update on work to develop the new Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy. This included a new proposal to offer every child in their pre-school year a minimum of 22.5 hours of pre-school education per week during term time. The group continues to seek to inform work on the new Strategy and to secure much needed investment in this vital sector.

Northern Ireland Council Elections 2023

We encouraged voters to put pressure on candidates to highlight how they and their party would make childcare an urgent priority. We shared some questions to ask candidates canvassing for votes and republished our policy manifesto, setting out key issues that must be addressed for the benefit of children and parents, for the local labour market and economy, and for society as a whole.



Informed engagement and campaigning for change

Across the year, we participated in a wide range of advisory groups, campaigns, forums and events - from the Cliff Edge Coalition and Women's Policy Group, to the Child Poverty Action Group and Helplines NI. We know that together, we are stronger, and seek to collaborate with others where possible to deliver the greatest impact.

We engaged with policy makers and others through responding to a range of consultations:

- 10X Performance Management Framework
- Miscarriage Leave and Pay
- Every Child: Department of Education's Draft Corporate Plan 2023-28
- Social Market Foundation Call for Evidence: Childcare costs and poverty.

We also provided updated evidence for the Stakeholder Report to inform the UK Committee on the Rights of the Child's examination of the UK Government in May 2023.



Responding to the UK Budget 2023

With significant new investment in childcare featuring heavily in Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Budget in March 2023, Employers For Childcare was on hand to provide commentary on what developments could mean for families and for the sector in England – and how Northern Ireland was being left further and further behind.



New 'Guide to Childcare' launched for employers

In September 2022 we supported the launch of a new guide to help employers better understand what financial support is available to assist their staff with their registered childcare costs. The practical, easy to read guide was developed by the Department for the Economy, Labour Relations Agency and a range of stakeholders – including Employers For Childcare.

We also presented at a #FutureofSkills event delivered by the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce around building inclusive workplaces through supporting parents to access childcare.

Delivering impact through research

Employers For Childcare undertakes research to provide up-to-date information and a robust evidence base to lobby government on childcare and work-related issues.

Since launching the Northern Ireland Childcare Survey in 2021 we have collated the experiences of 50,000 parents and childcare providers in Northern Ireland, using these to inform our policy and lobbying work. The survey is now carried out biannually and will next be undertaken in the Autumn of 2023.

Effective communications and engagement

Our communications and engagement work has felt particularly important this year, as we sought to reach more families, childcare providers and employers.

We have proactively provided **information, advice and reassurance**, raising awareness of support available, through clear, timely updates. And importantly, we have used our voice to **maintain pressure on the Government**.

Over 1 million engagements with our services in person, online, through social media and by telephone



We have seen strong engagement with our communications encouraging families to access all the financial support they are entitled to, such as with registered childcare costs.

We have used our regular e-newsletters, our website and social media platforms to ensure that parents, childcare providers and employers are kept informed on key developments and know where to go for advice and guidance.

“Great service and informative emails highlighting issues relating to families and childcare in NI.”

“I like that you keep parents up to date on any changes, keep us notified of legislative or policy changes relating to childcare and childcare vouchers.”

We have continued to deliver insight, analysis and guidance through radio and television interviews and newspaper articles on issues relating to childcare, financial support for families and family friendly working. Over the past year we have featured in a wide range of media outlets and are regularly approached to comment in the media on issues relating to childcare and this is a strong recognition of the reputation we have built up as experts, and a leading organisation working in the childcare policy arena in Northern Ireland.



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 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 our staff are valued, supported and invested in. We offer dependents leave, flexible working, a private healthcare package and Childcare Vouchers. We also support our staff to benefit from hybrid working, incorporating time in the office as well as days working from home.

Commitment to 'Buy Social'

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



Commitment to our ethical and green values

We remain firmly committed to our ethical and green values, which this year has shown to be more important than ever. From ensuring lights are fitted with motion sensors, to recycling and minimising our printing requirements, and minimising single use plastic in High Rise, we are working hard to reduce our carbon footprint.

Thank you!

Finally, thank you to everyone who made our work possible.

Over the years, you have helped us to achieve so much through our charity – in fact, you have enabled us to invest £7.4 million into helping working families across the UK, a number that continues to grow!

We welcome comments and feedback on this report so please get in touch at hello@employersforchildcare.org



HIGH RISE

LISBURN

Activities for all ages!

- ★ Clip 'n Climb
- ★ Soft play
- ★ Sensory rooms

Great for school trips or class prizes!

"Lots of fun and guaranteed to wear you out. We took a school group of older teens who loved the large variety of different challenges. The staff were excellent. Well trained, supportive, encouraging and cajoling in just the right measure."

- Fort Hill Integrated College, Lisburn

- ★ Alternative venue for PE lessons!
- ★ Bring your Duke of Edinburgh group
- ★ Autism NI Impact Award winners

High Rise is proud to be a Social Enterprise - all profits invested in supporting parents.

Just 10 minutes from Belfast!

www.highriseni.org | contact@highriseni.org



Employers For Childcare

Employers For Childcare

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