

# Early Years

DELIVERING SUPPORT THROUGH  
CHILDREN'S CENTRES



we|support



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## DELIVERING SUPPORT THROUGH CHILDREN'S CENTRES



# we support



More than just buildings, our Children's Centres provide holistic, integrated services that support the whole family.

### The need

It is widely recognised that the early years of a child's life are key formative years for emotional, social and cognitive development<sup>1</sup>. Parents play a vital role in their child's development and we know that socio-economic background, parenting capacity and early education are all proven to have a significant impact on a child's future success<sup>2</sup>.

Some parents, for different reasons, may need additional support to build their skills and knowledge to become more effective parents. Children's Centres should offer an inclusive, non-judgemental environment where all families can be supported in their local community.

Recent qualitative research<sup>3</sup> commissioned by Family Action illustrates the multiple and complex needs of some of the families receiving support from three of our Children's Centres in very different geographical areas:

- 11 out of 17 families who participated in the research reported behavioural problems in children (in 50% of cases this was explicitly linked to a condition such as autism or ADHD)
- 10 of 18 participants reported mental health needs
- 10 families had experienced some kind of family breakdown.
- 7 families reported domestic abuse
- 7 families reported financial difficulties

Such multiple and complex needs would present significant challenges for any family and require a coordinated response.

### Our response

Our Children's Centres provide a range of different support services that families can access including:

- Family support either at the Children's Centre or in their own home, to address issues impacting on parenting capacity and family life.
- Evidence-based parenting programmes such as The Incredible Years® Programs<sup>4</sup> and Triple P – Positive Parenting Program<sup>5</sup>
- Play and learning activities that promote school readiness and that support bonding between parent and child
- Integrated child and family health services such as breastfeeding support, play and weigh sessions and development checks
- Pre-employment training, job application support and advice on accessing affordable childcare to support parents to access education, training and work
- Targeted activities for fathers, recognising their significant role in their children's development

**10 FAMILIES EXPERIENCED**  
FAMILY BREAKDOWN

**7 FAMILIES REPORTED**  
DOMESTIC ABUSE

**7 FAMILIES REPORTED**  
FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

### Theory of Change:

Delivering support through Children's Centres

#### Goal

All children achieve age appropriate milestones regardless of family circumstance or background

#### Intermediate outcomes

- Improved child development
- Reduced need for intervention by specialist services
- Improved resilience and confidence for parents and children
- Improved parenting
  - Parents and carers act as the primary educators
  - Parents, carers and children learn and develop
  - Families make healthy lifestyle choices
  - Families develop self-esteem and resilience
- Families are involved in decisions

#### Activities

- Family support and outreach
- Evidence-based parenting programmes
- Early learning and on-site childcare
- Child and family health services
- Employability support
- Work to engage fathers
- Information and advice, signposting to other services

<sup>1</sup> www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Final-Overview-Best-Start-at-Home.pdf p 3  
<sup>2</sup> www.gov.uk/government/publications/are-you-ready-good-practice-in-school-readiness  
<sup>3</sup> Family Action Thematic Report into Children's Centres. Sample size of 17 families (18 participants)  
<sup>4</sup> www.incredibleyears.com/programs/  
<sup>5</sup> www.triplep.net/glo-en/copyright/



## Early Years

### DELIVERING SUPPORT THROUGH CHILDREN'S CENTRES



**“I have seen a big difference mainly in the last few weeks of working with a support worker because I’ve known the best thing to do and routines and stuff.”**

*Children’s Centre service user*

#### Our impact

Family Action uses a range of research methods to illustrate the impact of our work. Qualitative research<sup>6</sup> was undertaken with the aim of examining the value of Family Action’s holistic, strengths-based, whole family support in building resilience among families attending Children’s Centres. We chose this approach in order to capture effectively the compelling human experience and subtleties about the families involved and the issues relating to their experiences. Going forward, Family Action is developing a quantitative approach to complement and enhance qualitative findings. A greater emphasis on clinical outcomes tools and the measurement of “hard outcomes” will further evidence the impact of our services.

The qualitative research was carried out at three Children’s Centres in very different geographic locations. Eighteen parents – 16 mothers and two fathers – took part in 17 interviews using visual and reflective methods (one interview was a couple interview with a mother and a father), and four family support workers were interviewed for context. The research found that families that attended our Children’s Centres reported:

**“I like to come here, it makes me happy.”**

*Child at Children’s Centre service*

#### Improved parenting skills and ability to establish family routines

“I have seen a big difference mainly in the last few weeks of working with a support worker because I’ve known the best thing to do and routines and stuff.”

#### Improved confidence and reduced social isolation

“Without the support I would probably be that same person in the house on my own quite a lot of the time. Not getting out and about, just me and my son constantly. I wouldn’t have been going on courses...or getting out in the community or even seeing my family.”

#### Improved ability to prevent problems escalating

“I wouldn’t be where I am now if I didn’t have the support...I’d probably have lost my kids and I’d probably [be] an alcoholic, to be fair”

#### Increased support networks

“I’m meeting new people every time I go to ‘Stay and Plays’...and actually speaking to them and seeing how their child develops and then...sharing experiences and stuff...they help me, I help them.”

#### Improved resilience and self-esteem

“They’ve kind of really taught me that...[if you] fall over, [I can] pick yourself back up, get on and let someone know that I’ve fallen over, because that was a big thing that I never used to do.”

<sup>6</sup> Family Action Thematic Report into Children’s Centres. Sample size of 17 families (18 participants)

## CASE FILE

### Ravensdale and Forest Town Children’s Centre

Family Action runs 23 Children’s Centres across England.

We work hard to ensure that Family Action Children’s Centres are well run and effective. We are proud of our track record of taking on and ‘turning around’ struggling centres so that they can fulfil their responsibilities to their local community.

#### Background

On the 1st June 2013, Family Action took over the running of Ravensdale and Forest Town Children’s Centre, as part of the Nottinghamshire Children and Families Partnership (NCFP).

Less than two weeks later an Ofsted inspection judged the centre to be Inadequate.

#### The inspection found that

- The centre was not supporting enough children and families within the reach area, and was unable to clearly identify and give priority to those families who need the services most.
- Information and data available did not provide sufficient detail of the needs of the families they were working with. Staff did not use information well enough to precisely identify needs.
- There were not enough opportunities for those who might benefit the most to take part in activities to improve their personal skills, education and employability.
- Governance arrangements were weak and there was no functioning advisory board.
- The centre failed to set clear priorities to form integrated services that met the needs and requirements of the range of families within the local area, particularly for those in most need.

#### Action

A highly skilled new management team was put into place, including a new district manager and centre coordinator.

- The team worked closely with key partners such as health and schools to communicate the key priorities of the centre and to ensure that all families and expectant parents have information about the centre.
- An advisory board, including parents, was developed to find out about families’ needs and provide relevant services.
- Careful thought was given to how and where the centre delivered activities. For example, information about young parents was analysed and showed that their support group was not being delivered where it was most needed meaning attendance was poor. The meeting place for the group was changed and the number of young parents using the group increased.

- Structured and nationally recognised parenting courses were offered to families at different venues.
- Changes were made in how information was collected and used to make sure services and activities are highly relevant to the needs of families living in the area.
- Families who are suffering from domestic abuse were identified as a high priority for the centre. Excellent joined up working with other agencies locally and through district representation at the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) meant that families are given timely support according to their needs.
- Regular supervision, focusing on safeguarding and wellbeing, between workers and managers ensured that expectations were clear.
- A thorough and relevant staff training plan was developed to link staff development closely to the centre’s main priorities.
- A positive partnership with the local college and the county adult education services improved the range of services on offer.

#### Outcome

Ravensdale and Forest Town Children’s Centre was re-inspected less than a year later, in May 2014.

The inspection found the centre to be GOOD in all areas.

The inspection found that:

- The relationship between Family Action, Nottinghamshire Children and Families Partnership, and the local authority is clear, well understood and managed effectively. It delivers a robust process for checking how well the centre is doing in meeting the targets it has for improving the life chances of families living in the area it serves.
- Significant progress has been made in how information is collected and used to make sure services and activities are highly relevant to the needs of families living in the area. The centre now has sharp targets which are well designed to tackle issues faced by local families.
- Action to make sure that all families, including expectant parents, have information about the centre has significantly increased the number of families registered with, and using the children’s centre in the months leading up to this inspection.
- Families receive effective early help, guidance and support, helping them to make good progress in their lives. Services and activities are good quality, well placed and delivered by highly skilled and knowledgeable centre staff and partner agencies.
- The centre has good partnerships with adult learning providers helping adults to begin entry into learning and development. Some adults take up opportunities to progress into further learning and volunteering.