

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN AND YOUTH POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 14th October, 2013

Present:- Councillors: Sally Davis (Chair), Liz Hardman, David Veale, Michael Evans, Nicholas Coombes (In place of Loraine Morgan-Brinkhurst MBE), Lisa Brett (In place of Sarah Bevan) and Ian Gilchrist

Co-opted Voting Members:- David Williams

Co-opted Non-voting Members:- Chris Batten

Also in attendance: Ashley Ayre (Strategic Director, People and Communities), Tony Parker (Divisional Director Learning and Inclusion Service), Mike Bowden (Divisional Director - Health Commissioning and Strategic Planning) and Sara Willis (Service Manager 0-11 Outcomes)

45 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

46 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillors Sarah Bevan and Loraine Morgan-Brinkhurst had sent their apologies to the Panel. Councillors Lisa Brett and Nicholas Coombes were their respective substitutes for the duration of the meeting.

The Liberal Democrat Group currently has a vacancy on the Panel, Councillor Ian Gilchrist was their representative on this occasion.

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

49 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chair announced that a revised Appendix 4 had been circulated to the Panel.

50 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS,

STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

The Chair explained that a number of people had registered to make a statement and that they would be heard as part of agenda item 7.

51 RE-STRUCTURING OF THE EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN'S CENTRE AND EARLY HELP (0 - 11 YEARS) SERVICES 2014 - 2016

John Hack, Chew Valley Children's Centre Advisory Board addressed the Panel. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked if Chew Valley were to be linked to a hub in Keynsham would the same level of service be provided.

John Hack replied that he feared it would not and felt it almost inevitable that services for Chew Valley would cease to exist.

Tony Crouch, Chairman of Keynsham Children's Centre Advisory Board addressed the Panel. He asked the Panel to be mindful in any recommendations they make that the population of Keynsham was due to grow by 25 – 30% in the coming years.

Gemma Day, Toybox Toy Library, Weston Children's Centre addressed the Panel. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

Gemma also handed in a petition of over 200 signatures and the handprints of 30 children showing support to keep the Children's Centre open along with the services it offers.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked if the proposed cuts went ahead would the service you provide stop.

Gemma Day replied that the charity would still exist but expected it would only be able to offer a reduced service.

Councillor Michael Evans asked if the charity currently received any financial support from the Council.

Gemma Day replied that it did not. She added that it would be the support from the staff at the Centre that would be lost.

Elisabeth Markall addressed the Panel on behalf of her friend Fiona Day. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

Sarah Ford addressed the Panel regarding Keynsham Children's Centre. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked if the services she received were from volunteers at the Centre.

Sarah Ford replied that the services she accessed were from staff at the Centre.

Nettie Williams, Somer Valley Children's Centre addressed the Panel. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked what provision was available at the Centre now for post-natal depression.

Nettie Williams replied that the invaluable 'My Time, My Space' group was in place at the Centre with a crèche facility provided.

Ailsa McKenzie and her daughter Isobel addressed the Panel regarding Somer Valley Children's Centre. Ailsa said that she felt she would not be here without the support she had received through 'My Time, My Space'. She added that she had made so many friends through the group and that the services they provide are un-measurable.

She informed the Panel that she was the Assistant Head Teacher at Camerton School and spoke of how much value the school places on the back up that the Centre provides.

Isobel said that stay and play was good for her and that the toys and ladies at the Centre are lovely.

Marita Sherwood addressed the Panel regarding Parkside Children's Centre. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

Gemma addressed the Panel regarding First Steps Nursery, Bath. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

Councillor John Bull addressed the Panel. He stated how important the first few years of a child's life were. He said that he felt that if the service was to be staffed by volunteers and run through other agencies it would leave it in a vulnerable position.

He informed the Panel that he anticipated the Labour Group would produce a minority report ahead of the Cabinet meeting in November seeking them to reconsider the current proposals.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson addressed the Panel with regard to the Radstock Youth Partnership. She said that a non-viable service would be left if as a whole it were to be made to save £2.3m over the next two years.

She said from 2010 in Radstock a properly trained and resourced programme for young people had been made available. She stated that she believed it was essential to maintain a universal service.

She urged the Cabinet to find the savings from other areas within the Council or to provide the same level of service in another form.

Councillor Lisa Brett asked if she was aware that the Government had announced proposals to recruit a further 4,000 Health Visitors.

Councillor Jackson said she was aware but did not believe that it would solve the potential problems.

Councillor Michael Evans asked if she knew how many people were accessing the services provided within Radstock.

She replied that when they commenced there were 64 and that now including Westfield it totalled around 250. She added that the Partnership needed core funding to produce an integrated service for the area.

The Chair announced that a written statement had been provided by The Enrich Youth Project, All Saints Centre, Weston. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

The Democratic Services Officer outlined the next steps of the process following the conclusion of this meeting. He stated that the Panel only had the power to make recommendations and that an actual decision on the matter would be taken at the Cabinet meeting on November 13th 2013.

The Chair wished to thank the Councillors, officers, organisations & service users that took part in the Task & Finish Group.

Councillor Liz Hardman commented that the service would look very different if the proposed level of cuts were maintained. She added that it was inevitable that the Centre buildings would be retained because if they were not money would have to be paid back to the Government. She said that she was aware of some potential service providers that would only need to cut services by around 10%.

Councillor Nicholas Coombes commented that he felt the published report did not contain enough financial information.

Councillor Liz Hardman stated that she could not agree with Recommendation 1 because of bullet point five in Appendix 2. She added that it was key that preventative services were retained.

Councillor Lisa Brett commented that a frontline service must be maintained.

David Williams commented that flexibility would be required in any new model and that provision should be needs lead.

The Service Manager for 0-11 Outcomes replied that the service is predominantly needs lead and aimed to be targeted within a universal base.

The Strategic Director for People & Communities added that the Council would provide a core service as stated within the duties of a Local Authority. He added that the proposals in no way could be described as efficiencies and were clearly a service reduction.

Councillor Michael Evans commented that he felt a hub and spoke model should be the basis for the delivery of Children's Centre Services.

Councillor Liz Hardman stated that she disagreed with the comment as she believed that model would see a reduction in staff.

The Chair commented that three options were proposed to the Task & Finish Group and that it was the role of the Panel to make a recommendation to the Cabinet.

Councillor Michael Evans asked how our level of proposed cuts compared with other Local Authorities.

The Deputy Director for CYP Strategy and Commissioning replied that he could not give a definitive answer. He added that nationally a cut of 14.8% was anticipated in terms of Early Years Centres. He said that he believed that 4 out of 14 Centres were due to close in Swindon and that a cut of around 30% was anticipated in Stoke.

The Strategic Director for People & Communities added that a cut of around 15 – 20% would take place in South Gloucestershire. He added that all services are funded through the Early Intervention Grant and that Government have imposed a cut of 27% to that grant.

Resolution:

The Panel notes that there remain a number of questions over what services will be provided at the Children's Centres under the proposed new model, who will run the various Children's Centres, and to whom these services will be available. Noting these continued uncertainties, the Panel agrees:

Recommendation 1 was moved by Councillor Lisa Brett and seconded by Councillor Michael Evans with the following amendments. Councillor Brett proposed to amend the wording at the beginning of Appendix 2. She asked for the word 'for' to be removed from the heading 'Service Design & Commissioning Principles for:'

She also proposed that the sub-heading 'The Children's Centre Hub Models' and bullet point five 'All Children's Centres are available and all Children's Centre Hubs are open full time' be deleted.

- (1) That the design and commissioning principles set out in the amended Appendix 2 are adopted and applied to any future model of service delivery.

Voting: 5 in favour, 2 against, 1 abstention. Motion carried.

Recommendation 2 was moved by Councillor Michael Evans and seconded by Councillor David Veale.

- (2) That the approach to Play; Specialist Family Support and the Early Years Foundations Stage are dealt with separately from Children's Centres.

Voting: 6 in favour, 2 against. Motion carried.

Recommendation 3 was moved by Councillor Michael Evans and seconded by Councillor Sally Davis with the following amendment. Councillor Evans proposed that

the word 'any' be inserted after the word 'That' at the beginning of the recommendation.

- (3) That any funding reductions for these services are considered separately in line with service models.

Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against. Motion carried.

Recommendation 4 was moved by Councillor Michael Evans and seconded by Councillor Lisa Brett with the following amendment.

- (4) To recommend a hub and spoke model as the basis for delivery of Children's Centre Services, whilst recognising that the number of hubs, and the level of service at the non-hub Children's Centres, will be dependent upon the scale of budget reductions ultimately agreed by Council in February 2014.

Voting: 6 in favour, 2 against. Motion carried.

Recommendation 5 was moved by Councillor Lisa Brett and seconded by Councillor David Veale.

- (5) To retain all existing Children's Centre buildings.

Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against. Motion carried.

Recommendation 6 was moved by Councillor Michael Evans and seconded by Councillor David Veale with the following amendment.

- (6) To further explore the potential of a commissioned model and/or an integrated model with health services, acknowledging the need for further market testing of the potential providers.

Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against. Motion carried.

Recommendation 7 was moved by Councillor Lisa Brett and seconded by Councillor Liz Hardman with the following amendment.

- (7) To fully undertake a cost benefit analysis of any service changes.

Voting: 7 in favour, 1 abstention. Motion carried.

Recommendation 8 was moved by Councillor Nicholas Coombes and seconded by Councillor Liz Hardman.

- (8) To propose that Cabinet reconsiders the overall Council budget to determine if alternative areas of saving can be identified. The reasons being:
 - a) Information gained by the Task & Finish Group shows that early support to vulnerable people can lead to savings overall, There is concern that such significant cuts could lead to more costly interventions by statutory services of the council at a later stage.

- b) A commitment by the Panel to recommend some changes to services to meet part of the potential savings if the Cabinet are prepared to do likewise.

Voting: 7 in favour, 1 abstention. Motion Carried.

The Chair asked the Democratic Services Officer to explain the process of constructing a minority report.

She also reiterated that the next step in the process would be the Cabinet meeting on November 13th and highlighted to the public that if they wished they could also make a statement at that meeting by registering with the Democratic Services department.

The meeting ended at 6.55 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services

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**TRANSCRIPT OF PRESENTATION TO EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN & YOUTH
POLICY DEVELOPMENT & SCRUTINY PANEL
SUBMITTED BY JOHN HACK ON BEHALF OF
CHEW VALLEY CHILDREN'S CENTRE**

OCTOBER 14TH 2013

For a majority of parents, the perceived disadvantages of living in rural area – isolation, poor public transport, lack of choice regarding goods and services and housing shortages – are outweighed by the surroundings, clean air, reduced crime levels and a more peaceful environment. For those with cars, access to the internet, a reasonable income and family and friends close at hand, the disadvantages are regarded as occasionally troublesome but no more than that.

However, for a minority, the disadvantages are significant, causing some of them to miss out on basic and primary health care, continuing education, the opportunity to have social relationships, childcare and even employment. For some the realities of day-to-day living are extremely harsh and the impact of the recession continues to make life even harder.

Poverty is rising, employment in rural areas is often part-time, involves shift or seasonal work and may be low-paid, while basic goods and services are often more expensive and fuel costs are rising. Suitable affordable housing is in short supply and poor transport is a barrier to accessing services, or finding and keeping employment or training.

This rural poverty is often hidden and unacknowledged. Low population densities in rural areas mask the fact that poorer and more affluent families live in the same area. The effects of rural poverty on family life may also be hidden as families are reluctant to ask for help because of the fear of loss of privacy.

In its short life, the Chew Valley Children's Centre and its dedicated staff, have been able to engage and gain the trust of many of the families who find it hardest to access services, whether because of transport problems, lack of information about the services on offer, or because they are reluctant to ask for help.

Their success in doing so is achieved by a combination of practical help, combined with an approach which was frequently described by parents as welcoming and inclusive.

We acknowledge that the cost of delivering services in rural areas is higher and services may be thinly spread and the Council needs to take steps to address the financial situation. In our time with the members of the panel, we hope we were able to highlight first hand some of the issues we faced and we welcome the opportunity to explain an alternative solution.

Rather than becoming a spoke from a 'hub' in Keynsham we would wish to develop the Chew Valley Children's Centre to itself become a specialist rural hub using outreach at a very local level to help deliver and coordinate service delivery in partnership with other existing organisations or agencies.

Rural outreach though is not only about taking services out to satellite venues or to people's homes. As the Chew Valley Children's Centre currently covers over 86sq miles, equivalent to approx 65% of total land area of B&NES (135sq miles), we think it should be explicitly connected to wider community development, building the capacity of people in the local community and supporting community providers to develop their services across the rural area.

We see the link between this offer and the Councils own emerging Connecting Communities agenda for service delivery and the new national Community budget pilot programme as a mechanism by which an inclusive wrap-around service can be co-produced with B&NES.

In a national study of rural Children's Centres in 2009, parents highlighted their need for activities for individual older children and for the whole family; activities scheduled at times suitable for working parents, in the evenings and at the weekends. Many felt that the ring-fencing of centres for under-fives was not in sympathy with the realities of family life or the practical difficulties of having to transport children of different ages to separate locations.

These needs were particularly acute among those parents who had to travel some distance to attend children's centre activities and those reliant on public transport.

In addition to adopting a Multi Agency approach including continued integration of Health Workers, Social services, Educational specialist and medical staff, we can specifically identify the following issues that we would want to be addressed as part of a wider holistic approach to the successfully delivery of services in rural Bath & North East Somerset;

- Access to transport (capable of taking buggies and car seats including families with disabled children)
- Childcare or services allowing parents to work or train
- Availability of information, which includes access to the internet
- Training and mentoring (co-location of adult learning opportunities in children's centres could complement other activities and make basic skills and vocational training more accessible to families in need)
- Housing advice (and including energy efficiency and fuel poverty alleviation)
- Drugs and Alcohol support
- Advice on Universal Credit and other benefit programmes
- Access to outreach services from Job Centre
- Domestic violence support
- Financial inclusion (through Credit Unions and advice)
- Support on food, diet and fitness (addressing obesity and other childhood issues)

Our offer is to work with the Council, its commissioners, partners and providers, to co-produce a solution which best adapts the established children's centre model to meet the requirements of our rural communities and to support those families most in need, whilst at the same time, drawing on innovative and inclusive models of rural service delivery.

Central Government is actively seeking ways that 'freedoms and flexibilities' can be introduced at a local level to help deliver services and provide genuinely joined up provision. Through our offer, we would work with the Council, Government and partners to identify, address and remove these barriers, to deliver an effective user focused provision for those most in need in our rural communities.

We are all working towards achieving a fair and inclusive society where every child is given the best start in life and an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential. To ensure this happens it is vital that the issues we have highlighted are addressed to ensure that the children in the rural parts of Bath & North East Somerset are not left behind and are given every opportunity to be part of, and contribute to, their community and wider society into the future.

Thank you for your time and understanding.

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Toybox Toy Library

I am speaking on behalf of Toybox Toy library based at Weston Children's Centre. We are an independent, small registered charity. We offer a toy-lending library service which was set up by parents in Bath 25 years ago to provide access to a range of fun and educational toys at very low cost, as well as an opportunity for social interaction for families. We work with Weston Children's Centre providing this service as parent volunteers. We run a weekly stay and play session and are the only toy library that caters specifically for those in the north of Bath. We currently have 80 active members and 15-20 families attend our weekly sessions. Since being based at Weston Children's Centre our membership has increased by over 200% demonstrating the clear need for the service we offer in Weston.

Being based at the Children's Centre enables local families to access us easily. Many discover we are there because they have come to use another group or come to the Centre and its staff as a source of information and support. Our relationship with Weston Children's Centre is mutually beneficial as we signpost our members to other groups and Centre staff signpost to us. The loss of council staff at the Centre, would not only effect the provision that children's services offer but compromise the provision of privately funded services, such as ours, due to the withdrawal of support for volunteers.

Toybox Toy Library is a volunteer led organisation and we understand the need to support volunteers. Most volunteers also have 'day jobs' and the support from our employed staff and Children's Centre staff enables us to provide an improved service. The physical presence at a Children's Centre of council staff is being massively underestimated and devalued by this proposal. Volunteers are extremely valuable but they cannot function without adequate support. Given the level of support we believe they should receive to offer a safe service to vulnerable groups, elements of the proposal appear to represent a false economy. Volunteers also often attend groups with their own children and therefore cannot act as effectively as a staff member whose sole concern is the group member's welfare. The proposed hub system with one staffed Centre in Bath will automatically compromise services due to the reduced support provided for locally run groups.

We are also concerned that if we were asked to pay rent for the building use we would not be able to offer our current service due to financial restraints. We would struggle to find an alternative venue to store our library stock, or another building designed for use by children that is as safe as the children's centre.

We understand the council needs to make savings but withdrawing support in Weston will have long lasting effects for young families. More money will be spent in the long run because of a council decision not to invest in our children whilst they are children. It also concerns us that council funded work in the proposal will focus only on families considered vulnerable. The loss of core non-targeted groups, open to everyone, will remove a major opportunity to identify families considered vulnerable in the first place.

We have a petition that has over 200 signatures and the handprints of 30 children showing support to keep the Children's Centre open along with the services it offers. Our petition demonstrates that Weston Children's Centre services are an invaluable resource in our community.

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Super Kids, Special Parents

I am reading this on behalf of my friend Fiona Day who unfortunately cannot be here today. I offered to read this for her as I feel it is so important for her voice to be heard.

I am the mother of four children aged 7, 6, 4 and 1. My 4yr old son is autistic and my health visitor referred me to the family support worker at Weston Children's Centre to do some home visits to help me manage my son's behaviour. Being bitten, having your hair pulled and being repeatedly hit on a daily basis is emotionally draining. If anyone else did this to me it would be assault. If my husband did this to me it would be domestic violence. But because it is my autistic 4yr old who is simply trying to express himself in this confusing and daunting world, I have to grin and bare it showing no reaction at all but remain still and silent, gradually getting him into a restraining hold.

Before having children, I had a background in childcare and working with children with special educational needs including Autism. But the difference between working with autistic children, and being the parent of an autistic child, is you can't walk away at 5pm. It is all day, all night, every day and every night. Autistic children are notoriously bad at sleeping and mine is no different. As the parent of a child who displays behavioural difficulties, you stop going to toddler groups and become very isolated.

The home visits I received were a highlight of my week. Someone was coming to help me, to listen to how my week had been. To listen to what that week's issue was and to offer practical help and support. Support like this can save families. It is well known that many marriages collapse under the strain of caring for an autistic child. Having support in place for these families at an early stage can save the tax-payer a lot in the long run.

A friend of mine in a similar situation and also living in Weston, had the idea of setting up a toddler group for children with SEN, seeing a need in our community. Initially we did not get very far, both being parents who are stretched to the limit. However, with the Centre's support within a few weeks Super Kids, Special Parents was launching its first session. This is a grass roots group, grown from a group of parents, getting together to support each other. However because we all have our own family pressures, this group would fold if it wasn't for the centre, not only because they provide us with a free room but also to be there to help us set it out to meet and greet families and to be available to offer support and advice and to put us in touch with other services. We simply could not offer this if we tried to run it on our own.

Our group mainly comprises of families from Weston - there are 5-10 families attending each week. Many of the parents at ^{the} group are on their own and this group is their only support. Don't get me wrong - life is still hard. Now the highlight of my week is going to Super Kids, Special Parents where I see my ex support worker as she helps us run the group. Our children play freely without judgment from others and as we play with our children we share stories and support each other.

You have all heard of vulnerable adults and you have all heard of vulnerable children. But let me tell you there is such a thing as vulnerable parents. Taking our support away now will only lead to a big expensive mess for the council to pick up later.

Nick Clegg said "It is absolutely clear, as Graham Allen's report 'Early Intervention: The Next Steps' confirms, that investment in the early years of life leads to huge economic, social and emotional benefits later on, both for individuals and for society as a whole."

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With no family network for support, the thought of raising a family of my own was a daunting one to say the least. An accessible resource in the centre of my own town, that provides that much needed excuse as a lonely isolated woman to get out of the house with her child.

Somewhere I can meet other parents with the very same worries and concerns, the sure start centre did exactly what the name suggests and gave me and my beautiful child the sure footing and the confidence I needed.

So how does it make me feel to knowing this could be taken away partially or wholly?

Desperate and anxious would be a fair place to start! I personally am looking to have more children in the near future and if the wonderfully friendly and knowledgeable staff, and the second family of friends made were to be taken away, then I along with lots of other mothers would go back to a life of isolation and loneliness, bringing potential severe illness such as post natal depression and anxiety that would leave many families struggling to just survive.

The network that is vital to healthy families and in turn society would not be there to support the vulnerable people at such an important time in their lives.

Speaking on behalf of many mothers and fathers that use and rely on the centre, we are both saddened and shocked that this is even being considered an option shouldn't the children in our communities be a priority? shouldn't we be striving to continue to provide the necessary skills to the those caring for these very children?

As everyone is aware over the next few years there is a massive expansion of Keynsham town centre with approximately 1500 new homes to add to the ever-growing community this brings with it not just fuel for our economy and council tax payments it brings potentially a plethora new families with births and problems as well as successes.

The workload of the already stretched 30* internal and external groups that are based at our sure start will only be increasing thus needing financial support not abandonment at this time.

From social services to Midwives, from the police to speech therapists these are all really well utilised in the daily strive to produce a harmonious and functional community.

Having used things like the breast feeding group I know I may not have been able to feed my son for nine months without them, without the Stay and play groups my son would not have had the opportunity to mix with his peers to be introduced to other children learning how to share, play and explore with others to integrate to society.

I genuinely believe that if you start to chip away at the very foundations of a community spirit, a key stone like the centre, it will be the start of the decline of our towns worth. It will stop with the schools at the age 5 to identify those families that need the help by which time it's too late its engrained thus needing more help more resources in turn costing more to achieve this.

It is easy with the right help and determination to raise a happy child given the support beginning and in some cases before the child is even born.

I would like to summarise that the Keynsham sure start centre is a recognised institution that is utilised in every way possible to such positive effect that without it I see nothing but a decline particularly for the newest generation of Keynsham and BANES

As a mother I ask please don't take away our encouragement our support and our reassurance.

It's easier to build up a child than to fix an adult , please choose your actions carefully.

Thank you for listening.

My name is Nettie Williams I live in Radstock, have two children and am a user of Somer Valley Children's Centre in more than one way.

It's been difficult for me to know where to start as I wear so many hats with this service.

The obvious point to start with is the hat of a mother, I became a mum just over 8 years ago before the children's centre existed. I was 27 years of age and would certainly not have been targeted for any courses or groups because of my age alone, had they existed. When set up a universal group it had a great impact on my life. Like many new mums around me I did not have great support nearby, things have changed since our parents had us. I also struggled with mild post-natal depression and having staff at a group that weren't there to judge me, really helped me loose that isolated feeling. So I would want Children's Centres to be there for all mums because of this experience.

Fast forward to hat number two, I became a volunteer with the NCT (National Childbirth Trust) to support other new mums and dads. We were trying to reach more parents, and those with new babies and older siblings. We were struggling with funding for a room and for toys and then the Children's Centre offered us a partnership. The numbers accessing the group has more or less quadrupled. We have an NCT Breast-feeding Counsellor at this group, without the Children's Centre support we would struggle to offer this support.

I know the TAMBA group (Twins & Multiples) has also benefitted from this type of partnership.

Time for hat number three. Since becoming a volunteer I have trained and qualified as an Antenatal teacher. That's the reason I've the confidence to stand and talk in front of this room of strangers. I feel it's my responsibility to, because I can, so I'm standing here for the parents who were like me six years ago who can't. Over 200 of these people's voice are collected in the petitions I hold here, I've spoken to many about their concerns. Our paper people chains represent out children's voice.

My antenatal teacher training has led me to research the science surrounding the first 1000 days of childhood brain development and beyond. I don't think I need to tell you that the biggest impact we can make on a child for their entire life is basically the sooner the better. We can't wait till kids get to school that's why The Children's Centre's role is so important.

My fourth hat is sitting on the Advisory board for Somer Valley's Children's Centre. Some of the things I have observed have blown my mind away, with their endless determination and passion to make a difference in the area.

For instance planning around the recession and the fact that domestic violence could increase, the bringing of different services together to talk about the different roles they could play in supporting these families.

They look at statistics that showed that boys in a particular part of their geographical area weren't scoring highly in their readiness for school. Do you know what the solution for that is? Possibly, but the answer is messy play just in case you didn't. Getting boys to mark paper, which is essential for them to make that leap to writing, can be achieved in creative ways. So when you look through the door at a messy play session it may look fun but there's some serious learning going on too. Surely that's a vote for universal groups.

Before I finish, my last point is, being part of the Advisory board for the Children's Centre meant I got to go to the launch of The Connecting Families Initiative, from my perspective, cutting Children's Centre Service will only put pressure and create a need for such an initiative for families further down the line.

Thank you

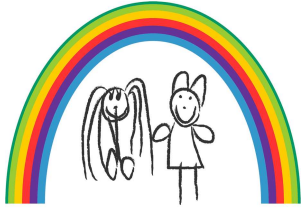
Life without the children centres and outreach workers would be a life with social services. Mary Foxwell has helped us change our life and is always there for support and encouragement.

My relationship with my partner was at rock bottom and our relationship with the children was getting distant. We struggled with agreeing on discipline. We attended a parenting course run by the children centre and now have full control of our children and our relationship is back on track. This wouldn't have happened if there wasn't the children centre or outreach workers.

The centres provide trips to Puxton Park and the seaside that just wouldn't have been possible for us to go on if we had to pay and the children still talk about these trips now.

All our children have benefited greatly for the children's centre and Mary's support. I bought my youngest to Family Focus group and my son attended Playbuds. This has given me confidence to bring my children to groups now. We have also had support with Team Around the Child meetings for my son at school that have been really helpful.

I have now applied to become a volunteer because I think that the work Mary and her team do is extremely important to struggling families that would be in a hole with social services and no support.



First Steps Bath

October 2013

Key Message From a Parent.

- If I didn't have the children's centre, I would have had nothing.
- It provides so much more for the whole community; it is a whole support system.

My Name is Gemma, I'm a mother of four, my oldest is 12 and my youngest is nearly 2.

I have been using the Children's Centre for over 6 years. I had a really hard time when my second child was born, me and my partner split up and I had post natal depression. My life crashed down round my ears, I worried about being a single parent. I discovered First Steps and their services at this time; they were easy to access and local for me.

I went to the 'stay and play' group. The staff were friendly and welcoming. They always noticed if I was not ok. They were always there to speak to. I wouldn't have asked for help but they seemed to know when I needed it. Now I can talk to them whenever I need to.

Depression never goes away completely but I recognise when I feel it coming back and the support is as strong as ever.

Stay and Play is the place that I see my mates, we can talk about things together. We discuss each other's problems from potty training to violent relationships and anything in-between.

Some of the mothers use the groups as a social outlet for them as well as their children, for some this is the only time they get out.

As well as 'Stay and Play' groups my children have and currently are using the First Steps nursery which my son spent nearly two years at before he moved onto infant school.

He thrived there and moved from nursery to school smoothly with the help of the staff, he is now exceeding his targets at school. I believe he wouldn't be achieving this without the exceptional start he was given by First Steps; I wonder where he would be now if he didn't have this support in his pre-school years.

My 3 year old daughter is due to start the same nursery in the next few weeks as I believe my daughter has and will benefit from the First Steps nursery and other services.

As a parent I always feel listened to and my point of view is always taken on matters concerned with the groups I attend. Just recently myself and other mums took part in interviewing candidates for a position within

First Steps and our feedback helped towards someone suitable being appointed.

This is something I feel passionate about and I'm sure mine and my children's lives would be very different if it wasn't for First Steps.

As well as myself I speak for all parents and carers that use the First Steps services when I say that taking away even a small bit of support, groups, advice and services they offer would impact the First Steps community as well as the local one.

So many, including myself rely on First Steps, so any cuts to services would eventually break down the "social network" that has been built up over the years.

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Statement from The Enrich Youth Project, All Saints Centre, Weston

We are The Enrich Youth Project and we are the community youth work that runs out of All Saints Church in Weston. We've been investing in local young people for the last 5 years and currently run a youth club, a drop in, a focussed session to look at issues young people face in life as well as a place to explore the Christian faith should people want to. We also run after school clubs as well as doing work in schools.

Some of our work runs from other places in Weston. These are the groups that need less space.

However, we need a space to operate from with a reasonable amount of space so that we can run youth club activities - a key place to build relationships. Weston Children's Centre fits the bill for us.

Obviously, working with young people in the community, we need a place in the community. We've looked extensively at other places and there is nothing suitable. The work we're doing with young people in Weston is changing lives and changing attitudes. It is long-term work and we need places like Weston Children's Centre to not only be open for use but also to support the work we're doing.

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