

Oak Tree Children's Centre Community Consultation – Executive Summary

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June 2005

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Nottinghamshire has been given the approval to develop 21 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 Oak Tree, 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 Oak Tree 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 and author of this report, 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 8 service providers.
6. Members of the Children's Centre team and local workers conducted interviews with 105 parents and carers, of whom 37 volunteered to take part in the planned focus group, to be held in Oak Tree the following week. This is an indication of the keen interest shown by parents.
7. While 105 interviews were completed, caution should be exercised in comparing percentages, as some questions received low responses.
8. The majority of respondents fell into the 30-39 age group (54 people or 51%), and were predominantly female (95%). Some 71% of respondents said they had children under 5, while only 7 respondents said that they were pregnant.
9. 44% stated they were working either full or part-time, and 82% were either married or partnered. The average number of people aged 18+ living in the household was 1.2 people.
10. Asked about their ethnic background, all respondents but one described their ethnic origin as white.
11. Asked about local services ever used, the highest scoring were:
 - Midwife (used by 78% of respondents)
 - GP practice (76%)
 - Health visitors (76%)
12. This was followed by services mainly for children, namely:
 - Toddler Group (56%)
 - Family member (48%)

- Pre-school playgroup (47%)
 - Nursery in a school (46%)
 - Children’s Library service (41%)
 - Day nursery (28%)
 - Friends (22%)
 - Speech therapists (20%)
13. All other services scored less than 20% i.e. 1/5 or less of respondents claimed to use the service as listed. (See table 3 in main report)
14. 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 & 6 in main report)
15. The following scores show that these services tended to be very highly rated, but those providing a child-centred service were considered more child-friendly than health services.

	Numbers using service	% Ever used	Mean score* - usefulness	Mean score* - child-friendly	
Midwife	82	78%	4.5	4.3	} Health Services
GP practice	80	76%	3.9	3.6	
Health visitors	80	76%	4.1	4.1	
Antenatal ¹	53	50%	3.9	3.5	
Toddler group	59	56%	4.5	4.8	} Child-centred services
Family member	50	48%	4.6	4.8	
Pre-school playgroup	49	47%	4.5	4.8	
Nursery in a school	48	46%	4.5	4.7	
Children’s Library Service	43	41%	4.4	4.4	
Day Nursery	29	28%	4.8	4.9	
Friends	23	22%	4.6	4.7	
Speech Therapists	21	20%	3.8	4.4	

*Of those giving a response, excluding ‘Don’t knows/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 being ‘not child-friendly’, ‘no toys or play area’, ‘no interest in child’, ‘patronising receptionist’. (See tables 5 & 7 in main report). Responses about lack of child-friendliness were received from over ¼ of respondents, slightly higher than those received about being not useful.
18. The most helpful service cited by parents for themselves from the list shown was Family Member (14%), Toddler Group (13%), Midwife (11%) and Nursery in a school (10%). (See table 9 in main report)

¹ Order changed to include with Health Services

19. The most helpful service for the child was said to be Toddler group (23%), Pre-school playgroup (16%) and Nursery in a school (14%). (See table 10 in main report)
20. Parents suggested that different times of events would help them to use services more often, followed by 'childcare'; 'better price' was more important to respondents aged 30-39 than younger parents (See table 11 in main report)
21. The preference for receiving information tended to be by newsletter or information sheet. (See table 12 in main report)
22. Asked what 3 things Oak Tree 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 and better child care/nurseries and general improvements to the area were the next most frequent requests. (See table 16)

The Focus Group

23. Eleven parents were subsequently selected at random from the 37 willing parents/carers for the focus group, of whom 7 took part.
24. Most respondents had more than one child, and one was also a grandmother of a 15-month-old child, who lives locally too. The respondents carried out a mapping of services and activities during the focus group. This demonstrated a general awareness of available services amongst most of the group, and they were generally aware of services that the partners who responded to their own questionnaire did not, although they may have been thinking over a wider area than the partners.
25. On the whole, the findings reflected the results from the parents' questionnaire, including the call for more information about available services.
26. Several of the group recognised the role that family members have played in support of them and their children, but this can be difficult over time and with subsequent children, which is when the support of external services become very important.
27. This group seemed generally knowledgeable about what is available to them, and were critical of less than child-friendly services.
28. They tended to agree that information was best received in the form of a newsletter by post, although some liked to discuss issues with other mums at toddler groups. However they did recognise that this was more difficult for first time mums who might not yet have got on to the network system. (All of these mums had more than one child, three of whom were in their teens – no child was under 2 years).

Ideas for Improvements

29. The main idea for improvements or additional services to the area from this group of parents was a call for more parks, play areas, play activities, secure adventure play areas and things to do.
30. They were particularly concerned with the need for more places to play for older children, perhaps reflective of the range of ages of children represented in the group.

31. A suggested solution to vandalism problems was a warden system, dedicated youth worker or a policeman on the estate.
32. Two parents mentioned the long waiting times for their daughters to join Rainbows and Brownie groups for their daughters, because of a lack of volunteer leaders. It was suggested that these were the type of groups that they would welcome in the area.
33. Other ideas included:
 - An emergency drop-in care system for family crises
 - A 'friendship stop' for adults as introduced in the school playground and other opportunities for meeting other parents informally
 - A drop-in café for adults
 - More support and practical advice for 2nd time and subsequent parents

Partners' Views

34. The majority of partners were supportive of the advent of the Children's Centre in the area, and their views largely reflected those expressed by parents both in the questionnaire and the focus group.
35. But there did seem to be some disparity between the view of the current lack of facilities, possibly in the neediest part of the ward, amongst some partners, and that of the parents in the focus group, who identified pre-school and toddler groups in the area, although this small group may be more aware of services than many other parents, and may travel around the area to find what they want.
36. However, the requirements for the area as perceived by the partners included the need for more play facilities, the need for more effective communication of services to parents and the need to encourage more use of services by parents.
37. A few highlighted the need for co-operation amongst service providers in the way services are delivered through more effective partnership working, but there was also the emphasis on the need to promote existing good practice to parents.