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**Children’s Centres need YOU!**

**North area priorities consultation 2014**

During May 2014 North Shropshire area Children’s Centre Services consulted with parents and carers about what our priorities for 2014 – 2015 should be. A questionnaire was distributed through Children’s Centre groups and activities across North Shropshire and via the Children’s Centre website as a Survey Monkey questionnaire to encourage parents and carers to have their say in how we take services forward.

We asked parents and carers to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following priorities:

* To increase the number of families that use Sure Start Children’s Centres
* To make sure that families get extra support when they need it most
* To support babies and children’s learning and development, and help parents, carers and others to do this
* To involve you more in developing Children’s Centre services to meet the needs of those of your community
* To encourage healthy lifestyles and support families to keep themselves safe and healthy

**Results**

We received 64 paper responses and 22 on-line responses, providing a total of 86 responses from parents and carers in North Shropshire.

* 19% of responses came from families accessing services in the Oswestry Children’s Centre area (Oswestry, St Martins, Gobowen)
* 8% in South Oswestry area (Morda)
* 15% in Ellesmere and Wem area (Whittington, Ellesmere, Wem)
* 20% in Whitchurch area
* 3% in Market Drayton area

35% of respondents did not specify in which area they access services.

We did not ask for a postcode for the Survey Monkey responses so these cannot be mapped.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with our priorities?**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Increase families using Children’s Centres | 65% | 33% | 1% | 1% |  |
| Support families when they need it most | 83% | 16% | 1% |  |  |
| Support baby and children’s learning and development | 83% | 15% | 2% |  |  |
| Involve you more in developing services | 49% | 36% | 14% | 1% |  |
| Encourage safe and healthy lifestyles | 75% | 24% | 1% |  |  |

This shows that parents/carers place our priorities in the following order of importance to them and their families:

1. To make sure that families get extra support when they need it most
2. To support babies and children’s learning and development, and help parents, carers and others to do this
3. To encourage healthy lifestyles and support families to keep themselves safe and healthy
4. To increase the number of families that use Sure Start Children’s Centres
5. To involve you more in developing Children’s Centre services to meet the needs of those of your community

We asked that if participants disagreed with any of the priorities to tell us why. The responses were as follows:

* **Involve you more in developing services** – *“Just never really been approached about it. I also feel services already provided are fantastic.”* (Ellesmere parent/carer)
* **Involve you more in developing services** - *“Involving parents should have a specific focus. Children’s Centres should be open to all parents.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* **Increase families using Children’s Centres** - *“Closing centres will save money provided it’s done lawfully.”* (On-line response)

We asked if participants had any suggestions for other priorities to tell us. The responses were as follows:

* *“I have noticed the children’s centre operates a young mums group. How about an over 40’s mums group?”*
* *“I think it’s really important to keep open all summer.”* (Ellesmere parent/carer)
* *“Picnics outside in sunny weather. More baking activities.”* (Ellesmere parent/carer)
* *“We really enjoy the sessions. Two sessions a week is lovely.”* (Ellesmere parent/carer)
* *“We really enjoy the sessions at Ellesmere. The staff are very friendly and make us welcome.”* (Ellesmere parent/carer)
* *“A fantastic service.”*
* *“Better information about opening times etc. Not helpful to turn up and find centre is closed especially as you have a website.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“Childcare for 2 year olds. I don’t mind paying a small fee for this for my child to do preschool learning perhaps 9 – 12?”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“Consider provision in St Martins when school moves. Ensure there is safe off road parking to get kids out of cars. Ensure continuity for children at new centre with same staff who are wonderful with the children.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“More playgroups available. More families attending Sure Start. Childcare more available in the village for 2 year olds.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“Very important to keep the Sure Start in our village.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“Sure Start is excellent and needs to stay in the village.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“Making sure that St Martins certain has the necessary facilities at the new location and that there is suitable parking there.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“I would like the Sure Start facilities to continue when they relocate to St Martins School – perhaps a rhyme time or story time session at the school (library area). Sufficient parking. Perhaps a “Lets Cook” course using the new kitchen facilities.”* (St Martins parent/carer)
* *“Budgeting.”* (Whitchurch parent/carer)
* *“As a grandmother I think you are doing a marvellous job.”* (Whitchurch parent/carer)
* *“Budgeting.”* (Whitchurch parent/carer)
* *“I am very happy with the service. My daughter has come on leaps and bounds since joining. More courses on child development and how to help them learn at home.”* (Whitchurch parent/carer)
* *“I find Sure Start very welcoming when I bring my grandson and very, very supportive and helpful.”* (Whitchurch parent/carer)
* *“Offer a very valued service.”* (Whitchurch parent/carer)
* *“It would be great to use the children’s centre for birthday parties even if this meant having a member of staff from children’s centres present. The play pals group is so so so very valuable. Amanda has done a fantastic job setting this up and inviting guests to the group sessions. This is so very beneficial to parents of children with additional needs. Please keep this group running.”* (On-line response)
* *“There needs to be more activities within the community getting people together to do things (this is a general suggestion for the whole of Wem not just the children’s centre)”* (On-line response)
* *“Increased uptake is of little benefit if the service don’t really make a difference – give first priority to quality of what is offered before trying to get more through the door. Also involving the public is not always the most effective route: look for evidenced based approaches that improve outcomes, not just meeting uniformed whims of the public.”* (On-line response)
* *“Huge need to support parents to develop their understanding and effectiveness of how they support their children’s learning and development.”* (On-line response)
* *“To continue to provide the excellent service it already delivers (particularly in Wem)”* (On-line response)
* *“Support mums when they need it most in the first few weeks not only with feeding whether it be breast or formula but with post natal depression. I know if I had had the support I wouldn’t of got to the stage I did. I feel Wem especially do not have enough support for PND.”* (On-line response)

In total 27 respondents provided these additional comments. Although the consultation was not conducted to establish user satisfaction 45% of the respondents who provided additional comments expressed overall satisfaction with the service that they receive from Children’s Centres in North Shropshire.

**How will Children’s Centres respond to the findings?**

* Continue to ensure that families receive the right support from the most appropriate service at the time they need it most. Through the Shropshire Council Early Help Strategy this is a priority that will focus all Early Help Services for children, young people and their families from pregnancy to 19 years
* Provide more themed sessions and courses to support parents and carers with their understanding of their children’s learning and development. This will include:
  + Increasing the number of Understanding Your Child courses and workshops provided across the area, including one for working parents in an evening and one for CWD and additional needs. Workshops will be offered to 24U settings – initial workshop at 24U setting delivered in July at Whitchurch Pre-school nursery. Further workshops planned for Kid Zone and Oswestry Methodist Pre-school
  + Development and roll out of three Book Start themed sessions during Stay & Play groups across the area
  + Roll out of messy play workshops for parents and carers and their children. Initial workshop delivered in Market Drayton in July 2014. Messy Play events happen during the school holidays for all the family to enjoy
  + Development and roll out of ‘Outdoor Learning’ themed sessions across the area. These have started in Market Drayton in August and at the Play Pals group in Morda
  + Introduce programme of ‘Chatter Matters’ sessions to be delivered monthly at Morda Play Pals group to support speech and language development and communication
  + Develop ‘Child’s Play’ workshop lesson plan for support workers to roll out on demand
  + Continue to provide Children’s Centre cluster events with local providers with specific EYFS focus – end of EYFS Profile data will inform activities and events in each area
  + Increase number of transition sessions in Children’s Centres to support children’s transitions into pre-school, nursery and school. These already happen on a monthly basis in Market Drayton and Whitchurch through ‘free flow’ between nursery and Children’s Centre Stay & Play
  + Continue to provide ‘Parents Guide to the EYFS’ (from Foundation Years website) to parents and carers to support their understanding and provide suggestions for how to support learning in the home and share child observations with parents and carers
* Continue to encourage healthy lifestyles and support families to keep themselves safe and healthy:
  + Development and roll out of ‘Food Glorious Food’ workshops for families across the area during Autumn Term
  + Development and roll out of ‘Let’s Stay Safe Together’ workshops for families across the area during Autumn Term
  + Development of E-Safety themed sessions for parents/carers and young children which will be rolled out in Stay & Play groups across the area during Autumn Term
  + Continue to deliver themed sessions during groups to support accident prevention, healthy eating and oral health, in response to identified needs and to support National campaign
  + All staff have attended a Help to Quit smoking cessation briefing and will undertake NHS Smoke Free Homes on-line training to support them in referring parents and carers for specialist support. Resources are available to enable staff to provide themed smoking cessation sessions within Children’s Centre groups where there is an identified need for this
  + Deliver healthy lunchbox sessions in partnership with local schools and pre-school settings. Initially being piloted in Market Drayton area due to obesity rates of children at reception and end of year 6
  + Link with health visiting team (especially in Wem) to look at services for parents with Post Natal Depression. Ensure that all Children’s Centres have Health Visiting Triage telephone number and PANDAS help-line number available for parents and carers
  + Increase number of Freedom Programme’s delivered across the area and provide 1:1 support where required
* Continue to increase the number of families that use Sure Start Children’s Centres through the further development of the Children’s Centre web site and digital media, including Facebook, to advertise our service. This will also be useful for updating parents and carers of changes to group times or inform of group closures due to unforeseen circumstances. We will continue to provide groups and activities during school holiday periods with a reduced timetable (due to staffing capacity)
* Continue to involve families more in developing Children’s Centre services to meet the needs of those in each local community through the development of Children’s Centre Parent Representative Boards and Parent Champions and through the promotion of volunteering opportunities, all of which are linked to an evidence based engagement approach. This could grow into parents and carers delivering peer group sessions and support e.g. groups for parents aged over 40, in line with identified local need. Through these developments, and parents continued involvement in Children’s Centre Advisory Boards, greater clarity will be provided to families in how they can be more involved in their local community.

**Feedback to specific comments:**

* Budgeting courses in Whitchurch – these have been offered with no take up. Further date to be planned for Autumn Term 2014
* Community events in Wem – Children’s Centre Co-ordinator will feed back the request through Shropshire Council Locality Commissioning project and to Community Enablement Officer
* Hire of Children’s Centres for children’s parties – this is not currently being considered, but may be explored in the future
* Provision of childcare – There are no plans for Children’s Centres in Shropshire to provide childcare, other than the crèches that support adult learning courses. We work closely with local Early Years settings to ensure that there are sufficient quality childcare and early education places in the area. In September 2014 the number of children aged 2 who are eligible for a free early education place (24U) will increase from 20% of 2 year olds to 40% (an eligibility criteria does apply). Information is available for parents about 24U in all of the Children’s Centres
* Facilities at St Martins School – We have been working in partnership with the school to ensure that the facilities for Children’s Centres and families with young children are maintained to the standard that we require. From September 2014 our Stay & Play session will open at the new site and will continue to be staffed by the same support worker to provide continuity to families. Considerations for parking will be fed back to the school, however most schools in Shropshire operate a no parking restriction.

A poster providing feedback will be displayed in every Children’s Centre area base in North Shropshire (*Appendix 1*) and the outcomes of the consultation will feed into Team Action Plans.

Sharon Graham

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