

PARENTS GET INVOLVED IN THE GREET'S GREEN CHILDREN'S CENTRE

FUNDED BY: A total of £67,000 has been made available to the Parents & Communities project - £48,000 by Greet's Green Partnership and £19,000 by Sandwell Council.

PROJECT BACKGROUND: Following the launch of the Greet's Green Children and Families Programme and the subsequent Children's Centre, it was decided to employ Community Involvement Workers to help engage and involve local parents.

The aims were to both promote services at the Children's Centre and involve parents in the running of them. This would ensure maximum take up and benefit of the services on offer while, at the same time, encouraging ownership, participation, and responsiveness to local needs.

The scheme was launched in January 2006 and was funded for three years. The Community Involvement Workers have now finished but their valuable work is being

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Local mum, Lisa Mannion, with her daughter Katie



The fathers' group at the Children's Centre enables dads to spend more time with their children and give mums a break.

absorbed as part of the continuing remit of other staff at the Children's Centre and, as such, will be sustainable.

WHAT IS IT? The Greets Green Children's Centre is a purpose-built community facility funded by Greets Green Partnership and Sandwell Council's Children's Services, and managed by a partnership of agencies.

The centre, in the grounds of Ryders Green Primary School, provides a wide range of services for families living in and around the Greets Green area of West Bromwich with children aged 0 to 5 under the three themes of Family Support, Family Learning and Family Health.

Services include advice on benefits, housing and legal matters, Stay and Play and Early Years Services, baby clinics, maternity support, family support, opportunities for training and volunteering, child home safety activities and advice, ante natal and post natal support. There is also a 51-place day nursery managed by the YMCA.

The Involving Parents & Communities project was designed to ensure maximum awareness and take up of services by local people and encourage their involvement in the centre.



This was initially achieved through the Community Involvement Workers and is now being continued through the work of all staff at the centre. The role of the Community Involvement Workers was to promote the centre by going out and meeting people, assessing their needs and inviting them to take part in day to day activities and sessions at the centre, and to develop new activities based on local needs.

The workers also provided one to one support for parents, identifying any particular issues, such as housing, social or financial concerns, and would signpost people appropriately to the professionals and services best able to help them.

If, for example, someone needed help from the housing department but hadn't the confidence to go on their own, a worker would go with them to assist.

As the two Community Involvement Workers were both Asian, they were also able to help many people whose first language might not have been English, and in other cases would organise the appropriate support and interpretation services.

In addition, one worker was male and the other female, therefore overcoming any gender sensitive issues. Another key aim of their work was to recruit parents to the Board of the Children's Centre to give local people a direct input into its work.

Acting Centre Manager, Flo Reynolds, says: "Our main focus is to give the child under 5 the best start in life. It's little things which don't sound like a lot but which make such a big difference to people's lives – if the parents' lives become that much easier, their children's lives become easier too.

"The point we try to get across to parents is that they are the key to their child's success. Most people are good parents - we're trying to help them be brilliant parents and have brilliant children, and help them appreciate their children and enjoy their family.

"We take a holistic approach encompassing health, social, education and economic issues. We need to look at not just the child and the parent but also at that person as a whole and as a part of the community."



Acting Centre Manager Flo Reynolds with Acting Deputy Manager Glynis Webb.





Baby Massage sessions at the Children's Centre are very popular.

ACHIEVEMENTS: Commenting on the Involving Parents & Communities project, Flo explains: “The concept was brilliant and we did manage to get parents on board. We supported them and helped them move on. It was a very successful project.”

While promoting the centre was not a problem, the community engagement part of the remit took time. The workers had to overcome any mistrust and build foundations for effective working relationships with local people.

The work of the project has proved successful in not only increasing the numbers of local people using the Children's Centre, but also in directly involving them in its work. Six parents have participated directly by taking places on the Children and Families Partnership Board.

Flo adds: “The centre is well used now and just over one third of the parents who come here were recruited through the Community Involvement Workers, while others came through health visitors and word of mouth.

“The work of the Community Involvement Workers is now being disseminated amongst the other members of staff and we have two new Family Support Workers who will pick up the bulk of this work, ensuring it is sustainable for the future.”



PROJECT IN ACTION: Services offered by the Children's Centre which have seen an enhanced take up by local people following the Involving Parents & Communities project include:

- Stay and Play Sessions – with a focus on parents enjoying their child through playing together. There are three sessions each week at the centre and there have also been others at Lodge, Lyng and Guns Village primary schools.
- Family Support – helping families who require assistance with problem resolution by working in partnership with other agencies such as the Credit Union. Issues include housing, benefits, financial, education or training.
- Positive Parenting – helping parents to look at how they parent. This includes dealing with behaviour, anger, truancy, and managing older siblings who can impact on the whole family and hence its younger children as well.
- Health Visitors – offering health check ups and baby clinics.
- Early Years Workers – including baby massage and baby yoga sessions.
- JobCentre Plus – where the centre can refer parents with an interest in returning to work.
- Volunteer programme – for parents looking to get involved in the community and enhance their own skills and confidence.
- Day Nursery on site run by the YMCA.
- Community Arts Programme.
- Community Events – including open days, sports days and family activities in the school holidays, where all ages can come along and have fun together.
- Cookwell – an opportunity for parents to learn more about healthy eating.
- Fathers' Group – enabling dads to spend more time with their children and give mums a break.



Parents have enjoyed taking part in Cookwell sessions at the Children's Centre run by the Early Years Workers.





Mum, Lisa Mannion and her daughter Katie are regulars at the Stay and Play sessions at the Children's Centre.

Centre transformed my life

Lisa Mannion is just one of the local parents who has benefited from the work of the Community Involvement Workers.

Lisa, aged 29, who's mum to one year old Katie and is expecting her second child in March 2009, says getting involved with activities at the Children's Centre transformed her life and that of her newborn daughter. She's so pleased with the impact the Children's Centre has had on her own life, that she's now putting something back into the local community to help other parents.

Lisa explains: "I had my daughter in 2007 and the only other person I knew with a child in the area at the time was my next-door neighbour who had a toddler.

"My health visitor told me I could get my daughter weighed at the Children's Centre and that was the start for me. I found out about the baby clinic and the Stay and Play sessions and started going along when Katie was only about six weeks old."

Lisa says that getting involved in activities at the Children's Centre helped her to gain confidence in herself and as a parent. She says: "There was one occasion early on when I was supposed to be going along to the Stay and Play session with my neighbour and she was ill. We were going on a trip to an indoor children's activity centre so I decided to go along on my own with my daughter.



“That’s when I really started to build my confidence and meet new people, and after that there was no going back.”

These days Lisa, who lives just across the road from the centre with her partner, Martin Waterhouse, goes to Stay and Play sessions at the Children’s Centre two afternoons a week, as well as continuing to attend the baby clinic. In addition, she attends Stay and Play sessions at Lodge and Guns Village primary schools.

She says: “I’ve got friends at all the different sessions we go to. I enjoy meeting up with them and Katie enjoys interacting with the other children.”

Workers at the Children’s Centre proved an enormous support when her daughter was diagnosed with a milk allergy at four months. Lisa explains: “It was a very stressful time and the Children’s Centre was wonderful. They helped me to find all the information I needed and they provided a shoulder to cry on too. I was very grateful indeed for all the support.”

Now Lisa is working with other parents to set up a parent support group so that she can help others in the community. “Sometimes it can be quite daunting for people to talk to a member of staff but they’d be happy to talk to another parent who’s gone through the same thing as them,” says Lisa.

“It’s something we’re very keen to get up and running during 2009 as we think it’d be very well received. The Children’s Centre has really helped me – now I want to help others.”

FACTS AND FIGURES: Figures show the impact of the Involving Parents & Communities project has included:

- 209 young people have benefited from projects promoting personal and social development
- 208 people have attended a health related event
- 6 parents have joined the Children and Families Partnership Board
- 1,043 parents and children have attended family days at the centre
- 236 new parents have been registered to the programme
- 232 local people have gained access to new facilities

Contact: For further information contact Flo Reynolds, Acting Manager, Greets Green Children’s Centre, on 0121 612 5131.





The 'Saturdays' session runs every Saturday morning at the Children's Centre.

Greets Green Partnership was awarded £56 million in 2000 to deliver a 10 year regeneration programme under the Government's New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative. It has funded over 340 projects throughout the area, covering community services, crime & community safety, health, housing & urban form and jobs & skills. The Partnership area, which is adjacent to West Bromwich Town Centre, is home to just over 12,400 residents living in 4,900 households.

For permission to publish this case study and to request photographs, please call Brian McKinstrie, Greets Green Partnership's Communications & PR Manager on freephone 0800 953 0215 or email brian_mckinstrie@sandwell.gov.uk



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