Changing Lives
Improving Outcomes

The impact of early intervention in North East Lincolnshire Children’s Centres

Executive Summary. December 2012

The findings of this research report highlight the personal impact that early intervention delivered through Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire can have on children, parents and families. The evidence presented shows that, if judged against their core purpose, Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire do have an impact on:

- child development and school readiness,
- parenting aspirations, self-esteem and skills, and
- child and family health and life chances.

In addition, Children’s Centres make a contribution to achieving the goals of the Local Authority’s own poverty strategy, they contribute to economic regeneration, increase participation in adult learning and develop positive citizens. This reinforces the notion that the impacts of early intervention with families are potentially far reaching— as the Office for National Statistics note there is a “close relationship between work, income and wealth and well-being” and this relationship “is central to economic and social issues at the neighbourhood level”.

This research study highlights the essential contribution Children’s Centres, as hubs of service provision suited to the needs of the communities they serve, make in changing the lives of people in North East Lincolnshire and in combating long term multiple disadvantage. The development of an outcomes map sets out short term, medium term and long term outcomes and shows how achievement of long term outcomes is dependent on achieving the medium term outcomes which in turn are dependent on the achievement of short term outcomes. The outcomes map also shows how achievement of the longer term outcomes facilitates achievement of short term outcomes resulting in a virtuous circle of achievement.

The model for estimating the return on investment backs up the moral argument for supporting Children’s Centres with a financial argument. It suggests that for every pound invested at least three pounds and forty pence of value is created. A more personal approach to ROI is also highlighted in the report and shows just how huge the potential return from effective early intervention can be when ‘knock-on’ effects are also considered.

What is required now is the strength of character, in those that determine public policy and public expenditure, to stand up for an approach - early intervention - and a means of delivery - Children’s Centres - that works.

HEALTH

Parents spoken to during this study report an impact, not only on their own and their child’s health, but also on the health of their partners and other children in the family. It is also clear that the opportunity afforded by Children’s Centre activities to ‘get out of the house’ and to build social networks plays an important role in improving the general well-being and mental health of parents.

Somewhat perversely the effectiveness of Children’s Centres may lead to higher demand on services as more people are identified and signposted to the appropriate service, thus statistical data for some health outcomes may appear to increase, for example the number of females accessing mental health services. Indeed, Speech and Language Therapy and the Family Resource Service reported increased demand but recognise that this results in a more effective preventative approach to service delivery.
EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The kind of ‘second chance’ education provided for parents by Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire is very important in helping the government achieve its goal of social mobility. The support offered, including free or heavily subsidised childcare as well as free or subsidised enrolment costs, is essential to enable access to education and was cited by interviewees as a significant reason why they were able to undertake learning. The time taken to establish parents learning needs and their life goals was also highly valued and helped to provide a clear progression route. Importantly, for many parents who had previously attempted to go to college, the ‘human scale’ of the provision on offer through Children’s Centres was extremely important – especially for those who reported low self-esteem. Indeed Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire may be considered exemplars of the Human Scale Education Movement’s belief in the ‘humanity of scale’ and the ‘primacy of relationships’ in informing the design of public sector services.\(^1\)

The contribution of Children’s Centres in improving the economic position of some families by increasing female, particularly maternal employment may be especially significant as it offers “a clear route to reducing poverty and improving outcomes for children in low-income families”\(^2\).

There is strong quantitative and qualitative evidence of the impact Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire have in relation to the educational attainment of parents who attend the centres and also some evidence of impact on the wider family, including older siblings and spouses/partners. There is also an increasing body of positive data showing the impact on children’s education in the borough at Early Years Foundation stage and at KS1. Improved attendance rates for children receiving Free School Meals (FSM) at primary schools may indicate a shift in parental aspirations and attitudes towards education.

PARENTING SKILLS

It is thought that effective parenting can counter the impact of socio-economic disadvantage during the early years of a child’s life. It is therefore important to understand if Children’s Centres successfully change parenting behaviours. Evidence reported by parents clearly indicates that Children’s Centres help them to improve their parenting skills including interacting with children, providing nurturing and supportive environments, and modelling appropriate behaviours. Children’s Centres also enable parents to build informal peer to peer support networks, thus creating sustainable advice networks that may outlast their involvement with Children’s Centre activities.

Whilst it is harder to draw on any statistical data to support parent and staff perceptions in relation to improved parenting, the qualitative evidence strongly supports improved outcomes in this area. It could be argued that without improvements in this outcome, health and education outcomes would not occur as a safe and nurturing home environment may be the foundation stone on which the other outcomes are built.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND SENSE OF PLACE

Whilst harder to quantify the level of contribution, Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire do have an impact on how people feel about where they live and by contributing to improvements in other outcomes they can impact on wider social issues.

2. Jane Waldfogel, Compton Foundation Centennial Professor at Columbia University and visiting professor at the London School of Economics writing in http://www.ippr.org/juncture/
A number of people spoken to during this research told stories of significant change in their lives as a consequence of support from, and involvement with, Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire. Their stories suggest that, by changing outlooks, raising aspirations and self esteem as well as by combating mental health issues such as depression, brought about by a sense of isolation, Children’s Centres do make a contribution to reduction in criminal activity and substance misuse.

**IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES ▼**

By improving the integration of services, as well as the reach and accessibility of services, Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire make a significant contribution to the delivery of services to the public and also combating severe and multiple disadvantage. The evidence suggests that Children’s Centres contribute to three of the five priority areas to tackle child poverty in North East Lincolnshire, namely, Reducing Worklessness, Raising Aspirations and Educational Attainment, and addressing Family Factors that Exacerbate Poverty.

**WHY IT WORKS ▼**

The research also asked the question ‘What is it that makes Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire effective?’ The Outreach Care Pathway approach, developed by North East Lincolnshire, enables Children’s Centres to be flexible and offer appropriate support, based on assessed needs, to the wide range of families they work with. The findings suggest the key ingredients that make Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire effective are:

- Being a hub in the community
- Offering a positive and welcoming environment
- Being data driven and information rich
- Developing trusting, non-judgmental and respectful relationships
- A culture of monitoring and evaluation
- Focusing on improving lives – outcomes focus
- Being family oriented – ‘We are family’
- Modelling appropriate behaviours
- Effective Leadership
- Passion
- Partnership

The research carried out during this project suggests that not only are these the key ingredients for an effective Children’s Centre but they also reflect the key attributes of an effective individual worker (whether they be a frontline member of staff, centre coordinator or head of service) as well as the key ingredients of an effective approach to building and maintaining a partnership.

**THE VALUE OF CHILDREN’S CENTRES ▼**

A return on investment was calculated using proxy values drawn primarily from New Economics Foundation reports and the outcomes revealed in the analysis of participants and staff interviews. The adjusted annualised value created through improved outcomes for the child, parent, family
members and wider society is calculated to be £8707. Value for Money data suggests annual delivery per child costs between £1000 and £2500. The potential ROI ratio is in the range 1: 3.4 to 1: 8.

Another way of looking at this is to take just one personal story and consider what has changed in that person’s life and the potential savings created by changing their life and the lives of their children. This more personal view of return on investment suggests that early intervention through Children’s Centres with just this one family has the potential to save the public purse £142,987 per year (not including the net lifetime gain to the economy of a graduate).

**Fig 7: A personal view of Return on Investment based on a service users story**

> I have known Val Bulmer for my entire life but only through SureStart for the past five years as she has helped me from my lowest point to my current high. When I met Val at SureStart I was pregnant with my second child and recently released from prison. It was not a good place in my life.

> With Val’s help, I have become a stable parent able to set a good example for my children by being a role model. My two children are healthy and happy young children enjoying their lives to the full. We enjoy family activities such as biking, swimming and time at the beach. In addition they both enjoy after school clubs and extracurricular activities including ice-skating academy and dance classes. I can cook good, healthy meals thanks to classes at the SureStart Centre and budget to make sure that my house is always warm, clean and that healthy food is always in the fridge.

> I have recently learned to drive which means that I can spend even more time with the kids as I can take them to places which we could not previously get to.

> Thanks to Val I completed level 1 and level 2 in Literacy and level 1 in Numeracy which gave me the confidence to enrol at University Centre Grimsby to undertake a B.A (Hons) in Performance. Val’s encouragement and guidance was the key to my determination and passion to complete this qualification and build a better life for my children and me.

> I want to follow in Val’s positive footsteps and give back to the community by using my skills and life experience to help people in similar situations. My degree is finishing with a dissertation piece into the positive effects of intervention drama on prisoners which is a subject close to my heart. I hope to use the knowledge gained from my academic studies and my real life experiences to help others better themselves and to understand their own behaviours to improve their home life.

> In conclusion, without Val, I firmly believe that I would never have lifted myself out of the low point of my life and that would still be aimlessly drifting through life. I only hope that other parents take advantage of what Val, the rest of her team and the Centre have to offer so that they can make huge changes for the better like I did.

| Costs of re-offending resulting in imprisonment | £37,500 per year |
| Increased educational attainment of other child | £1,661 per year |
| Reduction in costs to NHS from family’s unhealthy lifestyles | £1947 x 3 = £5841 |
| Potential reduction in costs of others re-offending if the career of this parent results in just one other adult not reoffending and not going to jail | £37,000 per year |

| Cost of child in care | £25,000 x 2 = £50,000 per year |
| Cost of Youth Offending (if one child becomes known to CJS) | £8,000 per year |
| Lost income to local economy (average spend on family activities) | £2,985 per year |
| Contribution to economy based on higher earnings of graduates - putting an individual through A-levels and university generates a £227,000 net lifetime gain for the economy |
CONCLUSION

Children’s Centres in North East Lincolnshire do have a positive impact on peoples’ lives. Evidence suggests that because of Children’s Centres children:

• are more prepared for learning when they get to school,
• are achieving well in the Early Years Foundation Stage
• may be more positive about school,
• develop good social networks

Evidence also suggests that because of Children’s Centres parents:

• are more able to support their young children,
• are able to help older siblings with homework,
• are more positive about parenting and more confident in seeking support
• have improved health and well-being, including mental health and self esteem
• achieve positive educational outcomes
• take up volunteering opportunities
• have increased aspirations for themselves and are better prepared for work
• have developed their social capital
