

**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**