

Social Impact Report



Foreword

This is the seventh year that Employers For Childcare has been reporting on our social impact, the positive effect our work has on people and communities right across the UK. And as I reflect back across those years, I cannot recall a more difficult time for the parents, childcare providers and employers we support – nor a time when our work was more necessary.



Just as we thought we were starting to see bright shoots of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and all the difficulties it brought, a new challenge emerged. The cost of living crisis is impacting everyone. Inflation is soaring to its highest level in 40 years. Families are struggling to make ends meet, employers are seeing an increase in their costs while experiencing a widespread recruitment and retention crisis, and childcare providers are under severe financial pressure. In Northern Ireland, we've seen another prolonged period of political uncertainty at precisely the time we need those in a position of power to step up to the mark.

It would be hard not to feel despondent, and yet, I am also proud to work in a sector that takes challenges and looks for solutions, for opportunities to make a positive social change. That's what we've continued to do at Employers For Childcare. As this report demonstrates, our team has worked hard to make a real – and lasting – positive impact on the lives of so many. This is only possible because of people and businesses choosing to 'buy social' and use their purchasing power with a social enterprise. This year, for every £1 we invested in our charity we identified a saving for parents of almost £47 - a huge return on investment.

We remain absolutely committed to standing with all of those affected by the spiralling cost of living. But alongside a deep and real concern about the ongoing and worsening crisis, I also want to express our strong sense of resolution and determination - that we will come through this crisis, because I know that we, and many organisations like us, will do all that we can to make it so. At the same time, we recognise that structural issues that pre-date the cost of living crisis – such as the absence of a Childcare Strategy in Northern Ireland, and investment in this critical sector – must also be addressed.

This year work has finally gotten underway on a new Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland. This is long-overdue and critically needed, but I'm hopeful it will be informed by the many years of hard work, research and lobbying we have invested. We will continue to work with the Department of Education and colleagues across the sector to press for ambitious investment that significantly reduces costs for families, supports the sector and its workforce, and promotes quality. I am determined that this time next year, when writing the foreword to our eighth social impact report, we will be sharing details of real and meaningful progress.

And this year also marks a new chapter for Employers For Childcare, as we prepared for the re-opening of High Rise, our social enterprise indoor adventure centre. It has been truly wonderful to welcome guests back to High Rise, to see children's eyes light up and hear the amazing feedback from families who have enjoyed a fun day out together. And even more wonderful? Every visit is enabling us to invest in our charity, and carry on with our work supporting families across the UK. So to all of our guests – a personal thank you from me, and I extend a warm invitation to anyone who has not yet visited. We would love to welcome you to High Rise and share with you what social impact looks like in action.

Marie Marin, Chief Executive

Charity Number 101176



Our Social Impact at a glance

We identified almost
£11.6 million
in financial support for families



For every £1 invested in our charity we identified a direct saving for parents of almost
£47



Our Family Benefits Advice Service helped almost 10,000 people directly and provided more than 4,500 calculations for parents



We enabled working parents and employers to save
£6.7 million through our Childcare Voucher scheme



We prepared to re-open High Rise – our newest social enterprise business, an inclusive and accessible family activity centre



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



We provided the secretariat for the All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare at Stormont



We launched the 12th Northern Ireland Childcare Survey and continued to campaign for an ambitious new Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland



Social value critical to building 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
£7.35 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.

Social Enterprises are stepping up to deliver critical support to those worst affected by the cost of living crisis, despite also being hit by skyrocketing operating costs that are challenging even the most robust social businesses.

Employers For Childcare is proud to be part of the Social Enterprise movement, a business set up to change the world for the better. The profit generated through our business activities is invested in our charity. Our charity's aim is to make it easier for parents with dependent children to get into work and to stay in work. We address childcare as a labour market and economic issue, as well as a social one.

This is a critical service to support families through the worsening cost of living crisis - and only possible because of the income generated through our social enterprise activities.

We are keen to see more businesses adopt this model, and to be supported in doing so by the Government, ensuring everyone is playing a role in building a better economy and society as we move forward. An important step in Northern Ireland was the introduction earlier this year of a new Executive policy making it mandatory to score social value within public procurement.

Looking to the longer term, embedding social value in how all of us do business is a real opportunity to do things differently – to do things better.



Delivering social impact and supporting families, childcare providers and employers during this difficult time

Through continuing to invest in our charity, we have been able to:

- **help struggling families** access the financial support they are entitled to, and support parents to stay in or return to work
- **deliver advice sessions for childcare providers** and keep them up to date on financial support for the sector
- **provide webinars for employers** to ensure they are better informed on how to help their staff to access support they are entitled to, remain in work and be better off as a result
- **engage with policy makers and elected representatives** to advocate for greater support for families and the childcare sector, as well as a new Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland.

£245,000

Invested in our charity through our Social Enterprise activities

£11.6 million

Additional financial support identified 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 **almost £47**

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.

Helping parents stay in work

We recently helped a single mum with 2 children currently on maternity leave. A 'better off' calculation from our team identified that she would be £576 per month better off working part-time (20 hours p/w) compared to not working, even taking into account her childcare costs.

Freephone 0800 028 3008 for your free personalised 'better off' calculation.



Welcoming guests back to High Rise!



When we first opened the doors to High Rise – our newest Social Enterprise business - in October 2019, we could not have imagined that less than six months later we would be forced to close with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Far less would we have predicted that it would be two years before we would be able to open again. But the many queries we received during that time, as well as the messages of support, have been so heartening, and really hit home how a community had started to develop around High Rise.

And so we are absolutely thrilled that this year we could finally get preparations underway to re-open, and we were overjoyed to begin welcoming our guests back in July 2022. It has been amazing to see so many familiar faces, along with new ones.

We are looking forward to **rebuilding the High Rise community this year**, to seeing the centre filled with families having fun and people of all ages creating wonderful memories together.

And we've used the time to **make things even better for our guests**, including developing a brand-new website and booking system.

We've continued to invest in training for all our staff and were delighted to receive the prestigious Autism NI Impact Award, reflecting our commitment to ensuring High Rise is inclusive, accessible and **welcoming for everyone**.



What is the 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 our charity, supporting families across the UK. So **thank you** to all our guests, and a warm welcome to those who join us over the coming year!

Your visit to High Rise helps us to support families through the work of our charity

Our Family Benefits Advice Service recently helped a single parent of two children with additional needs to identify an additional £273 per month through Universal Credit, leaving the family over £3,000 a year better off.



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...



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



#BuySocial



We are delighted to share some of the lovely feedback we have already received...and look forward to sharing lots more about High Rise in next year's Social Impact Report!



Delivering savings for working parents and employers through Childcare Vouchers

Employers For Childcare operates the **only Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher scheme** in the UK. We reinvest all profit to create positive social change. But as well as that, working parents and employers benefit directly from using the scheme.

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

When you buy social - society benefits!

In 2021/22



What is the impact?

For every member of their staff who uses Childcare Vouchers, as well as generating a saving to themselves and their employees, the employer also supports 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, but is also good for working parents, helping them maximise their income.

Feedback from parents using our Childcare Vouchers

- **95% of parents** told us they rate the service from Employers For Childcare as 'excellent' or 'good'.

"Great service all round and the link to send money to childcare provider is so easy to use and quick. Brilliant for a busy mum."

"I find Employers For Childcare to be a great service in itself. But what really makes it outstanding is the fantastic staff. Any queries I have had have been dealt with swiftly and with the utmost professionalism. The staff really make the service a pleasure to use."

"Employers For Childcare really take the stress out of everything. They do everything for me and I can just forget about it without worrying."

Feedback from the employers we work with

- **100% of employers** rate the service they receive from Employers For Childcare as 'excellent' or 'good'.
- **94% of employers** would recommend Employers For Childcare to another organisation.

"A great and simple online system with excellent customer support when it's needed."

James Hunt, HR Manager, City Year UK

"All aspects of the service are very professional and the staff are pleasant and very efficient."

Paul Weir, Director, William Coates Ltd

"Reflex Labels switched our Childcare Voucher scheme to Employers For Childcare and are delighted that we did. The switching process was very easy and straight forward and as well as knowing we are creating social value by working with a Social Enterprise, we also saved money through switching. A real win-win!"

Alison Brown, Group People and Payroll Manager, Reflex Labels

Supporting employers



Danske Bank had the pleasure of welcoming Employers for Childcare for an information session in September 2021. From our initial engagement, through to the training session itself, we were so impressed and encouraged by the wealth of knowledge Aoife and Chris have, and were so generous to share with Danske colleagues. Their planning for the event was meticulous, nothing was too much trouble, and our colleague feedback was excellent. I was also delighted about how inclusive the focus of the session was.

I would encourage any employer seeking to help colleagues to achieve a better understanding of what is available to them to engage Employers For Childcare – they will achieve this and more!

Jenny Moore, Employment Lawyer
Danske Bank UK



**Employers
For Childcare**

Supporting employers



We are proud to work in partnership with Employers For Childcare. This initially focused mainly on Childcare Vouchers for staff but has evolved to incorporate support from the Family Benefits Advice Service.

Chris and the team have been fantastic in signposting and explaining options available. Feedback from our information sessions for staff always highlights the gratitude of attendees who receive simple, practical solutions to their genuine concerns.

As a large employer, our partnership with Employers For Childcare is invaluable; enabling us to signpost our staff directly to a trusted organisation who provide, immediate, professional, person-centred support and information regarding the entire range of queries that affect working parents including; benefits entitlement, childcare options available and so much more.

Samantha Whann
HR, Belfast HSC Trust



**Employers
For Childcare**

Supporting childcare providers with recruitment and AccessNI checks

In 2021/22, we completed 178 AccessNI checks for childcare providers, an increase of 91% on the previous year, as well as providing nine recruitment support packages. At what remains a difficult time for the childcare sector, we have been delighted to provide these services offering convenience and cost-savings to providers.

AccessNI Umbrella Body

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

Delivering impact through the Family Benefits Advice Service

Through our Family Benefits Advice Service, we deliver support to 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, with a cost of living crisis that is impacting on everyone, and set to worsen further over the months ahead. The year in numbers...



10,000

people helped directly



4,500+

calculations for parents and queries answered



128

face to face and online outreach sessions



1,000,000+

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

Across the year, our team has been delighted to again offer face-to-face advice sessions and presentations, alongside continuing to use platforms such as Zoom, Teams and Facebook Live to meet virtually. Online sessions are great, and have expanded the accessibility of our service, but the team are really loving getting out and meeting parents in person again! And the feedback has been really positive.



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

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

"As 1st time parents we found the service so informative. Without it, we could have been missing out on money we are entitled to that could help our child's future."

"The lady I spoke to on the phone was so helpful and explained everything so well. She was also so lovely to speak to. I've been able to save a lot per month with Tax-Free Childcare which I would not have had the confidence to explore otherwise."

"They provide a friendly and helpful service giving advice on childcare issues which can seem overwhelming and confusing."

What difference did we make?

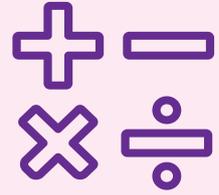


In **2021/22** where we identified **financial support** was available for families, the average amount identified was

£4,969 per family

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

£96 per week



In **2021/22** we identified collective **additional financial support** of almost

£11,600,000

for families who received a calculation from us



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:

- 60% had subsequently found work.
- 83% said they were better informed about the support they were entitled to with registered childcare costs.
- 100% said they were better informed of their overall benefit entitlements.

Supporting parents

Supporting families through our Freephone helpline and advice service

"I was speaking to Jimmy a fortnight ago about what benefits me and my partner were entitled to when we apply for Universal Credit. He gave fabulous advice and was very helpful."

Caller to our Freephone helpline

Employers For Childcare

Supporting employers

Delivering free support and advice to employers and their employees

"Brenda delivered an advice session to our employees outlining the various types of financial support that they may be eligible for, including with their childcare costs. The team found it really useful - it's an excellent free service and a great way for employers to support their staff, especially at this difficult time".

Ruth Murphy, Clanrye Group



Employers For Childcare

Supporting childcare providers

Delivering free advice and information sessions to support childcare providers

Chris spoke about a wide range of options available for parents and registered childminders. Any questions were answered by Chris and they were all satisfied with the answers to their queries. The Employers for childcare Zoom meetings are always well attended and Chris is always willing and able to answer any questions.

Grainne Scullion, NICMA



Employers For Childcare

We've enjoyed working with a wide range of organisations and groups across the year to support parents and childcare providers in particular. We have continued to deliver a contract of services for the Health and Social Care Board (Childcare Partnerships), delivering advice and guidance to some of our most vulnerable families.

We have also engaged with some new initiatives during the year. We have supported work being undertaken across the UK to increase uptake of the Tax-Free Childcare scheme. As well as taking part in UK wide webinars, we participated in planning and promotion meetings with colleagues from the Departments of Education and Health and HMRC. In Northern Ireland, we have also collaborated with colleagues on a project, coordinated by the Department for the Economy, to develop guidance for employers to help their employees access financial support for childcare.

What is the impact of our Family Benefits Advice Service for families?



Thank you for sharing your feedback – it means so much to us!

At Employers For Childcare, we are all about working with people – with parents, childcare providers, employers and colleagues in the sector. So it has been wonderful this year when so many have got in touch to share some lovely feedback on our work.

“Could I just take this opportunity to thank you and your team for the wonderful work they do. Every time I phoned for assistance everyone was wonderful and answered my questions.”



Andrew Wilson

I strongly recommend taking advantage of this service. If you have any questions or queries the team are so friendly and knowledgeable. Me and my partner are expecting our 1st child and found it daunting trying to go through what benefits we were entitled to, how many hours we could work without being affected. We were unsure of ringing but Jimmy cleared this up and advised us the best course of action to ensure we got the best entitlement available. Any doubts at all..... call them!!

Like · Reply · Hide · Send message · 2 h



Samantha Whann @SamanthaWhann · 23h

Replying to @EFCCG and @BelfastTrust

Great session with Chris: lots of practical support and guidance on tax free childcare, universal credit and taxable earnings.



Dolores McCormick

Lovely to have met Chris at the recent childcare financial support session hosted by RCM Branch of Unite for all Registered Childminders, great information and help for our members and parents 🙌👏



Samantha Gallagher LLB
@Samanth01517162

With the help and expertise of @EFCCG we have been able to unfold a well kept secret of claiming child care costs (CCC) under UC if you live&work in NI but wish to use child care facilities in ROI. Weve always been told you cannot claim UC CCC in this manner-turns out you can!!

“The Family Benefits Advice Service have facilitated many information sessions throughout the years for Registered Childminders. The sessions themselves are an invaluable source of information for those working in the childcare sector and the facilitators are friendly, knowledgeable and accommodating.”

Evidence based policy and lobbying for impact

This was an important year for our policy and lobbying work, from engaging in the Department of Education's 'Strategic Insight Lab' programme to inform the development of a new Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland, to using our organisational Manifesto to press for childcare to be recognised as a top, day-one priority for a new government following the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in May 2022.

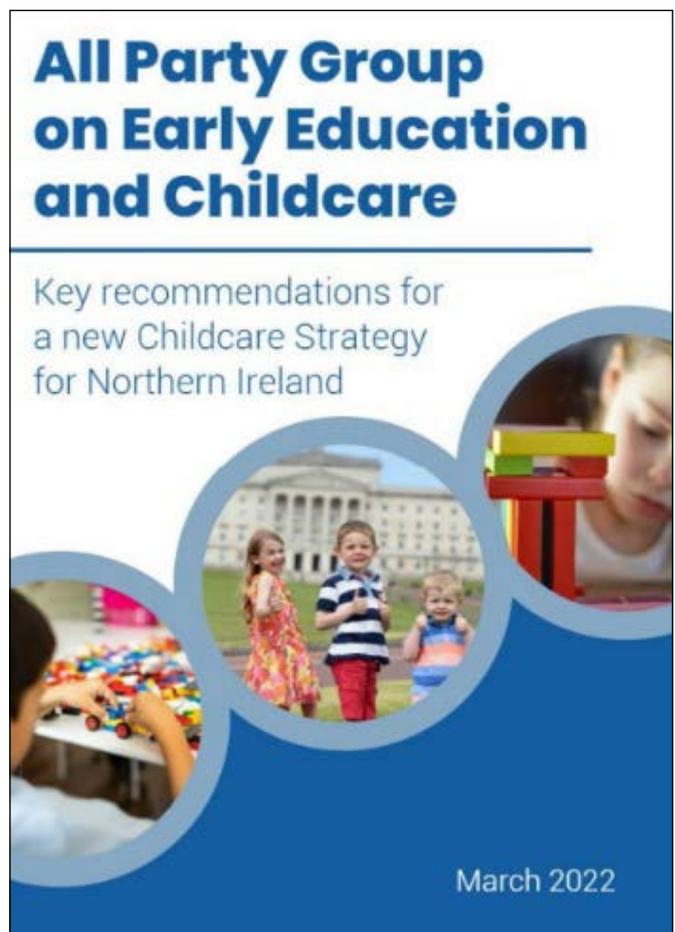
All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare

We continued to provide the secretariat for the All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare at Stormont, a Group that 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.

Meetings of the Group have included a session with the Education Minister, and discussions focused on the vital role of childcare to our economy and the importance of early education and childcare in giving children the best start in life. And in March 2022, 27 of the Group's stakeholders presented a comprehensive paper setting out key recommendations for a new Childcare Strategy.

Strategic Insight Lab

Towards the end of 2021, we were among a number of organisations who participated in a 'Strategic Insight Lab' to help inform the Department of Education's work in drafting a new Childcare Strategy. This was an important and strategic forum to be involved in, and we used our extensive research, as well as our work through the All Party Group, to provide informed and evidence-based contributions.



Assembly elections 2022

We published our organisational Manifesto in the run up to the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections, held in May 2022. We called on candidates to commit to addressing the issues that matter to families, employers and our society as a whole – specifically, to securing progress on a funded Childcare Strategy and support for our vital childcare sector, as well as the parents who rely on it.

It was positive therefore that this pressure resulted in childcare featuring prominently in the election campaign, with many parties recognising its critical importance and pledging action. However, with political instability continuing following the election, we are concerned that this could impact on progress that is already long-overdue. Following the election therefore, we have maintained pressure in calling for a functioning Government to be established, to translate the promises of the campaign into meaningful progress.

The new Northern Ireland Executive must commit to:

- Delivering an ambitious, inclusive and fully funded Childcare Strategy that:
 - Enables **all parents** to access and afford the high quality childcare of their choice without it costing a significant proportion of their income
 - Supports **all providers** to confidently deliver quality, accessible childcare sustainably while investing in their staff and provision
 - Ensures **all children** can benefit from the significant developmental benefits of quality childcare, regardless of their circumstances
 - Benefits **all employers** in being able to recruit, develop and retain the staff they need.

Employers For Childcare
www.employersforchildcare.org

Informed engagement and campaigning for change

Across the year, we participated in a range of advisory groups, campaigns, forums and events. These included groups working on a new Anti-Poverty Strategy, to develop a new Child Payment for Northern Ireland, on skills equality and diversity, the Women’s Policy Group and the Covid-19 Childcare Reference Group.

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

- Pre-school admissions criteria
- Northern Ireland Skills Strategy
- Work and Pensions Committee inquiry into children in poverty with no recourse to public funds
- Draft Northern Ireland Budget 2022-25 (consultation paused).



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. This year, we launched the **12th Northern Ireland Childcare Survey**, sharing the views and experiences of more than 2,200 parents and childcare providers.

50,000
responses to our
research over 12
years – thank you to
everyone who shared
your time and
experiences!

This is the most comprehensive research carried out into childcare in Northern Ireland, and the series provides a critical resource for policy makers, having analysed data from almost 50,000 parents and childcare providers over the last 12 years. The research, and the case it makes for much needed investment in our childcare sector, is more important than ever as work now progresses on a new Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Reflecting its high profile and impact, we were delighted that several MLAs chose to share videos online explaining how useful the research is to them, and how important an issue childcare is.



We used the publication of the research to put a spotlight on how the challenges facing Northern Ireland's childcare sector could pose a major threat to the economy, by impacting negatively on the ability of parents to work. We highlighted the difficult financial position childcare providers are in, and the risk to their sustainability, as well as the pressure on families, amidst rising costs.

The research was also widely picked up and shared in the media, featuring interviews with parents and childcare providers on BBC Radio Ulster and on the BBC Newsline and UTV evening news programmes.

We used our research to inform our engagement as part of the Department of Education's Strategic Insight Lab process and, looking ahead, will continue to use the findings to amplify the voices of parents and childcare providers in planning for a new Childcare Strategy.



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, all of whom are struggling in the context of an ever-worsening cost of living crisis and soaring inflation. We have proactively provided information, advice and reassurance, raising awareness of support available, through clear, timely updates.

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. For example, one social media post encouraging parents to use a registered childcare provider to save money on their childcare costs reached almost 16,000 people. We also added to the advice videos on our YouTube Channel.

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.

“Very good communication and informative emails.”

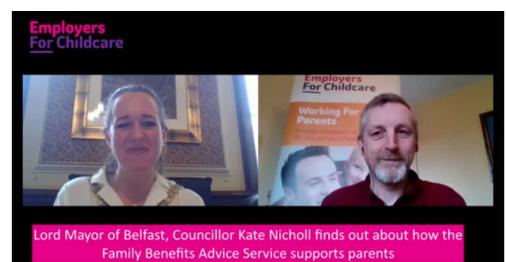
“The website is really clear and user friendly.”

“Regular email updates (but not intrusive) - it feels like EFC is on the side of parents, which is nice.”

We have continued to deliver insight, analysis and guidance through radio and television interviews and newspaper articles. Over the past year we have featured in media outlets including: *BBC Newsline*, *UTV evening news*, *BBC Radio Ulster (Good Morning Ulster, On Your Behalf, Radio Foyle)*, *U105*, *Radio Islam*, *Belfast Telegraph*, *Irish News*, *Business First*, and a wide range of regional papers across Northern Ireland.

We were also delighted to feature in a BBC Radio Ulster Charity Appeal, raising awareness of our Family Benefits Advice Service and encouraging parents to get in touch with us to access free, impartial and confidential advice.

We are regularly approached to comment in the media on issues relating to childcare in recognition of the reputation we have built up as experts in childcare policy. We have engaged with elected representatives to ensure they are up-to-date, and can in turn signpost constituents for advice and guidance. For example, we recorded an advice session with then Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Kate Nicholl (now an MLA), to encourage parents to give our Family Benefits Advice Service a call.



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 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, we are working hard to reduce our carbon footprint.

It was really wonderful this year to be able to phase our team back into the office. Having lunch together, catching up over coffee and brainstorming solutions to a new challenge – all things we enjoy doing in person. But as part of our efforts to reduce time spent commuting, we have introduced a new working from home policy that benefits all staff in Employers For Childcare's offices. And in line with global trends, 'virtual' sessions continue to play an important role in our work with others.

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 £7.35 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

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

Employers For Childcare

Employers For Childcare

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