

The Spinney Children's Centre

The Key to Success

Background

Guildford Grove Primary School was created ten years ago following the closure of two failing schools in the local area. The new leadership team were determined that the new school would take a holistic approach involving the whole family and the community. They ensured that a multi agency approach would be taken and forged good links with agencies working in the area.

When the opportunity came to bid for a children's centre, this fitted in with their ethos and they clearly understood the benefits this would bring to children and the community in general.

The Spinney Children's Centre has been open for nearly 3 years. The reach area served by the centre is the 2nd most deprived area of Surrey. In addition to Family Services and Support, we provide child care for children aged 3 – 5 years which is integrated completely with the Foundation Unit in the school.

After 9 months, the centre took part in a Pilot Ofsted inspection and was graded Good. In the Annual Conversation with Surrey Early Years this year (2011), the centre achieved Outstanding in all areas.

Main Factors Affecting Success

Aims and Vision

The centre has clear aims and vision which were developed jointly with our partners. *'The vision for developing the centre as a focal point for the community, the ambition to provide high quality services and the passion shown for the work of the centre by staff are outstanding'* (Pilot Ofsted, November 2009)

Skilled Staff

The centre has a commitment to employing staff of high quality who will be effective in their role. Outreach staff are expected to provide a high level of support to a number of families and must have a level of qualification and experience which enables them to do this. It is also important to recognise that, as Children's Services thresholds rise, the expectation on outreach workers is growing. However, they are not trained as social workers and do not have the professional backing to carry out this role. They should not be expected to carry this level of responsibility. This is an area that required careful monitoring in the future.

Our staff have complimentary skills and experience which provides parents with a wealth of support. Training has been undertaken to enhance the skills already available and to widen the support we can provide. We have used funding from external sources to fund particular posts such as a Teenage Parents Outreach Worker to focus on this target group.

The centre has ensured that other professional agencies have a good understanding of the role of the outreach workers from the beginning. This allayed any fears about duplication of role (the Nursery Nurse role and Outreach Worker role initially sounded quite similar) and enabled professionals to work together with families with a good understanding of the capabilities of each person. A high level of trust has developed between the agencies and the children's centre which has enhanced the effectiveness of multi agency working.

Effective Multi Agency Working and Innovative Approaches

This is key to successful children's centres. Co-location is not essential, does not necessarily lead to better links, and is difficult to implement in many cases, but providing there is real joint working, trust and understanding between the agencies, the best possible support can be provided for families.

It is highly effective to have a named social worker and health visitor whom we can contact with queries when necessary. This support enables more informed decisions to be made and plans of action to be discussed. This enhances the joint work with the other professionals in the agencies.

Potential gaps in services are discussed at meetings with service managers to enable our services to support the families by plugging these gaps. An example of this includes the New Baby Group which came about as a result of the Health Visitors no longer being able to run post natal groups. The New Baby Group involves several different agencies such as outreach workers, health visitors, nursery nurses, early years practitioners, St John's Ambulance, Family Information Services and others jointly facilitating information sessions for parents with their first baby.

The manager has also visited the Contact Centre to discuss encouraging families who are referred but do not meet thresholds to go to the children's centre for support. This is another potential gap but is hampered by information sharing protocols.

Universal Services

Universal services are vital to the success of the children's centre. They ensure that there is no stigma attached to attending a children's centre and enable targeted families to be identified who would otherwise have been missed, particularly where the need is more hidden or the need has developed after the frequency of health visitor input has reduced. Referrers sometimes find parents are more comfortable attending a universal service initially while they get to know the staff at the centre.