



Information Advice and Guidance within Children's Centres

The report is for the Agender Project

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Foreword

The merits of this investigation into the provision of Information Advice & Guidance (IAG) within Children's Centres (CC) is to determine;

- Is this service been offered?
- At what level is this service offered?
- By whom is the service offered?
- Does the CC have the resources (staffing or accommodation) to deliver the service?
- Does the CC want this service?

When I was asked to look at 12 of the 72 CC in Birmingham and Solihull, I assumed that the key benefit of the CC having such a holistic core offer would mean that each section of the offer would be addressed equally.

However, this was not the findings from the interviews. If anything what I found was **if** the targets around IAG were actioned, they were being executed in varying ways and at times by staff members with varying levels of training in Advice & Guidance.

What I did find was a number of CC where the leadership felt that the support to the adult service user was as important as other services provided by the CC, and impacted on the delivery of various and relevant services for the children. In these centres IAG was offered to the service user in whatever format that was within the CC capacity, e.g. from trained Advisers, external organisations.

Some of the interviewees spoke of staffing issues, lack of space in the building, and staff members already providing IAG. In the cases where the staff members were providing IAG they were not always NVQ 3 qualified in Advice & Guidance.

For the 1 CC that had the financial and accommodation capacity IAG was delivered and by a qualified Adviser.

Another factor was the lack of appropriate accommodation. Some CC were purpose built or renovated and adopted with all the core delivery in mind. Other CC have either not had their new build started or completed, or require expansion, therefore other issues become the leading agenda item.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all staff members and managers of the CC that gave their valuable time to participate in this process.



Introduction

The purpose of this process was to identify if and what level IAG had been delivered in the CC.

The outcome may help CC to identify if help to deliver the service is needed. External contractors can provide this service at no cost to the CC.

This partnership working would help to deliver the service more effectively working with Matrix accredited organisations with Advisers qualified to the minimum of NVQ 3 in Advice & Guidance.

Early investigations showed that the CC would like this service. The questions asked were therefore designed to take account of the challenges faced by the CC (staffing etc.)

What is a Children Centre?

Below are some of the official definitions.

www.surestart.gov.uk

What is Sure Start and how did it come about?

Sure Start is a government programme, which aims to deliver the best start in life for every child. It brings together early education, childcare, health and family support.

Sure Start covers a wide range of programmes both universal and those targeted on particular local areas or disadvantaged groups within England.

All Sure Start local programmes will eventually become children's centres. Local authorities are responsible for Sure Start settings and children's centres, and the services on offer may vary from area to area.

The first Sure Start local programmes were set up in 1999 as the result of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review.

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk

'Children's Centres provide multi-agency services that are flexible and meet the needs of young children and their families. The core offer includes integrated early learning, care, family support, health services, outreach services to children and families not attending the Centre and access to training and employment advice. Children's Centres will be models of multi-agency and partnership working. At the heart of a centre will be high quality learning and full day care for children from birth'

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk 2 December 2004

Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare sets out the Government's long-term vision to ensure that every child gets the best start in life and to give parents more choice about how to balance work and family life.

Choice and flexibility: *parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life*

Availability: *for all families with children aged up to 14 who need it, an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place that meets their circumstances*

Quality: *high quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce, among the best in the world*

Affordability: *families to be able to afford flexible, high quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs'*



About Equal Agender

www.equal-agender.net

The Agender Partnership has set out to promote positive images of people in non-gender-stereotyped jobs and remove this common misunderstanding. By removing this pre-conceived idea, it is hoped that women and men will become more likely to consider non-traditional roles in their hunt for employment. It is likely that the outcomes of the pilot exercises co-ordinated by Agender will show how pathways into non-gender traditional roles can become easily accessible to women and men.

You are welcome to look around and find out more about Agender. The site offers you a window into the work of the UK partners and links into the transnational working (WINGS). Read about the work of the sub-groups and projects currently in action. Finally, please feel free to contact us for further information and bookmark this page so that you can visit regularly to find out what is new.

Children's Centre Sub-Group

Children's Centres are part of the government's intention to provide co-ordinated, widespread and comprehensive services for young children and families. One of Agender's key objectives is to develop support centres that combine family support such as childcare and health services with advice about jobs, careers and training. This should be delivered by advisers who are experts in higher level and non-traditional careers. The Agender project aims to achieve this through its work with pilot children centres. These are located in some of Birmingham's most deprived areas including Aston, Kingstanding, Saltley, Bartley Green, Washwood Heath and Allen's Croft. Recruitment to the majority of Agender's taster courses and programmes will be through Children's Centres in order to target those women with multiple barriers to training and employment.

About nextstep Birmingham and Solihull - Who we are

www.nextstepbirminghamandsolihull.org.uk

Who we are

Partnership of organisations giving information and advice to adults on learning, work, careers or training through a variety of centres across Birmingham and Solihull, including:

- Voluntary and community organisations
- Connexions Centres
- Job Preparation Providers
- Employment Resource Centres

2 Learning Shops (one in Birmingham Central Library and one in Solihull Central Library). The Learning Shops act as referral centres as well as sources of information and advice. Each centre is responsible for the service it provides, deciding what sort of help it's able to offer the client.



Methodology

Face-to-face interviews carried out in two parts. The interview was structured around a number of themes:

- Related activity at the CC
- Premise capacity
- Staffing and resource capacity
- What sort/level of IAG was on offer
- Current capacity to deliver IAG
- Partnership working and with whom
- If any what sort of help or support the centre needed

Activities started in June 2007.

After making initial contact by letter, followed up by email or telephone, arrangements were made to meet with the managers and or staff member/s whose responsibility it was to address the issue of IAG in the centres.

Onsite interviews started July 2007 and the final interviews completed August 2007.

The format used was standard questions to start with then an open discussion.

It was important to ask standard questions at first to establish the building and staffing capacity of the centre.

The open discussion was to find out;

- Partnership working and with whom
- If any what sort of help or support the centre needed
- Would the centre wish to work with **nextstep** sub contractors

At the end of this discussion, it was explained to the managers/staff members what **nextstep** was about and the service it offered through its sub contractors.

From the questions in the first section, I was able to ascertain the progression of the original 6 centres and the current position of the other centres.



The Centres participating

	Name	Contact	City	Postcode
Pilot	Apna Centre for the Aston Family	Raymond Goodwin	Birmingham	B6 6NS
Pilot	Chelmsley Children Centre	Julie Doyle	Chelmsley Wood	B37 5UK
	Four Oaks Children's Centre	Sue L Bailey	Sutton Coldfield	B74 4RZ
	Keystone Children's Centre	Janet Bonney	Birmingham	B32 2NL
Pilot	Lakeside Children's Family Learning Centre	Janice Young	Birmingham	B23 7UH
Pilot	Mansfield Green Children's Centre	Lyndsey Hellyn	Birmingham	B6 5NH
	New Hall Children's Centre	Adam Cooper	Sutton Coldfield	B75 7NQ
	Norton Hall	Suzanne Knite	Birmingham	B8 1NA
	Shenley Fields Children's Centre	Jackie White	Birmingham	B31 1BS
Pilot	Smiths Wood Children's Centre	Marian Davis	Smiths Wood	B36 0QP
Pilot	Sure Start Doddington Grove Children's Centre	Andy Jenkins	Birmingham	B32 4EL
Pilot	Sure Start Saltley and Ward End Children's Centre	Louise Huckerby	Birmingham	B8 3AA



The questions

Has all building(s) work been completed?

YES / NO

Are you open to the public?

YES / NO

Resources

Do you have a public area within the Children's Centre?

YES / NO

What facilities does this area have (e.g. chairs, tables, computers/computer points, books)?

Is there an identified resources section within the public area for leaflets, reference journals, posters etc?

YES / NO

What information about work, training, learning is currently being provided in your Children's Centre?

Do you have any private rooms that could be used for confidential interviews?

YES / NO

If so, how many?

What facilities do these rooms have (e.g. chairs, tables, computers/computer points, books)?

Services

What services are provided to users at/through the Contact Centre?

Information needs

What sort of things do Children's Centre users generally ask about in terms of the labour market – employment prospects, types of work, jobs, training, qualifications etc?

Do people ask for information covering; *(Please tick all boxes that apply)*

▶ Short term (immediate future, less than 6 mths)

▶ Medium term (information looking at 6 mths – 2 yrs in the future)

▶ Long term (2 yrs plus)

▶ Don't know

What areas are people looking at for jobs / work/ employment / training? *(Please tick all boxes that apply)*

▶ ward area (local area)

▶ Birmingham and Solihull

▶ West Midlands

▶ England/UK

▶ Other countries

▶ Don't know

What formats do you think people would look at /use within the CC? *(Please tick all that apply)*

Journals

Magazines/ Newspapers

Posters

Workshops material

Don't know

Booklets

Leaflets

Verbal/presentation

Other (please specify)

If you have any other comments /ideas, please give details below.



Evaluation

Employment and training advice is one of the achievement targets for all CC:

- All who were interviewed were aware that IAG was one of the CC targets
- Some were addressing the IAG target in various ways
- While almost all the participants had considered the positive impact of having IAG delivered either from the main centre or from another site, not all had either the building or staffing capacity to undertake IAG delivery
- It was accepted by all that there was a need for the IAG to be delivered to a consistent standard
- The need for IAG differed depending on the geographical area and the service users
- All interviewees were aware of the need to address the issue of IAG delivery
- The access to leaflets, booklets, computer access, private room for interviews varied from CC to CC

First section of the interview

This followed a standard question and answer session. This worked well to find out exactly what was on offer for each CC. The original intention was to make comparisons from one centre to another, and perhaps pass on good practices. This was not the case. Through this session, I found comparisons were not appropriate. Each CC was different in their capacity, the geographical area they serve, or both.

In this session, I also found out what would aid or impede the delivery of IAG e.g. staffing, building capacity or even the need of the service user.

Need has been included because one CC in particular is a virtual centre with many satellite sites. This CC covered a very affluent area where the vast majority of the community was not in need of a centre providing IAG in the same way as other communities would need or use CC providing IAG. Out of the wide area this CC covered only a very small percentage of the community may have need of the IAG provision.

Second section of the interview

Open discussion allowed the interviewees to inform on differences within their CC due to either, building, staffing capacity, and or the needs of the service users.

It also brought out information on:

- What each CC was doing to address the IAG needs of their centre
- Partnership working to address this issue and with whom

From the information gathered through the interviews and discussions, it was realised that each CC knew what they had to do in reference to IAG delivery. Nevertheless, not all had the capacity to address it immediately or by themselves.



Advantages of partnership working

Various challenges facing CC means that other core delivery requirements may take precedence to the effective delivery of IAG. Contracting out the work will mean that the IAG targets are met.

There are skills and information shortages within the CC that affected the level of IAG delivery in some centres. Therefore, working in partnership will enable delivery of IAG by NVQ 3 qualified Advisers from Matrix accredited organisations.

Using sub contractors will mean that the delivery of IAG would be of a consistent quality but with no added cost to the CC.

Recommendations

IAG is potentially a very important function for the CC, partnership working with **nextstep** and Agender in the provision of qualified Advisers to work with the CC would:

- ◆ Raise awareness of the availability of trained Advisers from Matrix accredited organisations, monitored by the **nextstep** team with the remit to work within the guidelines of the CC
- ◆ Develop effective partnership working which is part of the CC, Agender and **nextstep**'s remit
- ◆ Aid the delivery of IAG by a very diverse group of organisations reflecting the make up of the communities in Birmingham and Solihull
- ◆ Require accurate recording of each session enabling the delivers and receivers of the service to know the effectiveness of the service
- ◆ Create a more joined up approach to the effective support of the service user by where possible linking the Job Centre Plus provision with **nextstep**'s. This should provide a service where the service user through Job Centre Plus can find out about benefits, local jobs etc and related information through the **nextstep** sub contractors provide the training and or employment advice
- ◆ Provide a matching of sub contractors and CC
- ◆ Introduce sub contractors to relevant CC and visa versa
- ◆ Encourage a sharing of good practices between CC, sub contractors and main providers of IAG type services within the CC
- ◆ Ensure the sharing of IAG information and resources