

## CHILDCARE COSTS FOR THE PARENTS OF DISABLED CHILDREN

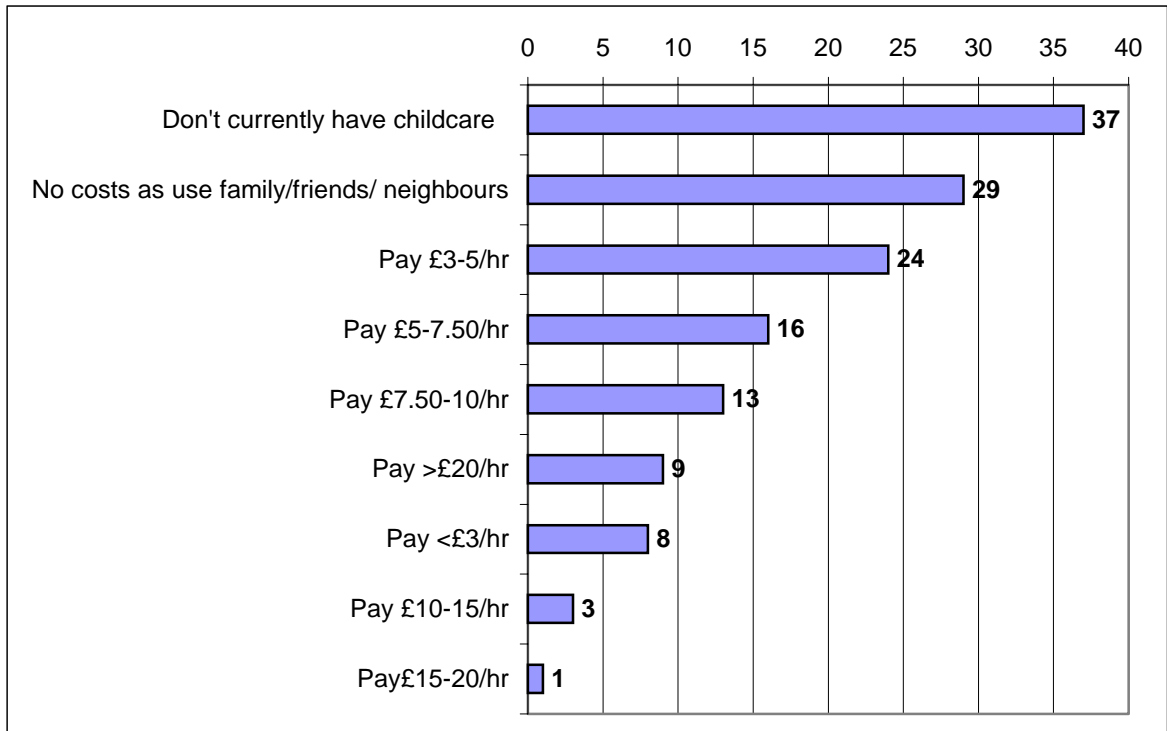
Government policy recognises that the best route out of poverty is work. If you are a parent, being able to work is dependent on being able to arrange and pay for appropriate childcare. Childcare is a special problem for families with disabled children. A number of studies have given compelling evidence of the extent of difficulties with childcare for families with disabled children. These difficulties are of two different sorts – being able to pay for child care and access to childcare.

Firstly, there are issues in terms of paying for childcare. Working Tax Credits allow a flat rate for child care of £135 for one child, of which 70% can be covered, although the flat rate and percentages will increase in future years. For the first time, the costs of using a home care agency can be covered. However, an agency supplying a worker with experience of disability issues would charge at least £8 per hour and Contact a Family's enquiries suggest an average cost of around £11 an hour. So for a basic 35 hour working week, even with no travelling time, costs of at least £280 would be incurred. The maximum a parent could claim would be 70% of £135 i.e. £94.50.

Clearly it is not every child who needs the intensive support and care provided by a one to one worker in their own home. Indeed this will be a minority of children. The Council for Disabled Children estimates that 80% of disabled children would be able to use non-specialist provision with no or minor or moderate adjustments to staff training or premises. However, the remaining 20% would need more specialist support. Contact a Family wanted to investigate how many parents were incurring large costs for childcare.

*Contact a Family undertook a web-based survey of parents with disabled children in November-December 2004. 179 responses were received as at 17 December 2004 (not all respondents answered all the questions).*

**1) Can you tell us how much per hour you have to spend on childcare? (tick one)**



The figures show that as expected, a minority of parents (8%) have to pay more than £10 per hour. A further 16% are paying between £5-£10 an hour. If these parents are working, or wanted to work, a 35 hour week, this level of charge would leave them with a substantial excess to pay if they are eligible for Tax Credits.

Of those 37 parents who do not currently have any childcare, 5 cited that it was too expensive in answer to a later question. Of the 29 who use only unpaid care, 9 of them cited cost. The remainder of parents cited reasons related to unavailability of suitable care.

The allowance within Tax Credits for childcare should be substantially increased in the case of a disabled child. It should be stressed that by no means all parents would need to take advantage of the enhanced allowance and we would expect that the majority would not. As only a proportion of actual expenditure can be claimed, those whose childcare was available at a more standard £3-5, would still only receive a proportion of those costs. When presented with a list of government actions (see tables below), 99 parents thought that more assistance with childcare in Tax Credits would be helpful and indeed when asked to select only one option, it was the most popular option.

However, the problem of insufficient supply still remains. A recent survey in Southwark (Early Education and Childcare for Children aged 0-14 with Disabilities and Special Needs, 2000) for which Contact a Family Southwark helped to find parents showed that there is insufficient after school and holiday provision for disabled children – only 9% of stated children and

1.4% of children with special needs receive out of school provision. Holiday schemes provide for 7.4% of children with statements and 30% of severely disabled children. Childcare during the holidays is the highest priority for working and non-working families. 71.8% of all parents used some form of childcare, but only 54.8% of parents of children with special needs.

There are very few specialist nurseries, childminders with accessible premises and appropriate training and expertise to look after children with complex needs and services can be inflexible. (JRF 1998 'Combining Work and Care')

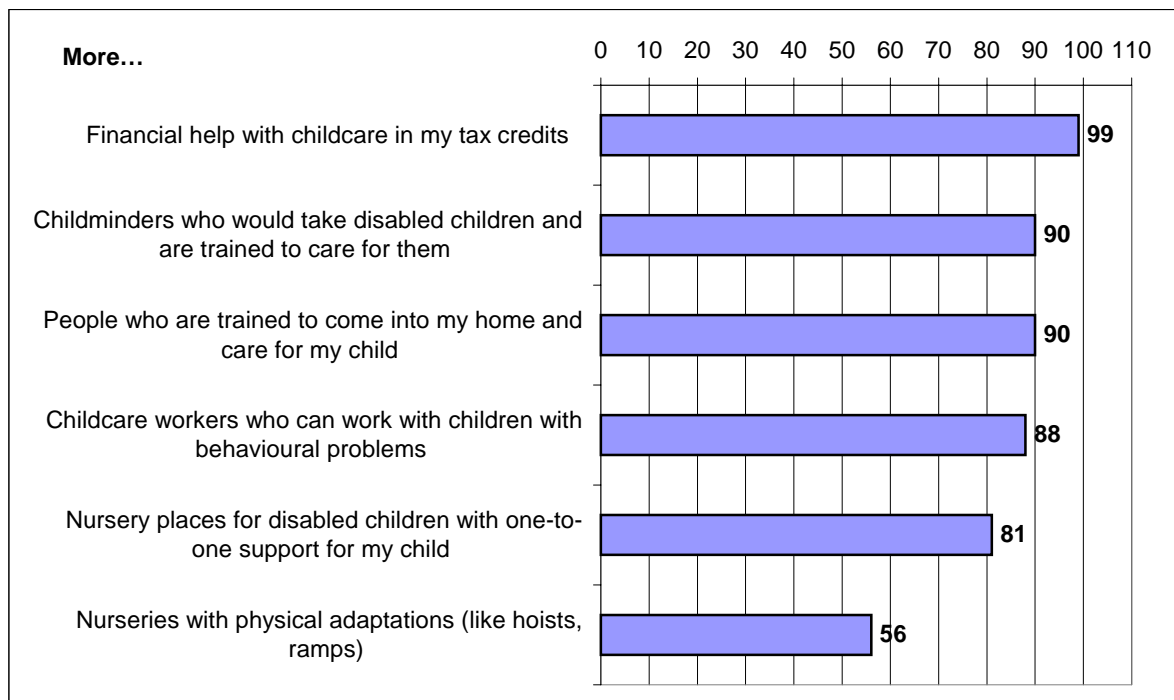
By far the majority of parents who said they had no childcare cited reasons other than money –

- 20 parents said it was hard to find information
- 15 parents said childcare was not available
- 16 parents said childcare staff did not understand their child's needs

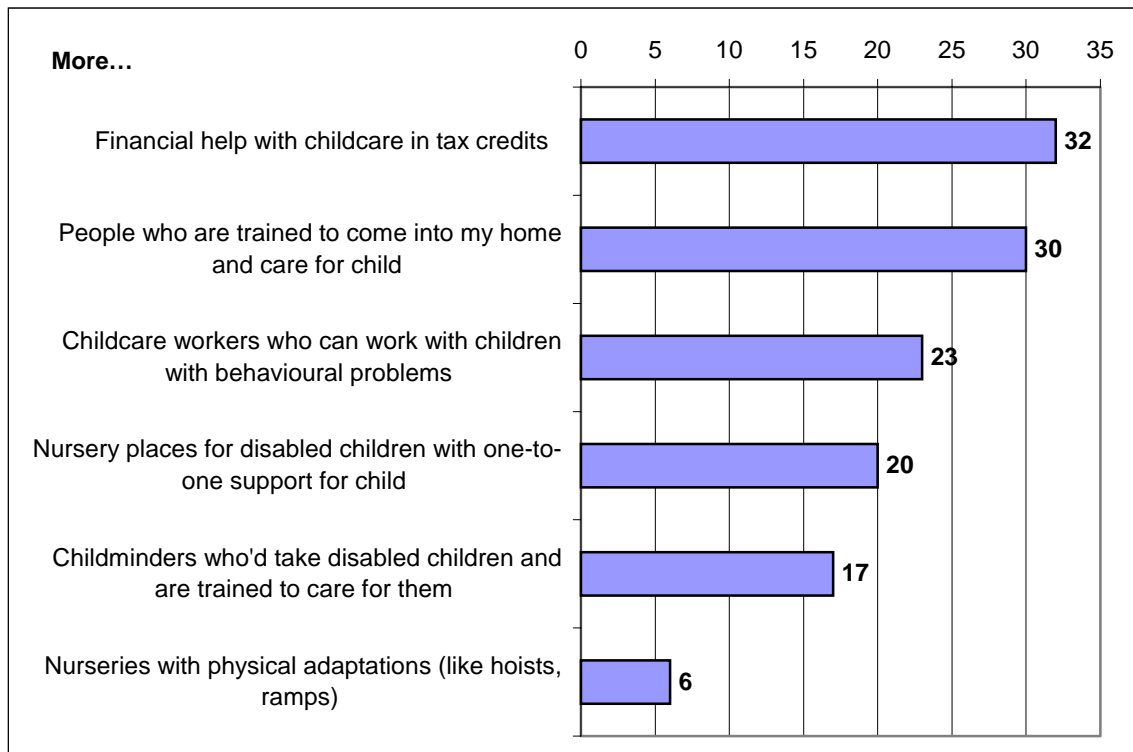
Of course, we cannot tell from this how many of these parents, HAD they been able to find a suitable place, would then have been unable to afford it. Many however, are not even able to consider cost as they cannot find the information they need or find a place that meets their child's needs.

*Contact a Family asked follow up questions to try and determine how parents thought the additional barriers could be tackled by government.*

**2) Which of the following government changes would help you personally with childcare? (tick as many as apply)**

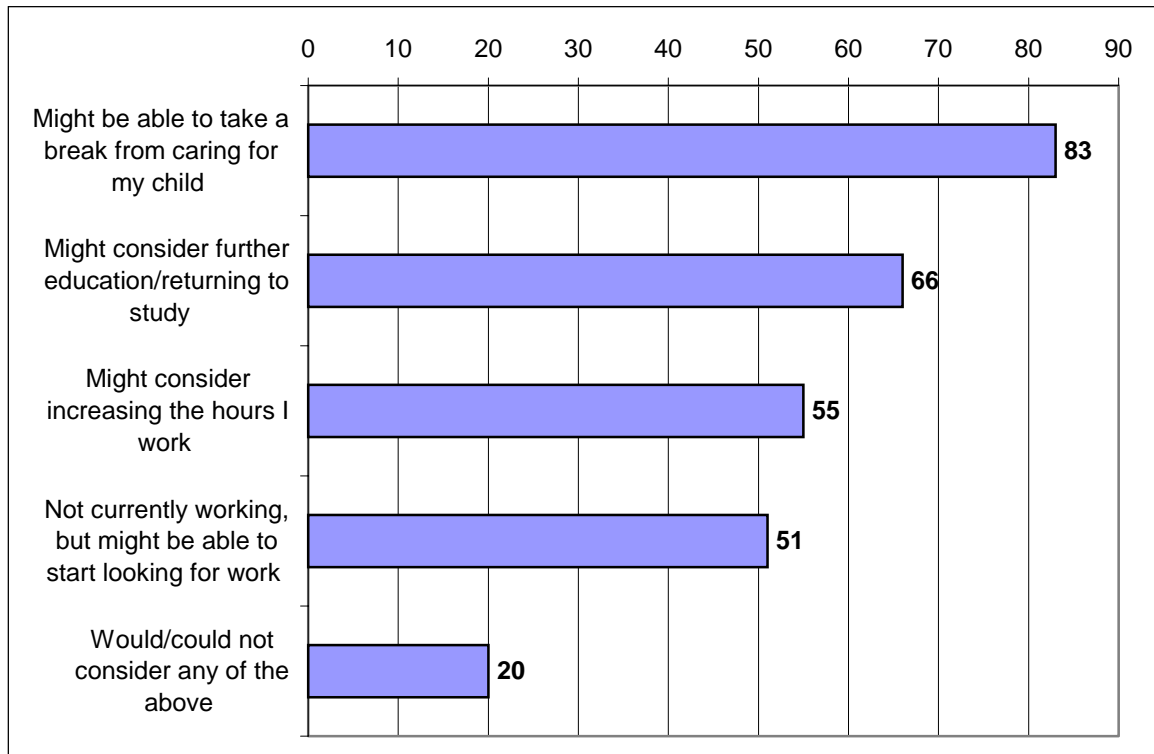


**3) And of those changes, which ONE would help you the MOST? (tick one)**



As we can see from the answers above, physical accessibility is not seen as a solution by most parents. Much more important would be home childcarers and the training which would be needed to equip childcarers with the skills to care for children with behavioural problems.

**4) If the one change you have ticked above were to be brought in, might it change your behaviour in any of the following ways? (tick as many as apply)**



We then asked parents to consider how their lives might change if they could get the childcare they need. Taking a break was most popular, but a substantial number would use the opportunity to study, increase their hours or start to look for work. These are all goals for families that the government would endorse for individuals and families to raise themselves out of poverty and decrease welfare dependence.

**5) Do you think any of the following statements are true for your family? (tick as many as apply)**

