

Statement from Nettie Williams for November 13<sup>th</sup> 2013 Ref: Children's Centre

I came here on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October and I told everyone present about the different perspectives I have when it comes to the Children's Centres, as a mum, a volunteer in Children's centre, chair of their Advisory Board or as newly qualified antenatal teacher. It's been a daunting experience. The reason I'm back again is because I can do it, I know a lot of parents who feel passionately against these cuts, talking here is not possible, because of the time of day or because of their confidence. They would probably be far better at explaining what Children's Centres have helped them with. Volunteering at a group and talking to parents about the cuts has meant I have heard many stories of our Children's Centres' impact.

Certain parties were very interested in the fact I am a volunteer, probably because they think that volunteers could run a large proportion of Children's Centre services for free, and I really think there should be a broader discussion about what volunteers might do, how quickly their turnover might be and therefore how their contributions might change, and importantly how much they rely on trained staff to support their volunteering. My antenatal teacher training informs my volunteering completely differently to other volunteers. Their life experience informs their contribution.

Target parents, for instance, under 25's and those that are picked up early on are going to be supported.

So I feel I'm fighting for middle ground here for the parents that aren't target material, are apparently coping, but if you look deeper are having real wobbles. Well maternity leave is great but financially it does tip many parents into that really difficult area of managing on a lot less money when they're at home, there's the prospect of some returning to work when their child is really young. So they might have employment and be educated and then many parties assume that they'll be alright, because of this. It means if there were no universal groups they might not get opportunities to ask for help, in a universal group they can and this would be normalised. For instance last time I was here Ailsa McKenzie talked about how hard it was for her, as a teacher to ask for help for herself, and her daughter when experiencing postnatal depression.

Parenting, when it's going right can be the best job in the world, but when it's not and support isn't there it's the worst. Those best placed to support us like our families could be far away, many are having kids later so their parents are older. As an antenatal teacher it's not uncommon for parents-to-be tell me this is the first time they've ever had anything to do with a baby before their own. Our families are more nucleated. There has never been more research into child development and care than in the last 10 years, which often puts them into conflict with their own families. Parents are left wondering what bit they should follow, whilst trying to raise their families in a box, with 4 walls called their home in isolation with a television to replace granny or Aunty Matilda, unless they have somewhere they can go. Society sells parenthood as something wonderful, what happens when it's not? Who would do you talk to someone you know or someone you don't, someone who won't judge you regardless of your background, someone who might spot you struggling or really ask you how you are? Yes you know what my answer will be.

For me that includes the older dad who needed reassurance that it was normal to have a 4 month old baby wake at night, and wanted a discussion about controlled crying and weaning onto solids.

It includes the mum of 4 whose benefits have gone wrong and she reluctantly needs to visit the food bank, fortunately she knows the staff, so she doesn't feel judged.

So if you'd just become a parent would you feel confident in the face of Gran telling you that your 5 week old baby was manipulating you because you picked them up when they cried? Would you avoid the Health Visitor if your baby wouldn't sleep on their back? Would you know what to believe when a GP hinted you might need to put your baby on formula because their weights not going on fast enough? What would you do to help your child's development? When you pick up one book it tells you one thing and then another one contradicts it. Who helps us deal with this minefield?

Just as the Children's Centres have established themselves, given valuable support to parents to chisel away the minefield of contradictory advice and support to help our children flourish, it feels like it probably is going to be taken away.

Please think carefully about what impact the cuts may have....

The Children's Centre biggest cost is staff, to cut cost you take away staff you this takes away relationships and trust for some of the neediest. How might you keep their skills?

Volunteers don't have to give one months notice they are the icing on the cake, which means staff can have more contact with those that need it and to get to know those that attend their groups.

Universal groups attract more than just the parents who aren't deemed quite needy enough, parents who were targeted have the right to be treated as normal, and have often gained confidence to walk through that door, need these groups to move on to.

Thank you