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**The Childcare Needs West, The West Needs Childcare:**

**A Childcare Needs Assessment  
of West Co. Sligo**

*-Report -*

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*Prepared for:* Sligo County Childcare Committee

*December 2003*

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## **The Childcare Needs West, The West Needs Childcare: A Needs Assessment of West Co. Sligo**

# Report

## 1 Executive Summary

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This report demonstrates the need to develop childcare services for the West Co. Sligo area. Despite the fact that 22% of the population of West Co. Sligo is under 15 years old, the area only offers three formal childcare services. This current childcare provision does not adequately serve the needs of the wide geographic area and growing population of West Co. Sligo.

The current childcare services provide 57 spaces for children in the pre-school age group and 20 for school-age childcare. With many areas of West Co. Sligo experiencing rapid population growth including Coolaney, Easkey, Templeboy and Enniscrone, new childcare spaces are required to meet the increasing demand and minimise the number of children awaiting childcare provision.

With the increase of two-parent working families and the lack of local provision, many parents are forced to take their children to Ballina Co. Mayo or Sligo Town for childcare. Other parents consider themselves 'fortunate' to find a reliable childminder or family member to provide full-day, flexible and local childcare- values parents share in an ideal childcare situation. In some cases, parents use multiple forms of childcare (i.e. childminder and playgroup) to cover the full working day and long commuting times.

Stay-at-home parents also need local childcare. Extending childcare provisions enables parents in isolated areas to work part-time, attend a course or even just complete day-to-day tasks. Currently there is a gap in provision, such as an absence of Parent and Toddler Groups, which leads to further isolation in rural communities.

The importance of 'child-centred' childcare was emphasised in local consultations. Parents who value childcare as socialization for their children before school age, desire local services such as playgroups, pre-schools and parent and toddler groups. Similarly, enhanced provision for school-age children is required in the form of afterschool programmes and summer and/or school holiday camps.

West Co. Sligo has not yet experienced the growth of different cultural groups to the degree of the larger towns in the County. However, West Co. Sligo does need to ensure that any development in childcare service takes into account the needs of different religious and cultural backgrounds, the travelling community (especially nomadic travellers), asylum seekers and migrant workers that move to the area.

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Parents with special needs children also use childcare, respite and weekly care outside of the West Co. Sligo community. Although parents are satisfied with the special needs services in Sligo Town and Ballina Co. Mayo, the commuting times for special needs children can reach up to one hour. Both parents and providers are open to an integration of special needs children in local area childcare, even for short-term or ad hoc care, but this requires attention and appropriate staff training.

This report highlights the childcare issues that emerge from the West Co. Sligo area. Isolation in a rural setting, especially for stay-at-home parents, is an issue along with transportation and distance travelled to access childcare services, which in many cases is over nine miles. The timing of childcare is also a major issue with most facilities opening after 9:00 a.m., which does not adequately facilitate working parents. The breadth of childcare is not deep enough at the moment to include adequate provision after 3:00 p.m. or afterschool/school-age childcare.

The recommendations in this report focus specifically on strategy to move forward on addressing the needs for childcare in West Co. Sligo. It is recommended that the Sligo County Childcare Committee co-ordinate, support and develop (as its own aim suggests) the current work by parents and providers in the area to increase childcare services.

The statistics, current provision and consultation process in West Co. Sligo suggests that a full-time daycare facility is essential along with a development of services to facilitate longer hours and a wider set of age groups. A Task Force for Childcare in West Co. Sligo is the first step to creating a suitable action plan to realise the appropriate childcare provision.

## **2 Introduction**

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This report provides a complete childcare needs assessment for the West County Sligo area. Commissioned by the Sligo County Childcare Committee, this report is both a quantitative and qualitative study, presenting both relevant statistics from West Co. Sligo and the views of stakeholders in the area: parents, statutory bodies, providers, social agencies, community groups. The original terms of reference for this research are available in the Appendix.

The population of County Sligo is concentrated in Sligo Town and Tubbercurry to the South. Although West Co. Sligo is a large landmass within the County; it is sparsely populated at 7,024 inhabitants, 12% of the County population.<sup>1</sup> The care for some 1,500 children aged 0-14 years- a higher percentage than the County average- continues to be a major issue for parents in West Co. Sligo with the changes in family and work situations over the past generation.<sup>2</sup>

The assumption that the extended family or the parents themselves take care of the children is no longer feasible choice for many parents. The challenge remains to find alternative childcare in West Co. Sligo that suits both the family's needs and ensures high quality care for the child.

### *2.1 Aims of the Research Project*

This needs assessment report aims to provide the following:

- A full demographic profile of the West Co. Sligo region, presenting statistics that impact childcare and childcare needs
- An analysis of the needs for childcare in West Co. Sligo through interviews and meetings with key stakeholders: parents and children; statutory bodies; childcare organizations; providers; social and community groups; educators and health care workers
- Highlighting the childcare needs of socially sensitive groups (lone parents, indigenous travelling families, Nomadic families, new families to West Co. Sligo, asylum seekers and migrant worker families)
- An action plan and strategy to respond to the recommendations of this report that integrates with the SCCC vision, aims and objectives

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<sup>1</sup> Central Statistics Office. "Persons, males and females in each County, City, Urban area, rural area and Electoral Division in Connaught classified by age group." 2002. Dublin: Census 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. *Actual number from 2002 census-* 1,523.

## 2.2 *Scope and Methodology*

This report will outline the research findings on the demographics in West County Sligo including the following towns and corresponding DEDs:

- Beltra (Dromard East)
- Dromard/Skreen
- Ardabrone (Toberpatrick East/West, Aughris)
- Templeboy
- Dromore West
- Owenbeg (Buncrowey)
- Easkey
- Rathlee (Rathmacurkey)
- Culleens (Rathmacurkey)
- Enniscrone (Kilglass)
- Corbally (Rathmacurkey)
- Castleconnor
- Largan (Mullagheruse)
- Masshill (Mullagheruse)
- Carrowneden (Carrownaskeagh)
- Coolaney

The research methodology is a balance between statistical data and consultations from key stakeholders on the needs of childcare for children between 0-14 years of age. This report presents the current childcare services in West Co. Sligo from the formal childcare providers to the informal childcare (childminders, extended family etc.,).

The quantitative information in this report is a combination of purpose-designed surveys (completed by national school principals and public health nurses) and Census Information. The Census data from 2002 and 1996 provided the majority of demographic information. The qualitative information was informed through consultations with stakeholders in the area along with statutory bodies and community agencies.

## 2.3 *Acknowledgements*

I am grateful to the Sligo County Childcare Committee for their support and commitment to this project. By initiating this research, the SCCC has extended their hand to the West Co. Sligo area to work with parents and stakeholders on developing childcare in the region.

For their valuable contributions to this report I would like to thank: the childcare providers in West Co. Sligo especially Alice Gallagher in Enniscrone, Maura Kelly in Dromard/Skreen and Fiona Taylor in Easkey; From the NWHB Des Keaney and the Counsellors of Special Needs especially Martina McCarrick and Delia Flynn; Ann Nelson and the group of parents in Enniscrone committed to improving childcare in the area.

The assistance of the National School Principals and Public Health Nurses who completed the short questionnaire is gratefully acknowledged. A special thanks also goes to the parents and children who informed this report.

At home, I would like to thank Pierce and Angela for their advice, knowledge and support on this project and most of all to Morgan- grazie mille.

- Maria Gallo

### 3 Demographics of West County Sligo

#### 3.1 General Demographics

From 1996 to 2002, the population of County Sligo has increased by 4% to 58,200 inhabitants. The increase in population in West Co. Sligo was not as great at 1% to 7,024 residents. Enniscrone, part of the Kilglass DED, is the most populated area in West Co. Sligo at 1,245 residents. Overall, West Co. Sligo is very sparsely populated although it spans a large geographic area (43,997 hectares) and has the district with the lowest population density (persons per square mile) with Mullagheruse at 3 persons per square mile.<sup>3</sup>

Population 1996 and 2002 of West Co. Sligo by Region (DEDs)

Population Area	Persons 1996	Persons 2002	Males 2002	Females 2002	% Change in population 96-02
Sligo County	55821	58200	28771	29429	4.26
Dromore West rural area*	6446	6468	3343	3125	0.34
Aughris	191	186	90	96	-2.62
Buncrowey	393	349	179	170	-11.20
Castleconnor East	267	257	135	122	-3.75
Castleconnor West	887	825	425	400	-6.99
Carrownaskeagh	116	99	49	50	-14.66
Coolaney	396	457	241	216	15.40
Dromard East	203	161	81	80	-20.69
Dromard West	128	164	91	73	28.13
Dromore	328	308	166	142	-6.10
Easkey East	522	535	286	249	2.49
Easkey West	658	698	367	331	6.08
Kilglass (Enniscrone area)	1132	1245	615	630	9.98
Mullagheruse	58	49	26	23	-15.52
Rathmacurkey	572	558	313	245	-2.45
Skreen	147	159	81	78	8.16
Templeboy North	296	280	140	140	-5.41
Templeboy South	194	194	91	103	0.00
Toberpatrick East	222	219	103	116	-1.35
Toberpatrick West	248	281	154	127	13.31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6958</b>	<b>7024</b>	<b>3633</b>	<b>3391</b>	<b>1.01</b>

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2002 Census

\*excludes Coolaney and Carrownaskeagh (Carrowmeden) DEDs

<sup>3</sup> Eire. National Childcare Census Report- County Sligo. (Area Development Management Limited, 2000), 8.

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### 3.1.1 General Observations

Some areas of West Co. Sligo experienced severe decreases in population, notably Dromard East (Beltra) at 21%, Mullagheruse at 15.5% and Carrownaskeagh (Carrowneden) at 14.7%.

In contrast, some areas of West Co. Sligo increased dramatically to the County average, notably Dromard West (28%), Coolaney (15.4%), Toberpatrick West (near Templeboy) at 13.3% and the Enniscrone area (10%). The number of new estates and developments in these areas since 1996 contributes to this increase in population.

In fact, 42.3% of the population of West Co. Sligo has experienced population growth higher than the County Sligo average of 4.26%, affecting seven Districts and 3,004 residents in this area.

The statistics on households below shows that at 2.87 persons per household, West Co. Sligo is in line with the County average of 2.83 persons per household. This statistic also shows that many households in West Co. Sligo include children, extended family or both.

#### Households in West Co. Sligo by Region (DEDs)

Household Type	Number of private households				Number of persons in private households			
	Total	Permanent	Temporary	Not stated	Total	Permanent	Temporary	Not stated
Sligo County	19643	19147	135	361	55727	54459	322	946
Dromore West rural area*	2218	2161	36	21	6349	6243	58	48
Aughris	56	54	1	1	185	180	3	2
Buncrowey	121	116	3	2	344	334	4	6
Castleconnor East	85	83	2	0	256	254	2	0
Castleconnor West	275	263	7	5	811	790	9	12
Carrownaskeagh	34	32	1	1	99	95	3	1
Coolaney	153	150	0	3	458	450	0	8
Dromard East	63	62	1	0	161	160	1	0
Dromard West	56	56	0	0	164	164	0	0
Dromore	116	114	1	1	306	303	2	1
Easkey East	193	188	3	2	530	521	4	5
Easkey West	249	244	1	4	695	687	2	6
Kilglass	412	407	3	2	1158	1143	9	6
Mullagheruse	20	17	1	2	50	47	1	2
Rathmacurkey	191	185	6	0	562	553	9	0
Skreen	53	51	2	0	156	152	4	0
Templeboy North	94	91	3	0	282	279	3	0
Templeboy South	58	57	1	0	191	188	3	0
Toberpatrick East	76	75	1	0	221	219	2	0
Toberpatrick West	100	98	0	2	277	269	0	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2405</b>	<b>2343</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6906</b>	<b>6788</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>57</b>

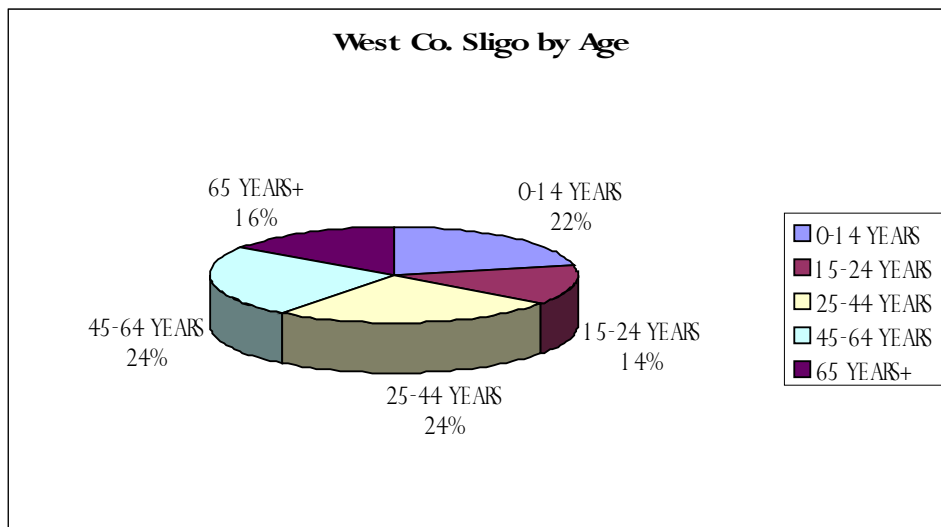
\*Does not include Coolaney or Carrownaskeagh DEDs

### 3.1.2 Age of the Population in West Co. Sligo

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The population of West Co. Sligo is slightly younger than the County average, with 1,523 children from 0-14 years of age comprising of 22% of the area population. In contrast, the County average is 21% for the same age range.



Source: Central Statistics Office, 2002 Census

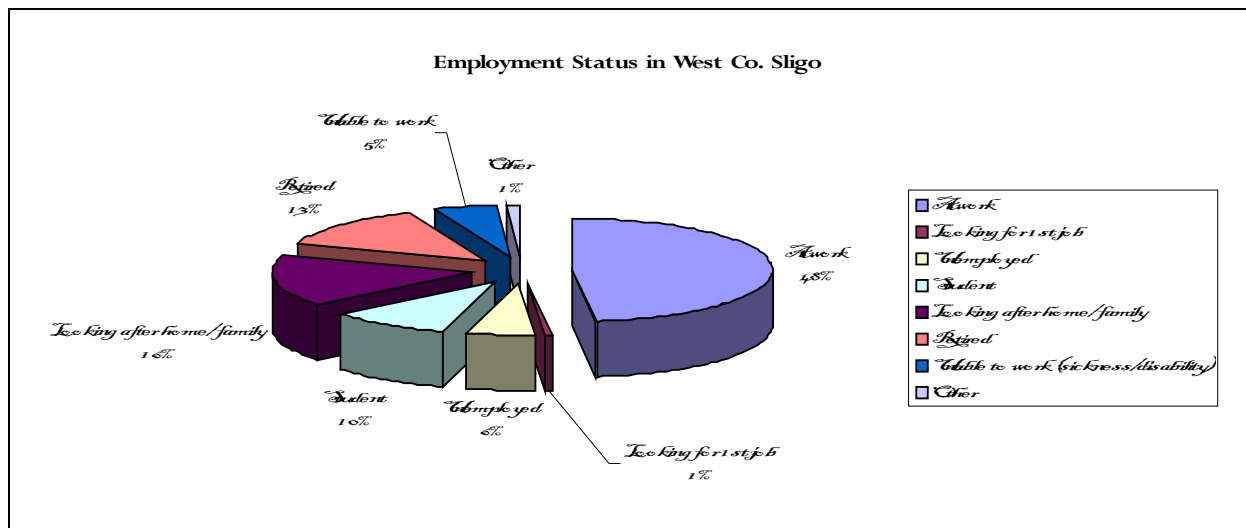
**Age Range in West Co. Sligo by Region**

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2002 Census

Age Group	Total	0-14 years	15-24 years	25-44 years	45-64 years	65 years+
<b>Area</b>						
Sligo County	58200	12089	9397	15757	13284	7673
Dromore West rural area	6468	1388	870	1612	1567	1031
Aughris	186	31	36	38	56	25
Buncrowey	349	91	44	79	69	66
Carrownaskeagh	99	20	14	22	29	14
Castleconnor East	257	62	40	59	64	32
Castleconnor West	825	156	123	189	241	116
Coolaney	457	115	66	133	98	45
Dromard East	161	27	24	37	42	31
Dromard West	164	45	21	52	24	22
Dromore	308	68	27	82	83	48
Easkey East	535	116	76	140	131	72
Easkey West	698	142	91	160	187	118
Kilglass	1245	260	159	331	269	226
Mullagheruse	49	7	7	8	19	8
Rathmacurkey	558	93	85	145	137	98
Skreen	159	36	19	43	41	20
Templeboy North	280	85	26	80	46	43
Templeboy South	194	43	38	42	42	29
Toberpatrick East	219	55	21	53	55	35
Toberpatrick West	281	71	33	74	61	42
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7024</b>	<b>1523</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>1767</b>	<b>1694</b>	<b>1090</b>

### 3.1.3 Employment and Income levels in West Co. Sligo

The employment profile for West Co. Sligo holds similar trends to the County-wide statistics. However, the rate of unemployed in the West is 6% (304), higher than the 4% County average. More relevant to the childcare context, West Co. Sligo has a higher percentage of adults opting to look after the home and family (16% versus County Sligo at 13%). This stay-at-home cohort includes about 900 residents in the West Co. Sligo area.



Source: Central Statistics Office, 2002 Census

### Employment Status in West Co. Sligo

Employment Status	Total	At work	Looking for 1st job	Unemployed	Student	Looking after home/ family	Retired	Unable to work (sickness/disability)	Other
Area									
Sligo County	46111	23927	266	2020	5788	5927	5590	2065	528
Dromore West rural area*	5080	2421	30	286	526	839	665	257	56
Aughris	155	71	1	9	19	27	17	7	4
Buncrowey	258	95	0	27	26	54	39	15	2
Castleconnor East	195	84	1	15	26	43	18	6	2
Castleconnor West	669	344	4	31	87	96	70	28	9
Carrownaskeagh	79	42	0	2	7	16	7	5	0
Coolaney	342	179	4	16	40	54	28	13	8
Dromard East	134	71	5	3	10	22	17	5	1
Dromard West	119	73	1	3	10	21	9	2	0
Dromore	240	111	0	18	23	35	30	19	4
Easkey East	419	186	1	34	34	66	52	37	9
Easkey West	556	260	4	31	45	101	73	38	4
Kilglass	985	452	7	45	114	150	176	36	5
Mullagheruse	42	14	0	3	5	8	6	5	1
Rathmacurkey	465	212	3	39	47	73	59	24	8
Skreen	123	70	0	4	10	18	13	6	2
Templeboy North	195	104	0	9	11	35	21	14	1
Templeboy South	151	61	1	9	29	29	18	3	1
Toberpatrick East	164	93	0	1	13	25	26	6	0
Toberpatrick West	210	120	2	5	17	36	21	6	3
Total	5501	2642	34	304	573	909	700	275	64

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2002 Census

\*Excludes Coolaney and Carrownaskeagh DEDs

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The 2002 Census did not include questions on income level. This section instead focuses on the social class statistics from the 1996 Census. Between the information on the employment status and social class information, an indication on income level can be inferred.

### Social Class in West Co. Sligo by Region (DEDs)

Social class								
Area	Total	Professional workers	Managerial and technical workers	Non-manual workers	Skilled manual workers	Semi-skilled manual workers	Unskilled workers	All others gainfully occupied and unknown
Sligo	42894	1968	8817	7879	8197	5638	3690	6705
Aughris	144	1	22	14	27	30	19	31
Buncrowey	275	7	38	58	52	39	39	42
Castleconnor East	192	3	15	60	46	35	13	20
Castleconnor West	673	16	128	197	143	71	51	67
Carrownaskeagh	89	12	3	13	24	14	3	20
Coolaney	282	12	43	51	82	44	24	26
Dromard East	149	14	21	21	43	22	10	18
Dromard West	98	1	12	32	23	15	6	9
Dromore	263	4	35	36	67	45	30	46
Easkey East	409	9	57	60	103	83	37	60
Easkey West	525	5	60	91	105	124	58	82
Kilglass	869	28	180	138	163	131	77	152
Mullagheruse	47	6	5	12	3	9	5	7
Rathmacurkey	451	5	26	75	118	111	30	86
Skreen	114	9	21	14	24	25	7	14
Templeboy North	216	14	34	57	34	31	17	29
Templeboy South	140	15	20	22	19	4	21	39
Toberpatrick East	170	2	35	38	38	16	10	31
Toberpatrick West	192	14	45	24	39	31	15	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>5298</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>1013</b>	<b>1153</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>803</b>

Source: Central Statistics Office, 1996 Census

According to above chart, a large percentage of workers in West Co. Sligo work in non-manual, skilled manual and semi-skilled manual work, which may correlate to an average salary wage. The largest region in the area, Enniscrone (Kilglass), registered the largest number of managerial and technical workers followed by neighbouring Castleconnor West.

Farming is still a major part of life with the best agricultural land in the north and east areas of West Co. Sligo. While there is no major industry in West Co. Sligo, there is a large tourist industry in Easkey and Enniscrone, especially during the summer months.<sup>4</sup>

It is also common for residents to commute to either Ballina Co. Mayo or Sligo Town for employment. Commuting distance to Sligo Town is under one hour for most of West Co. Sligo and Ballina can be under 30 minutes. In fact, the geography dictates the preference for many residents in West Co. Sligo to use resources and town services in Ballina and Co. Mayo.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Des Keaney, North Western Health Board- November 6, 2003

### 3.1.4 Haase Index of Relative Affluence and Deprivation and West Co. Sligo

The Haase Index of Relative Affluence and Deprivation used in the National Childcare Census Report is a score from 1 to 10 (10- most disadvantaged) that creates a rating by taking into account ‘*structural weaknesses*’ that can affect rural communities beyond unemployment figures and other statistics.<sup>5</sup> According to the Haase Index, most of West Co. Sligo is categorised as disadvantaged.

#### Haase Index for West Co. Sligo by DEDs and Number of Children 0-14 affected in ( )

Aughris	9-10	(31)	Easkey East/West	9-10	(258)
Buncrowey	9-10	(91)	Kilglass	7-9	(260)
Carrownaskeagh	9-10	(20)	Mullagheruse	9-10	(7)
Castleconnor East	9-10	(62)	Rathmacurkey	9-10	(93)
Castleconnor West	5-7	(156)	Skreen	7-9	(36)
Coolaney	5-7	(115)	Templeboy North	7-9	(85)
Dromard East	7-9	(27)	Templeboy South	9-10	(194)
Dromard West	7-9	(45)	Toberpatrick East	5-7	(55)
Dromore	9-10	(68)	Toberpatrick West	7-9	(71)

54% of the children in West Co. Sligo (824 children) live in the Haase Index most disadvantaged category and 85% of children (1288 children) are in areas ranked in the two most disadvantaged categories (7-10) on the Haase Index.

### 3.1.5 Cultural Diversity in West Co. Sligo

West Co. Sligo has not experienced the increase in cultural diversity of the larger towns in the County. The majority of residents are Catholic but there is a mix of other religions including the Protestant denominations.

There is a small minority of recent immigrants in the West Co. Sligo area, from the UK although a smaller group is from Eastern Europe and Africa. At the moment, the increase in asylum seekers in the North West has not had an immediate affect in West Co. Sligo, with the concentrations of asylum seekers in Sligo Town and Tubbercurry.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Sligo Travellers Project, there are no registered travellers in West Co. Sligo.<sup>7</sup> However, travellers in other parts of the North West indicated there are regular nomadic families in the Easkey and Enniscrone areas.<sup>8</sup>

The antidotal research on cultural diversity, including the asylum seeker and travelling communities, in West Co. Sligo demonstrates the importance of conducting a regular review in this area. This ensures the needs of cultural groups are met in growing areas such as Coolaney and Enniscrone.

## 3.2 Demographics of Children in West Co. Sligo

Children in West Co. Sligo comprise of almost one-quarter of the population in the region.

<sup>5</sup> Eire. *National Childcare Census Report- County Sligo*, 30-31.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Des Keaney, North Western Health Board- November 6, 2003 and North Western Health Board. *Growing up in the North West*. (NWHB, 2001),125.

<sup>7</sup> Consultation with Bríd Boland, Sligo Travellers Project, responsible for the Travelling Community remit, October 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Consultation with participants of the Donegal Traveller Project indigenous to the Ballina Co. Mayo area, November 2003.

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The specific information on age groups of children is based on a recent questionnaire circulated in November 2003 to National School Principals and Public Health Nurses. According to these surveys there are 1,164 children in the West Co. Sligo area.

For the purposes of this section, the children will be categorised in larger catchment areas within West Co. Sligo to coincide with the remits of Public Health Nurses and/or National Schools. These figures do not include families that recently moved into the area (this is especially true for the numbers between 0-5 years old) and children who attend school in other parts of County Sligo/County Mayo.

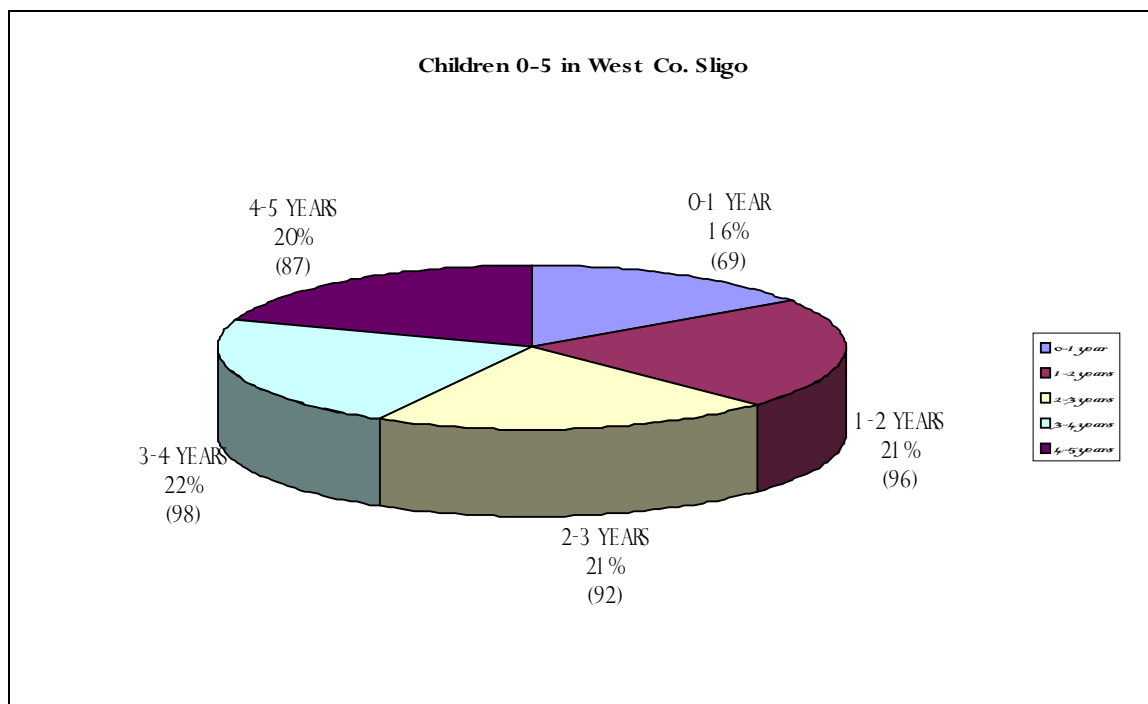
**3.2.1 Children Demographics by region in West Co. Sligo**

The section highlights the number of children in specific regions of the West Co. Sligo area.

Children between 0 and 5 years of age in West Co. Sligo

Ages	TOTAL	Carrownedan**	Coolaney*	Easkey	Enniscrone	Dromard/Skreen
0-1 year	69	0	6	10	30	23
1-2 years	96	0	9	28	32	27
2-3 years	92	3	6	22	35	26
3-4 years	98	1	8	19	43	27
4-5 years	87	1	10	22	29	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>128</b>

\*The Public Health Nurse in Coolaney indicated that many parents attend the PHN in neighbouring Cooloooney/Ballsadare  
 \*\*Carrownedan and surrounding area (Masshill, Largan etc..) are very sparsely populated and do not have many young families



**3.2.2 Children who require school age childcare**

School age children comprise of 62% of all children in West Co. Sligo. Since the Easkey National School closed recently, the small number of children in the area (under five children) moved to the Owenbeg and Culleens National Schools.

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**School Age Children (5-14 years of age) in West Co. Sligo**

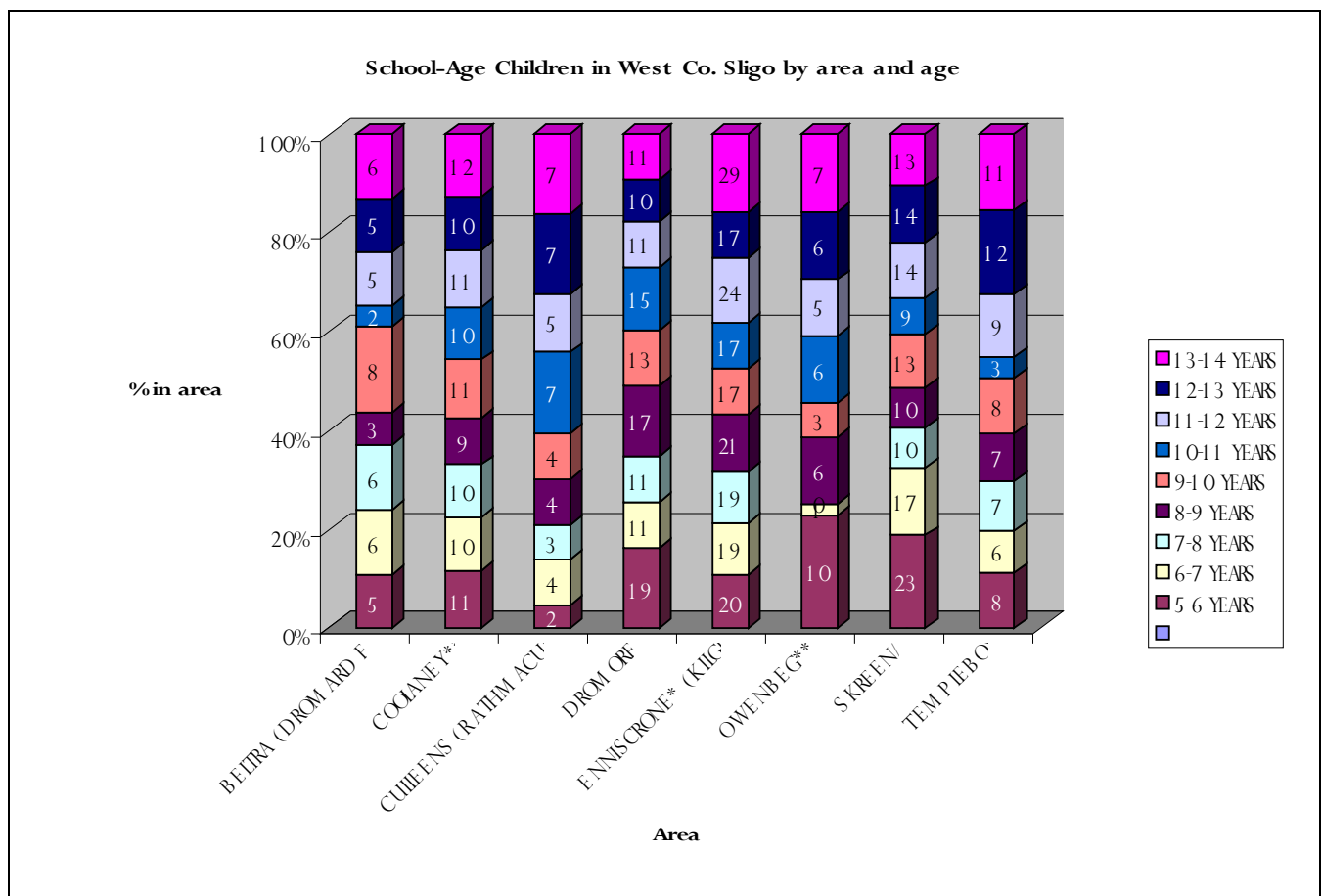
School Age	TOTAL	Beltra (Dromard East)	Coolaney**	Culleens (Rathmacurkey)	Dromore West	Enniscrone* (Kilglass)	Owenbeg*** (Buncrowey)	Skreen/ Dromard	Templeboy
5-6 years	98	5	11	2	19	20	10	23	8
6-7 years	74	6	10	4	11	19	1	17	6
7-8 years	66	6	10	3	11	19	2	10	7
8-9 years	77	3	9	4	17	21	6	10	7
9-10 years	77	8	11	4	13	17	3	13	8
10-11 years	69	2	10	7	15	17	6	9	3
11-12 years	84	5	11	5	11	24	5	14	9
12-13 years	81	5	10	7	10	17	6	14	12
13-14 years	96	6	12	7	11	29	7	13	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>71</b>

\*Includes Castleconnor East/West. This is a combination of 3 National Schools

\*\*Includes Carrowneden and surrounds

\*\*\*Includes Easkey and surrounds

NB: DEDs in italics if appropriate



For secondary school children, 12-14 years of age, afterschool childcare encounters another challenge. These children have a choice on Secondary Schools and many attend schools in Sligo Town, Ballisadare, Ballymote, even Tubbercurry, which makes distance and transportation an issue for coordinating afterschool programmes. This will be discussed in Section Four of this report.

### **3.2.3 Children with Special Needs in West Co. Sligo**

Special needs cases of children in West Co. Sligo includes down syndrome, autism, speech therapy needs and learning disabilities. The level of severity and special needs support required is unique to each case. The Counsellor- Special Needs assigned to each child is responsible for providing support with transitions to pre-school/school and making referrals to appropriate childcare resources for children.

There are ten to twelve children in West Co. Sligo between 0-7 years of age who are registered with the counsellors of special needs through the North Western Health Board.<sup>9</sup> There are a further five cases of special needs children between 8-18 years of age.<sup>10</sup>

Other children with mild learning disabilities or speech problems are not be officially registered with the Health Board but still require special attention and resource help.

### **3.2.4 Children from Socially Sensitive Groups in West Co. Sligo**

Children from diverse backgrounds are integrated in the local National Schools including children from non-Catholic religions and different cultures. Many schools use a peer helping system and a resource teacher to help students who may have a language barrier to improve and excel.<sup>11</sup>

Lone parents present even more challenges in a rural context. The amenities and resources in a rural area- including childcare- tend to difficult to access for lone parents. In some cases, lone parents rely on the limited public transportation system or on extended family and friends to look after children when attending courses/training, work or even just for day-to-day needs. According to the compiled surveys, 26 lone parent families in West Co. Sligo were identified.

## **4 Needs Assessment for West Co. Sligo**

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### **4.1 Introduction<sup>12</sup>**

Until recently, West Co. Sligo was self-sufficient in filling the childcare needs of the area. Traditionally, children stayed at home with mothers or extended families, including grandparents, creating informal

<sup>9</sup> Meeting with Martina McCarrick, Counsellor- Special Needs- NWHB, November 2003. Ms. McCarrick also indicated that the exact number of special needs cases is unknown because some diagnosis can occur over 7 years of age.

<sup>10</sup> Meeting with Delia Flynn, Counsellor- Special Needs- NWHB, November 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Meeting with Ignatious Henry, Principal Rockfield National School- Coolaney, November 2003.

<sup>12</sup> This section is informed by several meetings and interviews including: Linda McGloin, Childcare and Development Worker, Sligo County Childcare Committee; Des Keaney, North Western Health Board; parents in the Enniscrone area; Alice Gallagher, private childcare provider- Enniscrone; Maura Kelly, Dromard/Skreen Community Playgroup; Fiona Taylor, Easkey Community Playgroup

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childcare provisions. Formal childcare facilities emerged from the need for both parents to work and the opportunity for the child to interact with peers before starting school. More ad hoc and informal childcare also emerged including childminders especially in smaller, isolated settings.

In 1984, Alice Gallagher opened a private pre-school in Enniscrone. A popular facility with local residents, twenty years later the facility cannot meet with the demand from the immediate and surrounding area. The number of childcare spaces to children in West Co. Sligo is quite low and waiting lists for places start sometimes years in advance.

Similarly in Dromard/Skreen, a community playgroup was established in the early 1990s to meet the demand of the immediate area but also the area as far as Beltra, Coolaney and Templeboy. Even though the service offers a playgroup capacity for twenty children and another twenty spaces for an afterschool programme, the demand far exceeds the supply of childcare for the area. As a result, parents are left with no option except to use childcare in either Ballina Co. Mayo or Sligo Town.

These two examples demonstrate the inadequate level and breadth of childcare in the West Co. Sligo area. This section of the report will outline the current provisions for childcare available in the region and factors to consider in determining appropriate childcare for West Co. Sligo.

### **4.1.1 Current Childcare Services in West Co. Sligo**

#### **Dromard/Skreen Community Playgroup**

Type: Community, Sessional

Location: Dromard/Skreen Community Centre

Contact: Ms. Maura Kelly

Days and Hours of Operation: Playgroup- Monday-Friday 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Afterschool- Monday-Friday 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Number of Childcare spaces: 20 (playgroup); 20 (afterschool including pre-school-age children)

Comments: School transportation drops off children; Summer/Holiday camp; use of outdoor space; playgroup premises not wheelchair accessible; interest in staff training for speech and other special needs

#### **Easkey Community Playgroup**

Community, Sessional

Location: Easkey

Contact: Ms. Fiona Taylor

Days and Hours of Operation: Monday – Thursday 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Number of Childcare spaces: 24 (7-8 children on waiting list)

Comments: currently operating out of the recently-closed National School in Easkey; access to an outdoor space; new premises may become an issue; parents can use the service 1, 2, 3 or 4 days a week (similar to a drop-in centre provision)

#### **Bartra Pre-School**

Private, Sessional

Location: Enniscrone

Contact: Ms. Alice Gallagher

Days and Hours of Operation: Monday – Friday 9:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.; 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Number of Childcare spaces: 13

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Comments: Well-established in community, very popular; outdoor playspace; not NWHB registered; small facility therefore cannot accommodate more children; waiting list starts years in advance; the only afternoon pre-school provision in the area.

Kilglass Parent and Toddler Group is now closed. It once catered to 20-30 parents/toddlers per week in the Enniscrone and Easkey area. The group was disbanded because the premises were no longer available.

Information on the Coolaney Community Playgroup was not forthcoming. It can be inferred from the difficulty in obtaining information on this group that ordinary parents would also find it difficult to access this provision.

Note: There is an unknown number of childminders in the West Co Sligo area. This information will not be used when discussing the childcare spaces.

Grand Total number of known formal childcare spaces: 77

Childcare provision for 3-5 year old children: 57

Childcare provision for school age children: 20

Overall ratio of childcare spaces to children (0-14): 77 : 1164 or 1 space for every 15 children

*Ratio for 3-5 year olds: 1 childcare space for every 8 children*

*Ratio for school age children: 1 childcare space for every 36 children*

There are no full day care facilities in West Co. Sligo.

The afterschool programme in Dromard/Skreen started in September 2003.

### **4.1.2 Factors to consider in the context of Childcare for West Co. Sligo**

Over the past three years the demand for childcare spaces has increased in West Co. Sligo. According to the National Childcare Census Report- County Sligo, all four of the childcare provisions in West Co. Sligo had between 10 and 20 children attending.<sup>13</sup>

Today, with one of those provisions from the Census Report closed (Kilglass Parent and Toddler Group), there continues to be an increase in the use of the other three facilities: Bartra Pre-school- Enniscrone has 13 children attending (was 12); Easkey Playgroup has 24 children attending (was 10) and Dromard/Skreen has on average 35-40 children attending between the playgroup and afterschool (was 15).

The National Childcare Census Report also reports on the maximum distance travelled by parents to use a childcare service. Of the three services, two of them estimate parents travel between 5 and 9 miles and one service estimates parents travel over 9 miles for the service.<sup>14</sup> This is consistent with consultations with the childcare providers but they added that parents who could not find space at that facility (because of waiting lists) travel to Sligo Town or Ballina. Of the 21 facilities in the Sligo Town area, 7 report that parents travel over 9 miles, which could account for parents in rural areas, including West Co. Sligo.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, several issues emerge from the demographic, geographic context and current childcare provision in West Co. Sligo:

<sup>13</sup> *National Childcare Census Report- County Sligo*, 14 (and map following page 14)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, map preceding page 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid. and Ibid.*, 28.

- **Isolation:** West Co. Sligo is sparsely populated so isolation for parents and children is an issue. Attending school may be the first time a child interacts with other children in a formal setting because of the lack of playgroup/pre-school provisions. Parents may also experience isolation at home and supports for stay-at-home parents should be considered.
- **Location/Transportation:** The current childcare facilities in West Co. Sligo are accessible to public transportation and within walking distance to residential areas. Other location/transportation issues include: a parent having no access to a vehicle during the day; a provision for school bus to drop off children at childcare; proximity to residential areas; childcare facilities having own transportation.
- **Parental Involvement:** In most areas of West Co. Sligo, there is a high level of community involvement. Engaging parents in childcare ensures the provisions are needed and preferred by parents.
- **Informal Childcare Services:** Culturally, many residents in West Co. Sligo stay at home with their children especially in the first year, or have a relative look after their children. This family-based childcare cannot be assumed anymore and parents who want flexible and affordable childcare use childminders. The reasons parents choose informal provision must be considered when assessing childcare in this area.
- **Breadth of service:** The depth of childcare services must be considered to include different aged children, key times of the day (before school, afterschool etc.), services to cover the summer and school holiday times.
- **Cost:** Parents in West Co. Sligo indicated that childcare services should be affordable and accessible to all parents in the area.
- **Staff:** Childcare workers have expressed an interest in training to handle special needs/potential special needs children; address the increased interest in childcare training from both the VEC and the Institute of Technology, Sligo may provide students with local placements; bringing in the use of the Irish language; safety and security (including vetting of staff).
- **Communication and Support:** Parents and providers expressed difficulty in getting County Sligo childcare information because many parts of West Co. Sligo rely on Ballina and West Co. Mayo for services. The information (workshops, training etc.) is often Sligo-town based.
- **Consequences of the current childcare situation:** The childcare situation in West Co. Sligo impacts parents by restricting their work, education/training, social/volunteer activities and impacts children by affecting their socialising and development, activities and involvement in the community.

## 4.2 Overview of Childcare Needs of Childcare in West Co. Sligo

The needs analysis will pull together the threads of statistics, current childcare situation and issues surrounding childcare to identify common themes surrounding childcare for West Co. Sligo. This section will provide a general overview of needs for West Co. Sligo including quality and breadth of childcare suitable to the area. The second part of this section specifically targets the childcare for children with special needs and children in socially sensitive groups.

### 4.2.1 General Childcare Needs of West Co. Sligo

In order to address some of the issues highlighted by childcare stakeholders in West Co. Sligo, the following is needed:

#### *Full-time childcare provision*

Since many parents work out of the West Co. Sligo area, parents experience difficulty in finding childcare for children early in the day (i.e. before 9:00 a.m.) in order for the parents to commute to work. Similarly, childcare for after 2:00 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. allows parents to work a full day and return home from Ballina or Sligo Town.

How this addresses the needs of the area:

- Parents are able to keep their children in the West Co. Sligo area. Parents expressed a preference for local-based childcare services
- The use of only one childcare provision, reducing cost, logistics and stress of a playgroup/school then childminder/family member situation.
- A childcare facility central to both the densely populated areas of West Co. Sligo and accessible to small rural communities (e.g. on a main route, close to residential area and close to National School) is optimal
- This allows children as young as two years ten months the opportunity to integrate and play with other children in a safe and purpose-built setting.
- Parents who do not have extended family in the area and/or cannot find suitable informal care have a local facility.
- Parents have the choice to work or participate in training/education programmes not feasible without this childcare provision

At present the statistics, consultations with parents and West Co. Sligo culture suggest that a crèche facility to cater for babies is not required. However, demographic shifts and new parents to the area may in the future want to avail of such a service.

#### *Childcare for school-age children*

With the increasing number of school age children, there is a desire for school-age childcare including afterschool programmes. This is especially important for children to socialise in a safe, supervised and structured setting with the emphasis on child-centred programme.<sup>16</sup> The programme should balance homework and other activities such as outdoor activities, snack, sport and the arts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This is the views expressed by local parents interviewed for this report but it corresponds with a child-centred afterschool programme is also emphasised in Esther Pugh, *After School The Way Forward: Good Practice Guidelines for the Development of a Quality After School Service*. (National Children's Nurseries Association, 2000), 5,

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

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Many children in the first years of secondary school are attending schools as far away as Ballisadare, Sligo Town, Ballymote and Tubbercurry. Afterschool programmes would need to start later for this age group to facilitate travel to and from school.

Summer camps and camps that cover school holidays, allow parents the freedom to work and keep the regular routine throughout the year instead of trying to find temporary childcare.

How this addresses the needs of the area:

- An increasing number of children could avail of a local afterschool programmes and summer/holiday camps
- It enables parents to feel secure in knowing their children are minded in a stimulating environment with other children until they return home
- This alleviates the burden and pressure on parents to find informal childcare provisions, which is challenging but even more so for new parents to the area

### *Provisions for Stay-at-Home Parents*

The isolation for stay-at-home parents means that their development and the development of their children can suffer. Provisions such those mentioned above allow parents with school-age children or pre-school age children to get further involved in activities and allows parents time for outside interests (including community involvement and day-to-day activities).

Parent and Toddler Groups would also allow parents to socialise and meet, especially vital to new parents to the area. With transportation as a possible issue, a bus or transportation should be a consideration for all these provisions.

An early years programme, such as Lifestart used in other parts of the North Western Health Board, would give parents some opportunity to be connected with a family visitor and assist in their own child's early development and parenting skills development.<sup>18</sup>

How this addresses the needs in the area:

- Enables parents to meet and interact
- Gives the opportunity for children to socialise with other children before school
- Increases the chance for parent and child development
- Allows the ordinary parent to gain information on childcare and amenities available for children in the local area

### *Childcare with a Transportation Provision*

A bus or regular transportation arrangements are vital to any service in West Co. Sligo. This provision would allow parents who would not otherwise use the service a choice to put their child(ren) into childcare. This is an important provision for existing childcare provisions to allow rural houses in the catchment area the option to use the facility. A transportation provision is expensive but would increase the opportunity for all children to participate in childcare.

How this addresses the needs in the area:

- This gives all children the opportunity to participate in pre-school, playgroup and afterschool activities

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<sup>18</sup> Meeting with Mary Walker-Callaghan, Lifestart Newtowncunningham, Co. Donegal and Lifestart Donegal Funding Proposal Booklet 2002-2005, 9.

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- Parents can be secure in knowing that their child is transferred safe from home to playgroup and/or school to the afterschool programme.

### *Information, Support and Training Sessions for Parents*

Parental involvement in the local community initiatives is high. Some parents get involved directly in childcare provision development even if the process is such that their own children may not benefit from potential developments. In this context, communities in West Co. Sligo are eager and open to information and support on childcare and enhancements to their current provisions.

When the Kilglass Parent and Toddler Group closed, the capacity of the parents to mobilize and find a new facility was non-existent. With the proper support and even training, issues like loss of premises would not in future constrain groups in continuing to organise local childcare services.

How this addresses the needs in the area:

- Allows parents to get involved in the childcare development in the area
- Empowers parents and providers with information to enhance current childcare provisions and appropriately seek new provisions
- Enables parents to get involved in activities outside the home

#### **4.2.2 Childcare Needs of Children with Special Needs in West Co. Sligo**

Services for children with special needs are based in either Sligo Town or Ballina Co. Mayo. The proximity to Ballina means that some parents opt to send their children to special schools in Co. Mayo. So while families use the Western Health Board services they live in the North Western Health Board remit. Pre-school childcare for special needs children is also based in the bigger towns in some cases over one hour away.

### *Opportunities for special needs children to be accommodated in local childcare*

Parents with special needs children have expressed an interest to integrate their children- even on an ad hoc or part-time basis- with mainstream childcare provisions. This allows the special needs child to socialise with other children in his/her own area. Depending on the severity of the child's needs, have a special needs assistant may be required.

How this addresses the needs in the area:

- This enables children to have locally-based childcare, which may be more convenient to the parent and enriching for the child
- With long commutes to special needs childcare facilities for children as young as three years old, this allows the child to have more time in a childcare situation and less time in transit

### *Offer special needs childcare training for providers in West Co. Sligo*

Some parents want to use local community childcare but want to ensure the staff are well-trained to work with a special needs child. Similarly, providers have expressed an interest to getting training for special needs children especially for the development of speech.

How this addresses the need in the area:

- Staff and volunteers in childcare facilities can work more effectively with children who have mild or even undiagnosed special needs, especially in the areas of speech and learning disabilities
- Enhances the quality of the local service for all parents in the West Co. Sligo area

*Ensure childcare facilities in West Co. Sligo include provisions for special needs children*

Wheelchair accessibility and special resources may be required in order to make children with special needs more comfortable in the childcare setting and even enable a child access to the facility.

How this addresses the need in the area:

- Ensures a true 'child-centred' approach to all childcare facilities in West Co. Sligo for all children in the area
- Give parents the options to send children with a physical disability and/or other special need to a local playgroup
- Gives children with special needs a chance to interact with other children from his/her own community

#### **4.2.3 Childcare Needs for Lone Parents in West Co. Sligo**

A local childcare provision is a major consideration for lone parents. In many cases, lone parents who want to avail of education, training or work find an extra challenge without childcare. Similarly, isolation can be a big issue for lone parents and they would benefit from Parent and Toddler and early years programmes.

#### **4.2.4 Childcare Needs for Culturally Diverse Groups**

Although small in numbers, it is important that childcare in West Co. Sligo is accepting and open to all cultures and diverse groups. Celebrating difference is an important policy for childcare provisions in West Co. Sligo in order that new groups to the area feel welcomed and that their child(ren) will be given the special attention and understanding of their cultural difference.<sup>19</sup>

In some cultures, taking care of children is the responsibility of the family. Information is important to give parents options to use childcare provisions if desired. Cost and transportation should not be a barrier. Since diversity is not a major issue in the West Co. Sligo area, it is important to prepare in the event that children from diverse backgrounds want to use the provision.

Parent and Toddler Groups and early years programs are a great way to encourage parents and children from all backgrounds to meet and socialise. This addresses the issues of isolation and enables parents to share information about parenting and childcare.

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<sup>19</sup> C. Murray and A. O'Doherty. *Éist: Respecting Diversity in Early Childhood Care*. (Pavee Point Publications 2001), 46.

## 5 Recommendations

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In order to address the needs analyzed in section four, this report provides the following recommendations to the Sligo County Childcare Committee for consideration.

### 5.1 Summary of Recommendations

#### *Establishment of a West Co. Sligo Childcare Task Force*

Target stakeholders in the West Co. Sligo area and relevant County agencies/groups to start a task force to create a detailed action plan based on the findings of this report.

#### *Support the enhancement and sustainability of current childcare providers*

Work with the childcare workers and volunteer boards of management to examine how their service can be improved to meet the demand of the area. This may include:

- further staff training (including in special needs/speech therapy)
- expansion of provision to include longer sessional (half-day) provision and/or afterschool programmes
- a Childcare Worker's Network for West Co. Sligo;
- examine opportunities for placements for VEC/IT Sligo students
- further examination of transportation issues.

For childminders, the informal childcare provider, further support and information are desired. This may include a Lagan Family Daycare Network model<sup>20</sup> where a best practice guide is offered to childminders in the Lagan and Letterkenny, Co. Donegal areas. The Network offers childminders just that: networking and social opportunities to meet other childminders in the immediate area, training and an informal register (to fill-in for each other during holidays etc.,)<sup>21</sup> This would give childminders in West Co. Sligo local support with peers.

#### *Engaging parents in the West Co. Sligo Childcare through information and education*

Parents, as the users of childcare provisions for their children, need to be informed on recent developments in childcare in the area and the best way to choose and access local childcare.

This education could include materials and workshops on:

- grants/funding available and how groups avail of funding to fit local needs
- creating the appropriate 'skill set' of parents for a childcare development committee or childcare management committees- the skill sets for initiating a childcare service may be different to managing the activities of an established facility<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Meeting with Ms. Pat McCaughan, Lagan Family Daycare Network, November 2003 and Lagan Family Daycare Network "Best Practice Guidelines for Childminders" (Manorcunningham: 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Meeting with Ms. Fina Golden, Area Development Management Limited, November 2003.

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- how to find childcare services
- child development/parenting courses

The Sligo County Childcare Committee literature should continue to be available in community areas such as GP surgeries, community centres, government offices etc. Raising awareness of the County Sligo childcare services is especially important with many parents looking to Co. Mayo for services and/or support. It may be appropriate to establish a West Co. Sligo Parents' Forum to have an independent volunteer body to co-ordinate/promote the SCCC educational initiatives.

A provision for stay-at-home parents is also vital for West Co. Sligo. Isolation for both parents and children in rural areas is a major issue and can be rectified by exploring initiatives that would enhance parental and child development:

- a pilot project for a home-based early years education programme (e.g. Lifestart)
- Parent and Toddler Groups and education of the existence of these groups to community workers/leaders (educators, public health nurses) to pass on to parents
- Encourage the establishment of informal networks of parents to co-ordinate activities and/or any of the provisions above

### *Support new childcare initiatives consistent with the needs of the West Co. Sligo area*

With the ratio of children to childcare services so high and with so many parents working and expressing a desire for enhanced local services, the recommendation for childcare development feasible for West Co. Sligo may include:

- A full-time daycare provision to facilitate working parents
- A drop-in facility provision for stay-at-home parents and/or ad hoc care
- Parent and Toddler Groups in larger areas with the possibility of transportation to encourage parental interaction and peer support
- Afterschool care for school-age and pre-school age children following the 'child-centred approach to an afterschool programme
- Summer camps and school holiday camps for school-age children
- Longer sessional playgroups and/or programmes to facilitate parents who work/train/take courses a half-day (i.e. session from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.)
- An early years programme (e.g. Lifestart)

Some of the considerations, outlined in this report, must be kept in mind especially when thinking about childcare development in West Co. Sligo:

- close to residential areas, transportation routes
- centrally located for optimum use for both villages and rural areas
- timing of childcare (starting earlier in the day- 8:00 a.m. or 8:15 a.m. and provisions until 6:00 p.m. or 6:30 p.m.) to facilitate commuting parents
- integration of special needs children in childcare where appropriate.

## 5.2 *Building a Strategy for Recommendations*

This section suggests an implementation of recommendations in three phases over a nine-month period. This strategy applies the principles of the Sligo County Childcare Committee aim: “We aim to consider the issues affecting childcare and will co-ordinate, support and develop appropriate responses”<sup>23</sup> Each phase is themed accordingly- to co-ordinate, to support and to develop- and reinforces the SCCC objectives.

### 5.2.1 **Phase I- Coordinate: Short Term Strategy, January 2004 – March 2004**

Phase I begins with a formal adoption and agreement on the recommendations of this report by the Sligo County Childcare Committee. It is recommended that the SCCC take a lead on the implementation of this strategy.

#### **To Coordinate:**

- a forum for discussion of the ‘The Childcare Needs West, The West Needs Childcare’ report by Sligo County Childcare Committee staff and management committee
- a dissemination of the report to key stakeholders in West Co. Sligo and County Sligo for review including parents and providers where appropriate
- a shortlist and a call for membership for the West Co. Sligo Childcare Task Force
- a finalised list of Task Force membership and an formal announcement of the Task Force initiative (in both County Sligo and Ballina Co. Mayo media)
- an information pack for Task Force members to include the ‘The Childcare Needs West, The West Needs Childcare’ Report and other relevant materials
- the first Task Force meeting with the purpose of assigning action items to the recommendations and strategic plan
- an active list of interested individuals/groups who will inform the Task Force and work to the SCCC on West Co. Sligo childcare initiatives

This phase is consistent with following SCCC Objectives:

4. The County Childcare Committee will proactively support the development of appropriate policies and procedures in support of childcare in County Sligo, which will inform and influence future local, regional and national policy.

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<sup>23</sup> Sligo County Childcare Committee, [www.sligochildcare.ie](http://www.sligochildcare.ie) (2003). Please see the Appendix for the Vision, Aim and Objectives of the Sligo County Childcare Committee.

6. The County Childcare Committee will undertake to examine and provide a co-ordinated approach to the support and development of all childcare services so as to ensure the provision of a quality and diverse range of services for all.

### **5.2.2 Phase II- Support: Medium Term Strategy, April 2004 - June 2004**

Building on the findings of the Task Force on the action plan and strategy appropriate to develop childcare in West Co. Sligo, Phase II emphasizes ground-level support for individuals and groups working directly with children- providers and parents.

#### **To support:**

- childcare providers and staff with additional training and referrals of educational materials as identified including on special needs children and afterschool provisions
- childminders with training and information as deemed appropriate. This may include information on new childcare developments in the area in order for childminders to pass this information to parents
- individuals, groups and management committees working toward improving the childcare services in West Co. Sligo. This includes information on setting up certain childcare provisions and mentoring from other groups that have completed similar initiatives elsewhere in the County/North West area.
- current developments in West Co. Sligo childcare and update the appropriate groups. The regular support would also ensure that the needs of the area and specific group (lone parents, special needs children etc.) are considered
- the establishment of a West Co. Sligo Parents Forum. This initiative, informed by the Task Force, will include a call for interest in this group and ensure a co-ordinated approach is used in developing childcare in the region and to review periodically if the needs of parents in the area change.
- a review of the Task Force action plan and objectives and its suitability following the development of childcare provisions in West Co. Sligo.

This phase is consistent with following SCCC Objectives:

1. The County Childcare Committee will support the provision of a diverse range of accessible and affordable childcare services.
3. The County Childcare Committee will support childcare providers in the delivery of a consistency in childcare provision by promoting awareness through networking and accessible training and education.

### **5.2.3 Phase III- Develop: Long Term, July 2004 – September 2004**

Preparation for the new academic year, typically a time to bring on new programmes, it is recommended that the SCCC and the Task Force plan for the development of new childcare provisions as appropriate.

#### **To Develop:**

- a regular staff and training schedule as appropriate for the West Co. Sligo area, perhaps on the initiative of the childcare workers in the area
- a West Co. Sligo Childcare Worker's Network to allow all childcare workers (including childminders) an opportunity for dialogue and further co-ordination of services
- a strategy for provisions specifically for the stay-at-home parent that may include a pilot project for Lifestart, Parent and Toddler Group and other provisions as deemed appropriate by the Task Force. The aim of the establishment of the Parents' Forum in Phase II is to inform and assist in creating these initiatives. Workshops specifically for stay-at-home parents could be facilitated in West Co. Sligo area.<sup>24</sup>
- information packs and/or workshops on the best practice on starting afterschool programmes especially in the context of a rural setting. This would be provided to current providers and key groups that could work on realising programmes for the new academic year
- an integrated approach to childcare in West Co. Sligo by having a 'Open Forum' or 'Town Hall' session to inform ordinary parents of the childcare developments and allow new groups (i.e. Childcare Worker's Network and Parents' Forum) to interact. An integrated approach should also include the participation of new parents to the area and parents with special needs children, health care workers, educators and counsellors- special needs to inform stakeholders on local childcare. In addition, the new childcare groups in West Co. Sligo should be linked with other similar groups across the County for networking and information-sharing sessions.
- a reassessment of the Task Force progress and the creation of a one to two year strategic plan

This phase is consistent with following SCCC Objectives:

2. The County Childcare Committee ensure a commitment to quality in the support and development of policy, procedures, premises, staff, training and qualifications so that services are upgraded, safe, age

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appropriate and respectful of diversity.

5. We, The County Childcare Committee in recognising and acknowledging the important role of parents, will promote the development of a range of services to support the parent at home while respecting individuality.

## **6 Conclusion**

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The natural landscape and rural culture impacts the needs for childcare in West Co. Sligo. The parents, providers and community stakeholders in the West Co. Sligo are poised to work towards childcare services needed for the region. The current childcare provision in the West Co. Sligo area does not meet the demand and the projected increasing demand for childcare in the area. This is especially the case for the timing for childcare and provisions for school age children.

It is the recommendation of this report that the Sligo County Childcare Committee take a leadership role in coordinating, supporting and developing the childcare needs in the West Co. Sligo area. Adopting a task force specifically addressing the West Co. Sligo needs can work towards reaching optimal childcare for the area. This report clearly demonstrates the childcare needs west and conclusively that the west needs childcare.

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## **7 Appendices**

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### *7.1 Research Terms of Reference*

Sligo County Childcare Committee  
Needs Assessment

#### **Terms of Reference**

##### ***Childcare Needs Assessment of West Co. Sligo***

**Area:**            *Beltra, Dromard, Ardabrone, Templeboy, Dromore West, Owenbeg, Easkey, Rathlee, Culleens, Enniscone, Corbally, Castleconnor, Largan, Masshill, Carrownedan, Coolaney*

**To include:**    Profile and Population

##### ***Profiled Target Groups Including:***

Number of children in age brackets:  
(0-1), (1-2), (2-3), (3-4), (4-5), (5-6), (7-9), (10-12), (12-14)

Number of children with special needs

Number of children needing school age childcare

##### ***Breakdown of Population including:***

Cultural diversity

Levels of employment

Levels of income

##### ***Needs Assessment:***

*Total childcare needs of the area*

##### ***Needs of all Residents including:***

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**Lone Parents**

Travelling families indigenous to the area

Nomadic families

*Released by Doireann O'Connor, Co-ordinator Sligo County Childcare Committee in September 2003.*

## 7.2 Stakeholder meetings, interviews and consultations

The consultation for this research was completed between October and December 2003.

Bríd Boland, Sligo Traveller Project  
Jean Cassidy, Library & Information Officer, Combat Poverty Agency  
Delia Flynn, Special Needs Counsellor- North Western Health Board  
Alice Gallagher, Bartra Pre-School (Enniscrone private provider)  
Fina Golden, Area Development Management Limited  
Ignatious Henry, Principal- Rockfield National School, Coolaney  
Des Keaney, North Western Health Board  
Maura Kelly, Playgroup Leader Dromard/Skreen Community Playgroup  
Collette Kenny, parent with special needs child  
Mary Lee, Public Health Nurse- Coolaney  
Martina McCarrick, Special Needs Counsellor- North Western Health Board  
Pat McCaughan, Lagan Family Daycare Network  
Linda McGloin, Sligo County Childcare Committee  
Mary Neary, parent with special needs child  
Doireann O'Connor, Co-ordinator- Sligo County Childcare Committee  
Emma Quigley, Central Statistics Office, Dublin  
Fiona Taylor, Easkey Community Playgroup  
Mary Walker-Callaghan, Lifestart Newtowncunningham, Co. Donegal

Staff of the Sligo County Childcare Committee  
Enniscrone Childcare Working Group  
National School Principals  
Public Health Nurses  
Childminders in West Co. Sligo  
Parents in West Co. Sligo  
Children in West Co. Sligo

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Sligo County Childcare Committee Web site, [www.sligochildcare.ie](http://www.sligochildcare.ie)