

1.0 Background

The Project has been operational since June 2013. In the period June – August '13 the project reviewed relevant services, both in the Wirral and UK-wide, to scope how it could deliver to the brief of developing an intervention which tested the findings of the report The Foundation Years (2010). The purpose of this intervention is to develop a model of work with families from the antenatal period until children reach school, in a way which will reduce the developmental gap that emerges in the first child's first five years, and which is associated with poverty. As a requirement of Wirral MBC funding a Business Case was developed and submitted in September '13. A second WMBC requirement was to engage with 30 Birkenhead families; over 40 women, whose babies were born in the last 2 years, were approached to take part in a survey of families' experiences of services supporting them during pregnancy until the child was 1 month old. From autumn '13 we began delivering training and commissioning pilot services. The emphasis in the early period was on recruiting volunteers, preparation and training and piloting monitoring strategies. 4 groups/support services were operational from January – March 2014.

The Birkenhead Project is funded by WMBC, Garfield Weston Foundation, Wirral GP Clinical Commissioning Group and the Tudor Trust. The project forms one element in the wider work of the Foundation Years Trust. The Children's Trust is designated to receive quarterly reports from the project and this forms the first quarterly report.

2.0 Overview of the Project's activities April – August 2014

The Project is commissioning and directly delivering services which will impact on 3 factors which have a significant impact on school readiness: the home learning environment; parental mental health and well-being; and parental warmth and sensitivity. The services which have run in this period (April – August 2014) are as follows:

2.1 Bump-Start: one-to-one peer support for women from the 20th week of pregnancy until the child is 6 months old. Ran February – August 13, delivered by Home-Start Wirral: target 20 families: actual 12 *see milestone report for comments in relation to referrals.*

2.2 Side-by-Side: group play support for parent and special needs child, with one-to-one volunteer support. Ran March – August '14, delivered by Home-Start Wirral: target 5 families; actual 5. Addresses support for the home learning environment.

2.3 Read it Together @ (RITA): parent and child group with supported parent and children reading together, followed by adult reading while children have play session. Ran February – August -

- **RIT@Ferries** April – July, target 6 families; actual 6 adults, 8 children
- **RIT@Priory** June – July, target 6 families; actual 5 adults, 5 children

Addresses support for the home learning environment and parental mental health and well-being.

2.4 Home Play: one-to-one play in the home with child and parent(s) to encourage those who feel unable to attend groups, because of low self-confidence or practical obstacles to accessing services. Aims are to firstly encourage play in the home and subsequently to

support parents to access group services. Ran May – August '14, delivered by the project team: target 8 families; actual - 8 referrals, 3 supported; 3 pending and two refusals. Addresses support for the home learning environment and parental mental health and wellbeing.

2.5 Parents Early Education Partnership (PEEP) group: group parent and baby/toddler structured play, at St James Centre. Ran May - June, delivered by the North Birkenhead Development Trust: target 12 families; actual 17 parents; 17 children. Addresses support for the home learning environment.

2.6 Fun Tasters: group parent and child activities to develop models of 'fun' activities which can be easily reproduced in the home. Addresses support for the home learning environment. Ran July- August, delivered by Little World Nursery and project team: target 10 families; actual 6 adults, 13 children. Addresses support for the home learning environment.

2.7 Reflective Parenting: group programme for pregnant mothers/partners before and after birth. Training and multi-agency briefings February. To be delivered by Home-Start Wirral: target 8 families; actual – unsuccessful to date in recruiting sufficient numbers to form a group at same stage of pregnancy. *See milestone report for comments in relation to referrals.* Addresses support for parental warmth and sensitivity.

3.0 Monitoring and outcomes

Poverty indicators are being collected: no member of household in paid work; living in social housing/with parents/in rented housing; no access to car. These were chosen as externally recognised poverty indicators which are also less intrusive questions for families. Obstacles to collection include family withholding information; reticence on part of provider to collect information and the logistics of form filling if limited staff are available. Mitigation: over the first year we have progressively addressed these obstacles with 3 of our 4 providers (delivering all services in this section) - the 4th did not require help.

A variety of outcome measures are being developed. The type and relevance of measures is related to the type of support on offer. When longer-term relationships are built with families (e.g. Bump-Start) it is possible to use more generic measures which can be assessed over time. For groups running for a term or a few weeks we can only look at short term specific changes such as whether a family reports reading more with their child or taking a more active part in play. These are not the kind of outcomes which have a great deal of credibility externally ('parent reported measures') but they are the small steps which can be used at the pilot/development stage. Where groups do not sustain any regular attendance from parents even these are meaningless. We can collect parent or child satisfaction information but not outcomes. We can provide reports on these measures but they will be a series of different measures and will be developed progressively as part of developing the prototype.

4.0 Longer term developments

- a) **Developing a model or prototype:** the pilots detailed above are designed to explore the issues around the viability and effectiveness of certain activities: will professionals refer to these services? If not, is this because they do not value these activities or because there are practical obstacles to referring? Do parents value them and attend/accept support? If not, what changes could we make? Where are the best places to run services to reach the target group of parents? How do we avoid groups

being colonised by more confident and affluent parents? Who are the best agencies to deliver the services? Are the groups effective in achieving the aims we have set?

To answer this last question we are testing a number of monitoring and evaluation strategies and seeking advice from experts nationally. We are also looking at the evidence from antenatal parent support programmes UK-wide as there appears to be a pattern of low recruitment which we are seeking to understand.

- b) **Commissioning external evaluation:** the project is scoping a variety of evaluation strategies prior to commissioning an evaluation.
- c) **From prototype to programme:** the Foundation Years Trust is currently reviewing the length of programme it seeks to run and the financial and fund raising implications of this decision.

4.0 Request: guidance on the level of detailed reporting required would be helpful.

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Appendices:

1. **Milestone report**
2. **Case studies**