

Kilton Children's Centre Community Consultation – Executive Summary

Prepared by: Judith Unell, in association with Lang Research Associates

June 2005

Lang Research Associates
45 Caledon Road
Nottingham
NG5 2NF
0115 841 2844

janet.lang@ntlworld.com

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Nottinghamshire has been given the approval to develop 22 Children's Centres in the county by March 2006, to provide services and support to children, aged from 0-5 years, their parents and carers, based on partnerships between statutory, voluntary and private organisations and the local authority, and involving local parents in the planning, delivery, management and evaluation of their local Children's Centre.
2. All Children's Centres will provide day-care, with a qualified early years teacher leading the curriculum, with some day care places reserved for local families. Other core services are support to child minders, play and early learning for the 0-3s, health and family support, and opportunities to access training and employment.
3. The overall purpose of the consultation in Kilton, as elsewhere, was to inform the community about the forthcoming Children's Centre development, determine the views of parents, carers and partners, to identify knowledge and views of current services and the perceived needs for the future for families; to involve parents, carers and partners in developing future services for the community, and use the output from the consultation to help in the development of the delivery plan for Kilton Children's Centre.
4. The full report discusses the consultation in greater detail; the report, with appendices, is available from Diane Tinklin, Children's Centre Team or Janet Lang, Consultant, or will shortly be available as a pdf file from www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/eydcp/childrenscentres.

Questionnaire completion

5. After initial meetings with partners to explain the purpose and process of the consultation, self-completion questionnaires gathering their views were completed and returned by 3 service providers.
6. Members of the Children's Centre team and local workers conducted interviews with 83 parents and carers, of whom 38 volunteered to take part in the planned focus group, to be held in Kilton two weeks' later. This is an indication of the keen interest shown by parents.
7. Caution should be exercised in comparing percentages, as some questions received low responses.
8. The majority of respondents fell into either the under-29 age group (40%) or 30-39 age group (47%), and 93% were female. Some 84% of respondents had children under 5, and four said that they or their partner were pregnant at the time.
9. 58% stated they were working either full or part-time, and 81% were either married or partnered. The average number of people aged 18+ living in the household was 1.9.

10. Asked about their ethnic background, all respondents who answered the question - the majority of respondents - described their ethnic origin as white.
11. Asked about local services ever used, the highest scoring were:
- GP practice (used by 89% of respondents)
 - Health visitor (86%)
 - Midwife (76%)
12. This was followed by services mainly for children, and informal help with child care from family and friends:
- Nursery in school (66%)
 - Family member (58%)
 - Antenatal sessions (49%)
 - Children's Library Service (48%)
 - Pre-school playgroup (48%)
 - Toddler Group (40%)
 - Friends (28%)
- All other services scored 25 % or less i.e. 1/4 or less of respondents claimed to use the service as listed. (See table 3 in main report)
13. Respondents were asked how useful, and how child-friendly, they had found the service they'd mentioned. From the results, an average (or mean) score was calculated showing which service was most highly rated, with 5 being the highest possible score. (See tables 4 & 5 in main report)
14. The following scores show that these services tended to be very highly rated, along both dimensions but that those targeted more specifically at children were considered more child-friendly than health services. (Average of 4.8 compared to 4.3)
15. Similarly, the average mean score for usefulness for health services is 4.3 compared to a 4.8 average for child-centred services.

	Numbers using service N=83	% Ever used	Mean score* - usefulness	Mean score* - child-friendly
GP practice	74	89	4.4	4.1
Health visitors	71	86	4.0	4.4
Midwife	63	76	4.7	4.6
Nursery in a school	55	66	4.9	4.9
Family member	48	58	4.9	4.9
Antenatal sessions	41	49	4.1	3.9
Children's Library Service	40	48	4.6	4.6
Pre-school playgroup	40	48	4.8	4.8
Toddler Group	33	40	4.4	4.6
Friends	23	28	5.0	4.9

*Of those giving a response, excluding 'Don't know/no response', where 5= Very useful, 4 = quite useful, 3 = neither, 2 = not useful, 1 = not at all useful

16. Comparing the mean scores for usefulness and child-friendliness for these services, it can be seen that the GP practice is viewed as more 'useful' than it is 'child friendly'.
17. Reasons given for perceived shortcomings for any of the services included the lack of a child-friendly play area and toys, negative or patronising attitudes on the part of receptionists, difficulties in talking with the child in the same room, a lack of patience with the child, and long waiting times. (See table 6 in main report). However, these responses were very low.
18. The most helpful service cited by parents for themselves from the list shown was the Midwife (16%), followed by Pre-school Playgroup (14%), Nursery in a School (13%), GP Practice (10%), Toddler Group (6%) and Health Visitor (6%).
19. The most helpful service for the child was said to be Nursery in a school (28%), followed by Pre-school Playgroup (22%), Toddler Group (7%) and Health Visitor (5%).
20. Parents suggested that different times of events would help them to use services more often, followed by better prices and more childcare. Different times were more important for younger parents, while childcare was more of an issue for the older age group. (See table 10 in main report)
21. The parents indicated a preference for receiving information in written form, by newsletter, an article in the local paper or a flyer/information sheet. (See table 11 in main report)
22. Asked what 3 things Kilton would need to make it better for parents with young children, the most frequently suggested ideas focused on play and leisure activities for all children, including older ones, indicative of the concerns of respondents who feel that the lack of facilities for older children impacts on their younger children. More mother and toddler groups and more provision for children to be looked after before and after school and during the school holidays were other priorities stated by the parents. (See table 12)

The Focus Group

23. Eleven parents were subsequently selected at random from the 38 willing parents/carers for the focus group, of whom 4 took part. Although the number of respondents was small, they brought a wide range of perspectives to the discussion. The ages of their children ranged from 7 years to 5 weeks and three of the group members had more than one child.
24. They carried out a mapping of services and activities during the focus group. This showed that awareness of services was uneven within the group. Perhaps not surprisingly, the newest parent in the group expressed most difficulty in finding out what was going on locally.
25. The parents shared a belief in the importance of professional support at all stages of their young children's lives, not just when they were tiny babies. Their experience of receiving such support from midwives and health visitors was patchy; while some had enjoyed an excellent and consistent service, others had had disjointed relationships with a series of different professionals.

26. The mothers who had had more than one child sometimes felt that they were judged by professionals to be experienced and not in need of help whereas, in reality, they continued to need active support for second and subsequent children. They liked the idea of a consistent link person at the health clinic who could offer practical advice.
27. Other parents were also an important source of advice and support. *“Just having someone there that’s been through it”* helped their confidence and morale.
28. The focus group members agreed with the findings from the questionnaire that the school-based nursery and pre-school playgroup were particularly helpful to their children.
29. They agreed that the structured care and education that they offered were important in enabling their children to become more mature, confident about themselves and relaxed with others.
30. They emphasised the valuable role of nursery in preparing children for school and easing the transition from home.
31. At the same time, they had found it was not always easy to find out enough about the different pre-school options available in order to make the right decision for their child.
32. Although the focus group members were clear about the attributes of a child-friendly service, provision in Kilton and the centre of Worksop was generally seen to fall short of these standards. Buses, shops and banks were often not accessible for pushchairs, toilets in the town centre were disgusting and there was nowhere to breast feed.
33. There were also problems of access at local surgeries and clinics, with difficulties getting buggies through doors and into lifts, and a lack of safe places to park them outside. The toys provided in the waiting rooms were not very clean or inviting.

Ideas for Improvements

34. The main ideas for improvements or additional services to the area from this group of parents were focused upon facilities for recreation and play. They wanted:
 - Better parks and play spaces in order to improve the quality of life for parents and children. Existing parks were seen to be shabby, neglected and sometimes dangerous because of discarded needles.
 - Better security to protect outdoor play facilities, preventing them from being trashed by older children.
 - Better swimming and indoor play facilities, including soft play.
35. Many constructive and imaginative ideas were put forward about how the Children’s Centre could help local parents and children. These included:
 - Stay and play sessions for children and their parents;
 - Music-making;
 - Day trips (for example, to farms);

- Advice on practical aspects of child-rearing, such as weaning and potty-training, with leaflets available;
 - Breast-feeding advice and support before and after birth;
 - Advice about good equipment to buy and possibly a swap shop;
 - Ante-natal classes for fathers;
 - Baby yoga and baby massage;
 - Parent and toddler groups in the early evening for working parents, along with Saturday and evening activities;
 - Parents' meetings (with crèche), for 'me' time and an adult chat.
36. At the same time, there were some concerns about aspects of the Children's Centre and its impact upon the immediate neighbourhood.
- Parking.
 - Security of the building, both to protect the children and the building itself at night;
 - The impact on the nursery. Would children in the area who did not use the day care at the Children's Centre be disadvantaged when applying for nursery places?
 - Costs of using Children's Centre facilities.
37. All these concerns were talked through in the group with the focus group co-ordinators, one of whom was a member of the Children's Centre

Partners' Views

38. The views of partners overlapped with those expressed by parents, both in the questionnaire and the focus group.
39. The partners pointed out that some services for families, including healthcare, library and advice services are at a distance from Kilton, involving a drive or a considerable walk.
40. They saw a specific need for more holiday activities for the 8-12 age group.
41. They were optimistic about the impact of the Children's Centre upon the organisation of services for families, anticipating that they would be better co-ordinated, identifiable and accessible, with improved targeting to areas of need.
42. At the same time, they thought that it would be a challenge to get parents to use the Centre and to bring together all interested parties in order to support its development.
43. Their replies indicated an underdevelopment of partnership working, with few regular mechanisms for bringing agencies together to discuss the needs of the area.
44. Their suggestions about what the Children's Centre might offer were:
- resources for parenting skills
 - affordable childcare for parents who want to return to work or study
 - postnatal support groups, especially for breastfeeding support and postnatal depression
 - behaviour management advice

45. Feed-back was obtained separately from three local childminders on the issues raised by the consultation.
46. They had strong concerns about the impact of the Children's Centre upon their own livelihoods and about the range of childcare services available in the area.
47. There was also criticism about its focus on the under-fives, to the exclusion of older children who were currently less well served.