



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Evidence Brief

Out-of-school care services and aiding parents into work

2011

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Date of publication

This report was completed in 2011, and published in the MSD Research Archive website in September 2019.

ISBN

Online 978-0-9951241-3-4

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Out-of-school care services and helping parents into work

Key points

- Many parents prefer to use informal out-of-school care arrangements, such as themselves, other family members, friends or neighbours, to formal out-of-school care arrangements.
- However, access to formal childcare is central to many parents' decision to work, what type of work they do and for how many hours, particularly for low-income, sole parents or secondary earners who are usually women.
- Lone mothers are half as likely to work as partnered mothers, however, for families experiencing multiple levels of disadvantage, lone mothers are twice as likely to work as partnered mothers are.
- Several barriers prevent parents from accessing appropriated childcare and thus entering the workforce including:
 - access to affordable care of good quality that caters for short and/or unpredictable work hours
 - the cost of care balanced against the family's income may not make working financially worthwhile
 - families may lack knowledge of what is in their area or what financial assistance is available to access it.
- Internationally, a wide range of out-of-school programmes and assistance are offered to parents who chose to enter the paid workforce, such as vouchers, tax rebates, grants and subsidies.
- Nearly half of children currently using formal out-of-school services and subsidised by Out of School Care and Recreation (OSCAR) would not have used the service had the subsidy not been available.

Family work patterns have changed over recent decades, a significant increase has occurred in women's participation in the paid workforce and more men are working full time and for longer hours (Robertson & McKenzie 2007). Increasingly, parents are working outside the typical working week (8am–6pm Monday–Friday) and require either formal or informal childcare during non-standard hours. For parents with school-age children, a range of care options are available: formal and informal, standard hours and non-standard hours, funded and non-funded. This evidence brief looks at the different approaches to out-of-school services (OSS) and the evidence available on the impacts of each.

What is informal and formal care?

Informal care is care provided by parents, family, friends or neighbours usually at the child's home, while formal OSS care includes registered and unregistered supervised care out of school hours by a provider normally (but not always) in a school or community facility. The objectives of different formal OSS services also vary. Some

focus on the development of the child and young person while others may be used to help parents to stay in work. It is difficult, however, to isolate the effects of childcare from other influences in the child's or family's life, such as improving family circumstances (MWA 2007).

Situation in New Zealand

In New Zealand, nine percent of school-aged children (aged 5 to 13) attend at least one type of formal OSS. Formal OSS includes care for children outside of school hours, such as before or after-school and holiday programmes run by a provider at either school or a community centre (MWA 2007). While care within a person's own home, such as a nanny or babysitting service, is often considered to be formal OSS it has not been included here due to difficulties in approving, controlling and standardising such care.

Many OSS programmes are eligible for direct government funding, providing they meet basic requirements such as health and safety. Low- and middle-income families can also access subsidies to meet the cost of formal childcare through the Out of School Care and Recreation (OSCAR) subsidy. This subsidy helps working parents meet the cost of before- and after-school care and school holiday programmes for their children aged 5 to 13 years for up to 20 hours a week. Parents and caregivers qualify for this subsidy, provided they:

- are in part-time, full-time, casual or short-term work
- work night shifts
- are training or doing another work-related activity
- are seriously ill, disabled or have a child with a disability (OSCAR Foundation 2011).

Providers can gain access to the OSCAR subsidy, the Assistance Grant or the Development Grant if they gain approval by Child, Youth and Family.

Statistics New Zealand's Childcare Survey (2010) reported that OSS care, both formal and informal, was most common for children aged 5 to 10 and less common for children aged 11 to 13. The survey identified one-in-five (21.4 percent) children were using formal OSS care as subsidised by OSCAR. Of these children, nearly half would not have used OSS programmes or services had the subsidy not been available. The parents of these children were more likely to be sole parents, earning under \$40,000 and living in rural areas (Families Commission 2011).

Decisions to use OSS depend on factors such as cost, accessibility, quality and family arrangements. Many parents prefer to use parental care (56 percent) and informal networks, such as grandparents and friends (36 percent), over formal childcare (Families Commission 2011).

However, for some, the cost of formal childcare can act as a barrier to participation. Statistics New Zealand (2010) reported that some parents (4.4 percent) did not use formal OSS because it was seen as too expensive, particularly for low-income families. Three percent of children did not attend due to lack of available places, lack of local availability or lack of provision at times needed. These children were more likely to be living in rural areas, compared with urban families (10.2 percent and 1.7 percent respectively).

Of the children attending formal OSS care:

- 8.8 percent attended at least one type of formal OSS during the September 2009 quarter. Four out of five of these children attended an after-school care programme and 38 percent of these children spent 3 hours or less in such care per week (Families Commission 2011)
- about half of holiday programme attendees spent 20 hours per week in such care (Families Commission 2011).

The Families Commission (2011) found that income did have an effect on the use of formal OSS, but this was in combination with other factors such as age, ethnicity, employment, family structure and geographical location.

- During the school term, families with higher annual incomes of \$100,000 or more were the highest users of OSS, at 12 percent. While parents who earned between \$40,001 and \$50,000 per annum were the lowest users at 6 percent, and parents who earned \$20,000 or less made up 7 percent. A similar trend is seen for participation in holiday programmes.
- Working parents, sole parents and parents of European descent were the highest users of OSS.
- Māori and Pasifika parents were more likely to use informal family care and less likely to use formal OSS.

New Zealand established Extended Services in 2008 to provide further funding for school-aged children in low-decile schools, to widen the range of activities offered by OSCAR programmes (CSRE 2009). Under Extended Services, providers must involve communities, schools, families and children in creating sustainable programmes. The benefits of Extended Services include support for parents to remain in work or study and the benefits families gained from skills children learned while on the programme (CSRE 2009: 28).

How is out-of-school care provided in other countries?

In Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, as in New Zealand, parents use a mix of informal and formal care solutions to care for their children outside school hours.

Informal care

Informal care is generally defined as care arranged by the child's parent either in the child's home or elsewhere, provided by relatives, friends, neighbours, babysitters or nannies, and it is generally unregulated. This type of care is not necessarily unpaid (OECD 2011).

Home-based care may be informal (eg, family, friend and neighbour care) but it can also be regulated family childcare. Home-based childcare is a common arrangement for many young children in the United States, especially those from low-income families and ethnic minorities. Home-based services or informal care can be more flexible in meeting the needs of these parents. These services can also be the

preferred option of parents with large numbers of children, living in rural areas or who have extended reliable personal and family networks (Bellett & Dickson 2007).

There is less support for home-based or informal care than for other types of care, and little research exists on which initiatives best support such care (Porter et al 2010; Rutter & Evans 2011). Parents in countries that have high levels of formal care typically rely less on informal care (OECD 2011).

Across the OECD, the most common form of informal care is grandparents looking after their grandchildren. In Nordic countries, care by grandparents seems to complement parental and formal care; in other countries (central and southern Europe) it often substitutes for parental care. Some countries have explicitly recognised the role that grandparents play in the provision of informal childcare (OECD 2011).

Self-care is also an option for parents, particularly those of older children and young people and is increasingly becoming an area of concern. Several studies have looked into the effects of self-care. In a review of studies, Blau and Currie (2003) found that:

- many studies report behavioural problems in children under self-care
- some negative correlations existed between self-care and test scores for younger children
- older self-care children are more likely to use cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana
- self-care children are more likely to be headstrong and hyperactive.

It is important to note, however, that many of the studies that Blau and Currie looked at did not examine the social differences between children in self-care and other children. These differences included things such as family circumstances or the specific needs of the child (such as disability or behavioural problems) and the influence these could have on how the child or young person is cared for. The authors also note that (at the time) there was a lack of evidence demonstrating formal OSS programmes as the solution.

Formal care

Increasingly, OECD countries are providing formal OSS care services at some point during the day, as well as during school holidays, although availability of such services may differ. OSS care services vary in their objectives (ie, provide a safe and supervised setting for children, create academic- or cultural-enrichment opportunities for children and young people, or prevent youth from engaging in risky behaviours or dropping out of school), and the distinction among these categories is sometimes blurred. Some programmes are targeted at specific populations while others are not (Beckett 2008). They are frequently, but not always, based in school facilities or youth centres.

There is evidence of effective OSS care services targeted at at-risk young people, for example:

- LA's BEST, which is provided within schools (see below)
- Chicago's After School Matters programme, which is a collaboration among schools, parks and libraries to provide apprenticeship opportunities (with stipends and requirements) for high school youth (Beckett 2008)

- Big Brothers Big Sisters, which is now run in several countries, is a specialised after-school care programme that pairs unrelated adult volunteers with youth from single-parent households (Beckett 2008).

However, there is a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of less expensive, less resource intensive programmes such as after-school care programmes that may simply ‘baby-sit’ children (Beckett 2008). The OECD (2011) states that, in most countries, the provision of OSS care is still in the early stages of development and the lack of data reflects the absence of capacity to a large extent. Across OECD countries, the highest enrolment rates are for 6- to 9-year-old children, with rates dropping sharply for teenagers who prefer to spend their time with their peers outside a formal service.

Provision of care for those working irregular hours, shift work or in the weekends

Services for school-aged children are limited for those parents who work irregular hours, shift work or in the weekends (Singler 2011). Formal care used during non-standard hours, particularly weekends, is most likely to be an in-home care or nanny service, which can be difficult to formally regulate and control (Butt et al 2007). Families that work non-standard hours are more likely to have low levels of education and to earn lower wages and exist in weak labour market positions – typically ‘blue-collar’ and service occupations.¹ However, some parents may choose to work these hours because they facilitate better childcare arrangements that allow parents to work around each other’s schedule (by what is known as ‘shift parenting’), school hours and the needs of other informal carers (Szekely 2004).

Internationally, various initiatives have been developed that may help parents working atypical hours or in remote areas. For example:

- *Scotland: Sitter Service Development:* In an effort to boost the availability and quality of care for low-income families working non-standard hours, the Scottish Executive has recently begun funding sitter services provided by not-for-profit non-governmental organisations, including sole parent advocacy organisations.
 - Sitter Services provide registered childcare in the child’s own home at times when other care is not available.
 - Care can be arranged to fit around shift work or to fill the gaps left by other forms of care (eg, weekends, evenings, early mornings) and is available for occasional use (eg, teacher only days or days when children are sick).
 - Charges depend on the household income and can be covered by the Childcare Working Tax Credit.

An earlier assessment of the costs and benefits of the services found that, for very little expenditure, they provided a service that resulted in a range of individual and community benefits (Wilson et al 2007).

- *Australia: In-Home Care:* Government support for childcare in Australia covers the In-Home Care service for children aged under 13. To be eligible for In-Home Care, families must not be able to access an existing childcare service or their circumstances must be such that an existing service cannot meet their needs.

¹ Ethnicity is a factor in this, however, more research is needed to draw any firm conclusions.

Families living in rural or remote areas and where parents work shift work or non-standard hours qualify (DEEWR 2011).

Out-of-school care for disadvantaged children and young people

Those least likely to use formal OSS care are children from lower income families, sole-parent families or those families with an ethnic minority background (OECD 2011). Evidence suggests that children of disadvantaged socio-economic groups who are most at risk are likely to benefit most (socially, emotionally and academically) from participation in formal OSS services. Examples of services aimed at increasing participation amongst disadvantaged children and young people include the following.

- **Denmark: ‘all-day school programme’** – Denmark provides a comprehensive system of affordable and good-quality childcare, school and out-of-school-hours services, and Danish children perform well above the OECD average in most dimensions of child wellbeing. However, migrant children in Denmark fare less well. Several schools located in areas characterised by ethnic and social segregation face difficulties in meeting the learning needs of students within the maximum number of school hours set by law. Since 2006, the Danish Government has established 11 ‘all-day-schools’ in disadvantaged areas, which provide services beyond the maximum number of school hours, to strengthen language and other academic skills among disadvantaged children. Evaluations of the ‘all-day school’ project are under way, and if experiences are positive, the project may be extended to other schools (OECD 2011).
- **United Kingdom: ‘extended schools and services’** – These include a wide range of services available from 8am to 6pm, 48 weeks a year, including school holidays and are provided either on-site or through access to other sites or centres offering extended services (Colleen et al 2010). The term ‘extended services’ emphasises the role that schools have as a focal point for access to services for children and families wherever and by whichever agency they might be provided (Colleen et al 2010). While extended services are aimed at all schools and all children, they allow schools and their partners to develop their own services appropriate to their circumstances – as such, schools from disadvantaged areas are free to develop services aimed at addressing disadvantage. Service provision is based on the principle of ‘progressive universalism’, where services are available to all but not everybody needs all services, and services are targeted at those who are most likely to benefit from them (OECD 2011).

Services include:

- a variety of activities run in a safe environment that include study support, recreation, sport, music, arts and crafts, and other special interest clubs
- childcare between 8am and 6pm for primary schools
- easy access to specialist services, such as speech therapy
- community access to facilities including adult learning and sports facilities (Colleen et al 2010).

An evaluation of the extended services initiative is currently being undertaken and is expected to be completed in 2013–14 (Colleen et al 2010).

- **United States: ‘LA’s BEST Afterschool Program’** – LA’s BEST is one of the first and most successful out-of-school-hours programmes in the United States targeted at children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The main features that have contributed to the programme’s success include: engagement and interest

of students in academic and recreational activities, consistent student attendance, recruitment of highly motivated volunteers from the same community, and setting clear objectives that are monitored on a regular basis. The programme started in 1988 and currently serves 28,000 children from 3pm to 6pm at 180 primary schools in Los Angeles. It is located in neighbourhoods that are most vulnerable to gangs, drugs and crime and that have the lowest student test scores in the district (LA's BEST 2011).

Programme evaluations have shown that students who participate have more regular school attendance, higher academic achievement on several test scores (maths, reading and language), improve their behaviour and participate more in class than non-LA's BEST students. Moreover, drop-out rates among LA's BEST students are 20 percent lower than the overall district drop-out rate. Those who participate most frequently and for the longest period are the ones who are least likely to drop out of school. In addition, students who attend LA's BEST activities on a regular basis are 30 percent less likely to commit juvenile crime (OECD 2011).

What funding options are there internationally for out-of-school care?

OSS care is funded in different ways internationally, as discussed below.

- **Publicly funded financial support to parents:**

In the United States:²

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families is a federal funding programme provided to states by the Federal Government to provide financial support to low-income families, which can also be used to support after-school programmes. The state can decide whether the funding is spent on after-school programmes or partially transferred to the Child Care Development Fund (Find Youth Info 2011)
- The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) run by the Child Care Bureau provides childcare vouchers to subsidise the cost of childcare for low-income families as well as funds towards improving the quality of state childcare (Find Youth Info 2011). CCDF is the largest federal childcare subsidy programme (Szekely 2004) and is being used by many states to support the increasing number of parents working non-standard hours. The CCDF is considerably flexible towards 'needs assessment', 'target population', 'type of care', and 'potential partners' of local policymakers.

In the United Kingdom:

- Tax credits are currently available for parents who work and pay for registered or approved OSS care – school services do not need to register. Parents qualify if they both³ work 16 hours or more a week, and can receive up to 70 percent of their childcare costs – subject to limitations.
- **Support for providers:** In the United States, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) initiative is a federal funding source that solely supports after-school programmes. Its purpose is to support community learning centres and schools that provide academic enrichment services during OSS hours. Grants are awarded by the Department of Education to state education agencies, which manage state-wide competition for the grants (Find Youth Info 2011).
 - Participation in this programme, however, had an overall negative effect on participants, who were more likely to be suspended or disciplined in school. While further research is needed to verify why this is happening, it is thought to be because children are tired of spending so much time at school, programmes tolerate different behaviours to schools, or programmes are poorly designed and implemented (Beckett 2008).
- **Employer funded services:** examples of employer funded childcare are as follows:
 - *Provision of a childcare co-ordinator:* in response to demand for care at non-standard hours, the Greater Manchester Police Force employed a childcare co-ordinator based in the Greater Manchester Police Equal Opportunities Unit and funded from the Force's general budget. The Co-ordinator manages a network of childminders who provide childcare from 6am until the following

² US funding and regulations are at both the federal and state level.

³ Excluding a parent who is disabled, in hospital or in prison.

day, including any time, any day and overnight childcare and school drop off and pick up. This took several years to develop and has been in operation since 2003. When employees also reported problems with childcare during school holidays, a network of school holiday clubs was established, spread across 10 local authorities. To date, this includes over 20 clubs. The Childcare Co-ordinator has been critical in building relationships with local authorities to establish and maintain this network (Alakeson 2011).

- *Portable childcare subsidies or vouchers:* In the United States, some firms use a voucher system. The vouchers are administered through a flexible spending account (FSA), a federally subsidised pre-tax account. FSAs are limited to \$5,000 a year and can only be used to reimburse parents for childcare costs from providers that provide a tax ID number, and among families where both parents are employed (full or part time), attending school or looking for work. The vouchers can be used for any form of legal childcare.⁴
- In the United Kingdom, employers may offer their employees help to pay for childcare, including cash payments to pay for childcare costs or paying the childcare or school fees directly. If the employer offers any of the above, parents are liable for tax and national insurance contributions on whatever aid is given. Other types of childcare support are available, however, that employers could provide without parents having to pay tax or national insurance contributions. These include childcare vouchers, along with directly contracted childcare, and workplace nurseries (HM Revenue & Customs 2011).
- Voucher programmes are more flexible, can be tailored to each employee's individual needs and can fluctuate relative to employee demand and market conditions. Furthermore, because vouchers can be linked to regular payroll operations, they are a tool easily implemented by all employers, regardless of firm size or the number of employees with children, and thus offer wider replicability than on-site childcare (Morrissey & Warner 2009).
- A study of the voucher system used at a large US university found that employer-supported childcare vouchers were able to reach those employees most in need of childcare assistance, particularly hourly and sole parent employees, and that programme design could encourage participation by those employees facing greater childcare challenges (Morrissey & Warner 2009).

Use of financial support to families has limited impact where the supply of childcare services is insufficient to meet demand (Mitchell et al 2008). While many parents express a preference for informal care or use formal care to supplement informal care, research suggests an unmet demand also exists for formal OSS care services (Singler 2011; Bellett & Dickson 2007).

⁴ For example, childcare centres, preschools, summer camps, licensed family childcare homes, licence-exempt relatives, friends or neighbours (but they must meet minimal safety expectations and have tax ID numbers).

Internationally, what services support employment?

A recent UK study by Speight et al (2010) found a connection between levels⁵ of disadvantage experienced by families and maternal employment, particularly the disadvantage of lone mothers. In terms of employment and partnered status, for all “mothers, lone mothers were half as likely to work as partnered mothers, while mothers from families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage, lone mothers were over twice as likely to work as partnered mothers” (Speight et al 2010: 43). Just under two-thirds of mothers from highly disadvantaged families agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer to work if they could arrange good quality, affordable, convenient and reliable childcare, compared with just over a third of mothers from families with no level of disadvantage (Speight et al 2010).

For many parents, the choice to work part time is constrained by lack of access to affordable childcare of good quality and employment that caters to short and/or unpredictable school hours. There appears to be a positive relationship between part-time female employment and childcare costs (OECD 2004). Part-time work is typically characterised by lower hourly earnings, less training and promotion opportunities, and less job security – greatly affecting families at high levels of disadvantaged particularly low-income and sole parents. However, for most part-timers, usually women, the advantages of working part time outweigh the disadvantages (eg, better ‘life’ control, less stress and improved health). The OECD recommends that barriers to moving into work, and from part-time to full-time employment, be removed. To this extent, childcare is becoming increasingly important in welfare reform agendas – for example, the United Kingdom’s make work pay for parents (Alakeson 2011).

When children are in school, most sole parents in OECD countries make net gains on low wages. For low-wage sole parents with children in primary school, additional benefits and fiscal supports supplement take-home pay. Nevertheless, in some OECD countries, incentives for parents to increase earnings remain weak from preschool children to when children are in primary and/or secondary school (OECD 2004).

One component of that is access to OSS care. Options for increasing access include:

- **childcare subsidies⁶ for parents:** international evidence indicates that childcare subsidies can support employment. Studies on the relationship between childcare subsidies and the labour force participation of women show “subsidy use to be associated with increased rates of employment and improved employment outcomes” (Lawrence & Kreader 2006: 2). They are “inherently intertwined” because “subsidies support employment, while employment and preparation for employment are conditions for subsidy eligibility” (Lawrence & Kreader 2006: 2). Mothers who use a subsidy are more likely to work at a job, work more hours, work standard schedules, sustain employment and earn more (Lawrence & Kreader 2006). However, much of this is reliant on the reliability of the childcare – some childcare programmes may not be regularly reliable creating further stress and problems for parents

⁵ Speight et al’s levels of disadvantage include but are not limited to: neither parent being in paid employment, lone parent family, low educated family, low income, and three or more children, which they used to create five levels of disadvantage.

⁶ However, it should be noted that many studies focus on childcare subsidies for preschool children. Little research is available on the effect on parental employment of subsidising care for older, school-aged children.

- **childcare subsidies for providers:** subsidising providers allows for regulation and control of how the programmes can be run and what areas are served. Examples include the United States 21CCLC (Afterschool Alliance 2008).

Barriers for accessing out-of-school care

Several barriers exist for families wanting to access OSS care in order to enter the workforce. This is particularly prevalent for low-income and/or sole-parent families because they have fewer resources to pay for quality childcare or social activities, greater vulnerabilities and less flexibility in their work schedules.

Out-of-school care for rural areas

Several challenges are involved in the provision of OSS care within rural areas. These include:

- fewer children requiring such services and fewer 'centres' where OSS care may be provided
- fewer private partners for rural OSS programmes to expand their funding base and fewer resources for their programmes
- a limited tax base, this is a common issue for rural areas that can face difficult socio-economic circumstances and competition with other youth programmes for limited resources
- high transportation costs and staffing challenges (Sandel & Bhat 2008).

Awareness of services

In some cases, services may exist but parents do not know about them. A UK study (Speight et al 2010) identified parents from families with multiple disadvantages as being less informed about care options (44 percent compared with 37 percent of all families), more likely to learn about childcare from job centres, and holding negative views about the quality, affordability and sufficiency of childcare within their local area. A similar finding was reported by Butt et al (2007) who found that, while four-in-10 parents think there are not enough childcare⁷ providers in their area, most providers report vacancies.

A study in Canberra, Australia, found that disadvantaged parents who lacked connection to childcare services often lacked the social networks needed to connect and/or introduce them to such services (Winkworth et al 2010). Previous contact with formal agencies contributed to parents' disconnection, because services often left them feeling judged and under surveillance and missed opportunities to connect parents with appropriate support avenues.

Service setup

Several barriers also exist to setting up childcare services. Such as:

- the difficulty in establishing demand – gauging demand requires highly detailed surveys and qualitative data asking detailed questions about parents' needs for childcare

⁷ For both school-aged children and preschool children in this study.

- demand is irregular, ad hoc, requested on short notice or for irregular hours, which creates problems in arranging staff adequately and cost effectively
- childcare services can also find it difficult to access local support networks
- difficulties in matching types of care to a family's specific needs – such as a high needs child or transportation
- the registration process, access to grants and funding, and knowledge of what is available are also barriers for setting up and maintaining childcare programmes and for parents interested in such services (Singler 2011; Beckett 2008).

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