

A close-up photograph of a young boy smiling. He has tiger face paint on his face, including black stripes, a black nose, and whiskers. He is wearing a green headband. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people at an outdoor event.

family
action

Building
stronger
families

Family Action

**Southend Children's Centres
Impact Report**

2018 and onwards



Who we are, what we do

About our charity

Family Action is a national charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support that reaches out to many of the UK's most vulnerable people.

We provide effective and innovative services that have a positive impact on people's lives.

Our broad range of services include early years care, support for children and families, helping adults with mental health and wellbeing issues and the provision of financial Grants.

With our people focus, can-do attitude and dedication to excellence, we ensure everyone who comes to us receives the help and respect they need to tackle their problems.

About Southend

Southend-on-Sea is a popular seaside town and the largest urban area in South Essex, with a population of 178,000 people.

The town is becoming more ethnically diverse (8.9% of people are BAME) and the number of older people is increasing (over 65s are 18.9% of the population). Southend is a Unitary Authority separate from Essex County Council.

Deprivation in Southend is higher than both the England average and the regional average. In 2015, 25.8% of Southend residents lived within areas classified as being in the 20% most deprived in England. As of 2017, Southend had 20.6% of children under 16 in low income families, above the regional average of 15.4% and the England average of 18.6%.

'Southend 2050' is the Borough's ambition for the future and specifies five aims for the city by 2050. Our work supports the first four:

1. Pride & Joy

Southenders are fiercely proud of, and go out of their way, to champion what our city has to offer

2. Safe & Well

People in Southend-on-Sea feel safe in all aspects of their lives and are well enough to live fulfilling lives

3. Opportunity & Prosperity

By 2050 Southend-on-Sea is a successful city and we share our prosperity amongst all of our people

4. Active & Involved

By 2050 we have a thriving, active and involved community that feel invested in our city

5. Connected & Smart

By 2050 people can easily get in, out and around our borough and we have a world class digital infrastructure

Our team

Our nine Children's Centres are overseen by an Operational Manager, with two Cluster Managers who manage the team of twelve Early Years Practitioners.

A Family Support Manager and two Family Support Coordinators manage the team of eight Family Support Workers.

Finally our Business and Data Manager manages a team of seven administrators.

In 2019 we had six volunteers supporting delivery, from counselling to developing story sacks, and maintaining our allotment.



About our Children's Centres

Family Action is funded by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council to deliver services in nine Children's Centres across the town: Blenheim, Cambridge Road, Centre Place, Eastwood, Friars, Hamstel, Prince Avenue, Summercourt and Temple Sutton/St Luke's.

Our Children's Centres are a place where parents and children have the opportunity to meet other families from their community as well as professionals such as Early Years Practitioners, Family Support Workers, Health Visitors, Midwives, Speech and Language Therapists and many more. A range of core services are offered in each centre to support individuals and families.

The range of services on offer varies in each centre, dependant on local demand, but can include:

Expectant and New Parents: advice and guidance during pregnancy and after the birth of your baby	Personalised Support: a variety of specialist support is available e.g. parenting, family support, counselling and training	Help, Information and Advice on a wide range of local services for children and families	Parent/Child Activities Groups: a range of age appropriate activities for children and families which support learning, attachments and interaction
Breast Feeding, Starting Solids and Feeding: support and information to make informed choices regarding feeding your baby	Healthy Lifestyles: we offer a variety of courses and sessions promoting healthy eating and activities	Health Services and Child Health Clinics: families can meet healthcare professionals who can provide support and advice	Positive Parenting: six week courses that enhance parenting skills and build confidence in supporting children
Adult Learning and Family Learning: maths, english and more to support parents back into education or work and support their children's learning	Work and Benefits Advice: professional advice on how to get back into work and access benefits.	Volunteering and Placement: volunteering at a local centre is a great way to help others and may lead back into work or education	Childcare: full day and sessional childcare through on-site nurseries. Information about funded places for 2 year olds and 3-4 year olds is provided.

A typical day for a Family Support Worker

8:30am - 10:30am

Checking and replying to emails from partners about family cases, and data entry into our case management system. Updating calendar, checking and replying to phone calls and texts. Assisting with families accessing the centre, signposting where needed.

10:30am - 2:30pm

Hourly home visits are carried out with families. May also meet families at Children's Centres/hospital appointments/housing drop-ins etc. depending on the families' individual action plans.

Time may be spent with families:

- listening to their life stories
- completing Initial assessments
- tour/risk assessments of their homes for lone working
- Completing genograms
- Creating action plans/Family Stars
- being child focussed, interacting and role modelling play with the children
- Giving advice and support
- Building evidence and raising any concerns

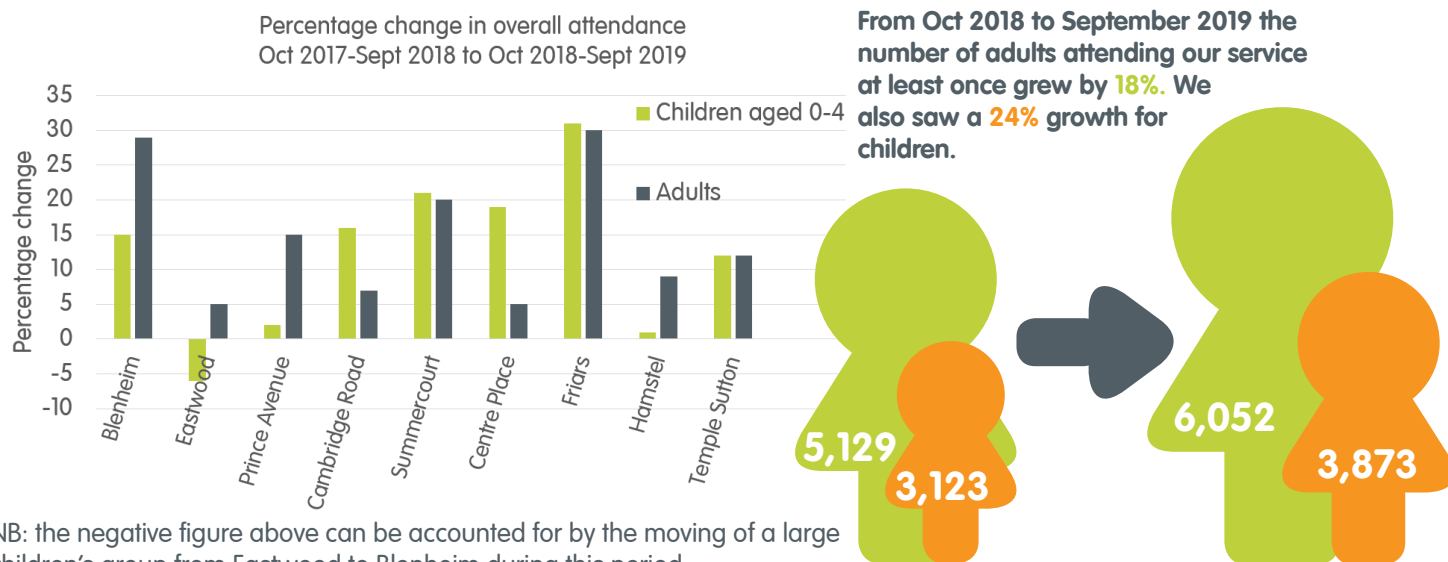
2:30pm - 4:30pm

Return to office to type up detailed recordings/notes/observation of visits, paperwork completed, update emails to and from partners, including any other actions that may arise from visits such as referrals/escalations, letters of support etc. and upload to the case management system, ensuring safeguarding issues are dealt with immediately. Often on coming back to the office there will be the opportunity to discuss the visit/concerns with other FSWs/Co-ordinators/managers and take appropriate action. Any non-urgent concerns will be made note of for monthly Supervision.

What we delivered and the difference we've made

Attendance

The diagrams below chart our attendance from October 2018 to September 2019, and show a nearly universal increase in usage and, consequently, demand. 655 men attended (an increase of 34% from the previous year) and there was also a 14% increase in people attending who are unemployed. Our Stay and Play sessions were attended **2203** times.



NB: the negative figure above can be accounted for by the moving of a large children's group from Eastwood to Blenheim during this period.

Sandra's story

I started coming to the Multiples group with my twins, Hayley and Bob, when they were three months old. The Multiples Group is open to any parent, grandparent or carer with multiple children and their siblings on a drop in basis.

I had returned to the area after leaving university and worked in London so I didn't have a great support network, and I was looking to meet other mums. My Health Visitor mentioned the Children's Centre was looking to start a multiples group so we went along.

It wasn't always easy to get out of the door when they were young – but everybody is in the same boat and I felt so supported.

We've tried private play groups but the Children's Centres follow the Early Years Foundation Stage and that has been so important for the twins to develop their skills – the staff are really involved, and the activities link to their development. It's more than just putting out a lump of playdough.

I have found more than just a play group, I have a support network. At other play groups I have made acquaintances, but here I have made really good friends. Hayley and Bob are turning four and still love it here at 'Twin Club', as they call it, and greet the staff with big cuddles every week.

They've started pre-school and I have made sure that it fits around the Multiples Group – that's how important this is to us.

If you're a parent and you're feeling isolated – get to your local Children's Centre. These places are invaluable - I feel so sorry for other parents who don't have the opportunity to get to a Children's Centre. We are so lucky.

Other parent feedback

"I'd be lost without the Children's Centres. My twins love attending the stay and plays and it's a joy to see them having fun and interacting with other toddlers."

"Family Action is a fantastic service and my experience with them has been very positive. My case worker has some very special qualities; she's empathetic, sympathetic and a real person who understands real people and the problems they face. Moreover, she is a strong, positive person and role model, with a can do attitude towards everything."

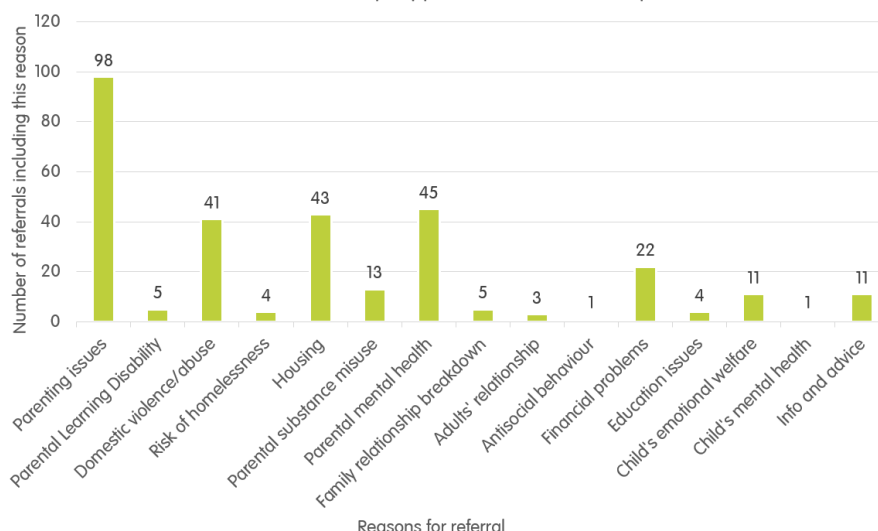
Family support

From Oct 2018 to Sept 2019 we delivered Family Support to **146** families, with **405** home visits.

The five most common reasons for referral are parenting issues, parental mental health, housing, domestic violence and abuse and abuse, indicating a broad range of needs among families in Southend.

"Having a Family Support Worker come to your home means you have privacy and no worries over people hearing your issues. The children are more chilled as they are in their own home, and they can watch tv or play with their own toys. If you feel ill, you can still have your visit take place or if the children have had a bad night you don't have to rush out of the house your visit will still take place. You're not alone when you have a Family Support Worker."

Reasons for Family Support referral Oct 18 to Sept 19



A family support story - Jenna, Andrew and Tiffany*

We received a referral to our home based support requiring financial support for Jenna, her partner Andrew and their four month old baby, Tiffany.

We completed an initial home visit where Jenna told us that she had previously had a child removed from her care and placed under a special guardianship order with their paternal grandparents.

The property where the family lived was a one bedroom council flat. The tenancy was in the Andrew's name only. The flat was cluttered and untidy.

Jenna did not want Andrew to know that she was currently receiving home based family support and told us that he does not help her with Tiffany. Andrew was in control of the family's finances and all benefits were paid into his bank account with Jenna only receiving child benefit fortnightly. There were currently rent arrears on the property.

Jenna told us she had previously suffered sexual abuse as child and as a result now takes medication for anxiety and depression, and said she also found it difficult to attend groups in her local Children's Centre and she was worried as to what people would think of her.

Issues identified

- Poor home conditions, creating hazards for Tiffany
- Jenna's emotional wellbeing due to the sexual abuse she experienced
- Domestic abuse
- Risk of homelessness
- Tiffany not meeting her developmental milestones
- Isolation

What we did to help

A Family Support Worker completed weekly home visits when Andrew was not at the property. We provided support to improve home conditions to ensure Tiffany was in a hazard free environment. The Family Support Worker attended Stay and Play sessions at the local Children's Centre with Jenna and Tiffany to reduce isolation.

Jenna also completed the Freedom Programme. This offered a crèche space for Tiffany at the Children's Centre and an opportunity for her to explore her learning and development. Jenna recognised that she was currently in an abusive relationship and as a result, with support, she left Andrew and is currently living in a refuge. She is now in receipt of all benefits she is entitled to and is currently looking to secure a property with the tenancy in her name.

Relationships between Jenna and the crèche team have been established with Jenna and Tiffany both regularly using their local Children's Centres for sessions, including stay and plays, baby weigh in, cooking and parenting.

*** Names have been changed to protect identity**

Our projects

Discovering Art

Over the past year we delivered two Discovering Art projects, from our Friars and Blenheim Children's Centres.

We worked alongside local artist Debbie Hadley to deliver the project, which spanned three sessions and aimed to support children and their families to access new art mediums, encourage them to continue this in their own homes and visit local venues where art can be viewed.

It was really successful and resulted in two external art installations created from clay and a number of prints produced for internal display.

10 adults and 16 children attended the sessions, and 100% of the adults said they enjoyed the sessions.



We also made links with a local art gallery which has stated it would like to invite parents and children in for a workshop session to support the continuation of the projects.

The sessions were made possible by funding from Southend Borough Council's Culture and Wellbeing Small Grants.

Food For Life allotment



Friar's Children's Centre staff commenced a 12 session allotment project in March 2019 with funding from A Better Start Southend.

Six to eight adults and children attended each week - planting seeds, watering and maintaining the allotment and collecting produce to take home.

100% of adults who attended felt more confident with their children helping in the garden and 95% of children tried new fruit/vegetables that they hadn't tried before.

Cooking sessions

Eight adults and eight children attended the programme of six cooking sessions offered at Prince Avenue Children's Centre.

Parents reported a 100% improvement in encouraging their child to try new foods and feeling more confident to cook at home with children, with one parent attending the sessions reporting:

"Fantastic class, we both enjoyed it, it really encouraged my child with his cooking and eating."



Volunteering

We are indebted to the work of our committed volunteer team, who together donated over 465 hours of their own time to the project between January and September 2019, an estimated value of **£13,442**.

Mike's story

Mike recently finished volunteering with our Children's Centres after five years, donating over 300 hours of his time as a qualified teacher. His specialist experience in the field of languages meant he required no additional training.

Here's Mike's story:

I taught French and Russian for many years until my wife and I decided we wanted a big change.

We both gained qualifications in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), packed up and moved to France, and taught English to businesses in Normandy.

In 2014 we decided to retire and return to the UK. I was still young and passionate about teaching so I looked into volunteering. Together with the Children's Centres we developed an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course for parents, with a free crèche for the children.

The classes brought adults from many parts of the world together - Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Poland, the former Soviet Republics and Russia itself. They came to know each other and share experiences.

I noticed that sometimes students didn't know much about the local area or nearby London, so I used local references and real life scenarios as I taught, including local history and culture. The sessions originally started in the Balmoral Community Centre, but they really improved when we moved into Summercourt Children's Centre and I could use the projector to include videos and songs.

We also had some participants that were completely new to the English language, so I began to volunteer an extra half hour before the course started to provide 1:1 support to parents to cover the basics, like the alphabet, and phonics. With that 1:1 support they could then join the main group and build on their language skills.

None of this would have been possible without the excellent support of my assistant, Tanzila (Early Years Practitioner). We built a great working relationship and she was a fantastic assistant. She managed the crèche, and participated in lessons at the same time - she did a brilliant job.

It was a joy to help the parents gain confidence and to witness them improving over time - it was so satisfying when you could see the penny drop.

I found that the parents I worked with were committed to learn, they actually wanted to do homework and they even asked for it!



Family fun days

In Summer 2019, we delivered three family fun day picnics across the Children's Centres to celebrate Family Action's 150th Anniversary.

An amazing 2159 people attended, including special guests Ricky Champ from TV's Eastenders and Sir David Amess MP.

We offered donkey rides, a mini-petting zoo, a tombola, magician and inflatables, as well as stalls to promote the work of other services in the Southend area that our families may find useful.

Parents had a great time, as the comment from one parent below shows:

"An absolutely brilliant family event, perfect for all ages, enjoyable for the whole family. The team we have in Southend are amazing, very welcoming, supportive and inclusive."



Partnership working

Our delivery partners provide a wide range of services from our Children's Centres.

These include:

- Health Visitors - Child Health Clinic
- Midwifery - Antenatal Clinic
- HICCUPS - Stay & Play for preschool hearing impaired children
- Welcome to the UK - support for families new to the UK
- Little Heroes - parent-Led ASD Support Group for families of children who are on the autism spectrum
- A Better Start Southend - offer a range of services for families living within the A Better Start wards

Partner feedback:

"Thank you so much to the Operational Manager and the team at Summercourt Children's Centre for meeting with me this morning. Great to hear about all the activities on offer with Family Action across Southend's Children's Centres and plans to develop more. The Children's Centres are at the heart of our communities with their early years, health and family activities. I hope to see further development with our many community groups to extend the use of this brilliant resource."

- Southend Borough Councillor

"I just wanted to take the time to say a HUGE thank you to you for being so ridiculously helpful last weekend! The venue was perfect and everything went so smoothly because of all your help. Thank you to you all for giving up your time to support (especially on a gloriously sunny day!)."

- National Deaf Children's Society

"Thank you so much to your volunteer for his invaluable support. From the moment we got there he was so attentive, helpful and friendly."

"I cannot stress enough how grateful we are for his talk at the end of the day - I know it's not easy to stand up in front of a group of strangers and talk about something personal like your experiences/life, but he took it in his stride and delivered such an eloquent, genuine, moving 10 minute talk about his life with no notes/prep!"

"It was so inspiring and it was just such a valuable addition to the day, which I know the parents really appreciated, as did we! Thank you so so much!"

- Event Organiser, The National Deaf Children's Society

"Thank you so much for your hospitality, I felt very welcomed and I also met two people who are just as passionate as me!!! I am really looking forward to working alongside you all and will be in touch very shortly as counselling assessments are coming in thick and fast."

- Family Support Counsellor, Havens Hospices



What we have learned and what's happening next?

Key findings

Centres located in central Southend are in more demand from partners wanting to use them as delivery sites, and we are not able to always meet this demand.

To alleviate this, we have been carrying out tours of our other centres where there is better capacity. We have been able to showcase the space available and how easily it can be to access the centres. Arriva are the providers of local buses and have a campaign to connect local communities. We have a page on their website detailing bus routes and directions of how to get us: <https://www.arrivabus.co.uk/herts-and-essex/latest/connecting-communities-herts-essex/>

The number of referrals into our Family Support Service has increased, with some families requiring a longer period of support.

To ensure that families are supported whilst on the waiting list, in September 2019 we introduced a Family Group Session. All families are signposted to the group, which is facilitated by two Family Support Workers – this means they can receive support immediately.

**We have identified several areas for development:
Co-production and engagement with partners and families, increasing our volunteer opportunities and raising the profile of our work.**

To provide a lead for these areas, in September 2019 we employed a Stakeholder & Community Engagement Manager. This role has already developed significant movement in these areas, such as working with Southend Borough Council to develop Key Performance Indicators and case studies linked to the Southend 2050 ambitions. We have also developed a parent/professional survey for feedback on our work and have begun work on facilitating co-production opportunities.

Future plans and partnerships

Intergenerational Project

We have carried out a number of pilot sessions in three local care homes where families can come in to the care home and workers from both the care home and Children's Centre provide an hours story and singing experience with the residents. This aims to bridge the generation gap and stimulate memories and reduce isolation for the residents, many who have dementia and do not always have visitors. The feedback from all involved has been very moving and positive. We aim to seek funding to embed this into our weekly timetable.

Age Concern Southend

We have begun discussions with Age Concern Southend at their Haven Centre to look at the delivery of some outreach sessions.

National Deaf Children's Society

We co-delivered a day in June 2019 for deaf children and their families. This was very well received and we will be developing on this to co-deliver a further two days for early years practitioners in 2020.

Holiday Hunger and Family Tea Times

To address issues faced by families during school holiday periods, we will be working with a range of local partners to pilot sessions during the holiday times. In addition to this we will also be introducing a monthly Family Tea Time to promote healthy, affordable meals and the importance of eating together.





Contact us

Contact telephone number for all centres: 01702 220 810

West locality

Cluster Managers: Jo Houston - jo.houston@family-action.org.uk

Blenheim Children's Centre
Blenheim Chase
Leigh on Sea
SS9 4HX

Prince Avenue Children's Centre
Hornby Avenue
Westcliff on Sea
SS0 0LG

Eastwood Children's Centre
Eastwood Primary School
Rayleigh Road
Leigh on Sea
SS9 5UT

Central locality

Cluster Managers: Jo Houston - jo.houston@family-action.org.uk
Nicola Marks - nicola.marks@family-action.org.uk

Cambridge Road Children's Centre
40-42 Cambridge Road
Southend on Sea
SS1 1ES

Centre Place Children's Centre
Prospect Close
Southend on Sea
SS1 2JD

Summerville Children's Centre
Summerville Road
Westcliff on Sea
SS0 7AT

East locality

Cluster Managers: Nicola Marks - nicola.marks@family-action.org.uk

Friars Children's Centre
Friars Primary School
Constable Way
Shoeburyness
SS3 9XX

Temple Sutton Children's Centre
Eastern Avenue
Southend on Sea
SS2 4BS

Hamstel Children's Centre
Hamstel Infant School
Hamstel Road
Southend on Sea
SS2 4PQ

Outreach Site
St Luke's Church Hall
St Luke's Road
Southend on Sea
SS2 4AB

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