

Exploring the experiences of management committee volunteers running out of school clubs

Karin Silver, January 2007

Summary

Out of school clubs are a feature of a social world where school hours do not fit with the hours parents work; where families are increasingly separated by geography or changing relationships; and where there is a desire for children to play safely.

Current debates in the childcare sector crystallize around four issues: the nature of care; equality of access; the childcare workforce; and the sustainability of provision. This report focuses on the last of these areas, and the changing contexts emerging with the drive towards Children's Centres and Extended Schools. It looks specifically at the nature of voluntary managed out of school clubs, which currently provide a significant proportion of out of school provision in the UK. The report ends with recommendations for voluntary management committees, for the public bodies that work with them, for employers, for government and for future research in this area.

Voluntary management committee members are usually women, usually working and nearly always constricted by a lack of time. However the regulations and financial pressures experienced by small community-based organisations providing childcare, can lead to a large workload, which may be onerous and this has implications for sustainability in the out of school sector, and may have relevance for other voluntary managed provision, such as pre-schools and community nurseries.

In this study committee members were asked about their experiences of helping to run out of school clubs. While most expressed satisfaction with their contribution, and pride in their achievements, many described frustrations and stress relating to the workload, responsibilities and challenges involved in running their organisation, and the negative impacts this may have had on themselves, or their family lives. Most described the difficulty of recruitment, through a lack of interested people, or the opportunity to engage them. Some were positive about their involvement, some were rather negative, but most were ambivalent: while they appreciated the benefits of the service provided (to themselves or to others) many described feeling unrecognised and unsupported by other parents, schools or local authorities.

While these findings are preliminary and exploratory, they help to illuminate the experiences of a group of people whose voices have not yet been publicly heard in current debates over the implementation of childcare policy in the UK.