

**Notes of Parents Meeting Held at Queens Road Community Centre
20th October 2009 10.00 - 11.40am**

Present:

Children Centre representatives:

- Carolyn Axtell - (Parent Governor of Low Hall Nursery School and Chair of Children Centre Committee) - chair
 Jenny Vacciana - Community Development/Family Support Worker
 George Washington - Fathers Worker
 Coral Jepson - Children Centre Coordinator

Parents and Carers (including a grandparent and child minder)

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Peter Harvey | Emily Smart | David Henig-Griffin |
| Sherene Banner | Natasha Moses | Cath Martindale |
| Pamela Howe | Esther Poka | Moneeza Syed |
| Farah Ahmed | Nazish Khan | Sharon xx |
| Alyson Weston | Lucy Watts | |

(sorry if we've missed anyone else off the list!)

Matters discussion

1. **Welcome** - Carolyn welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief overview of the purpose of the meeting which was to give parents and carers the opportunity to:
 - share their experiences of using the Centre and make sure we are meeting their needs
 - get feedback on existing services and activities
 - share ideas and suggestions for the development of the Centre
 - if time, to get parents ideas about :
 - how to make sure all local families know about the Centre
 - our newsletter (how useful it is and what to include in the next issue)

2. **Introductions** – Carolyn asked everyone to introduce themselves, saying the age of their child/ren and the groups they attend. Most of the parents and carers present had attended a number of different activities and had been involved since they were pregnant or had a new baby. A lot of positive feedback was received about activities at our Queens Road site including the:
 - high quality of services
 - wide range and variety of activities
 - welcoming environment – friendliness of staff who talk to and welcome both the parent/carer and child/ren and often know them by name
 - cultural diversity of families attending and the inclusive environment
 - way in which Dads are welcomed/included too
 - that we make changes to activities in response to parents comments e.g. more activities for younger children in stay and play.

Parents spoke of the Centre being 'a lifeline' preventing them from feeling isolated, some said they come almost every day, that it was a 2nd home for their child and that Centre activities helped their child develop their confidence and social skills.

Two other issues that came up and were discussed further later in the meeting (see below) were

the current overcrowding of some activities and how to manage children's behaviour in group settings.

3. Overview of the Children's Centre Core Offer

Jenny gave a brief overview of what we call the 'core offer' which is the six key services and activities our Children's Centre must offer:

- Early Education and childcare (which include all our play activities)
- Child and family health services
- Outreach and family support
- Information and advice on return to work, training, benefits etc
- Support for child minders.

Coral explained how Children Centres are funded from Central Government with money passed down via the extended services division of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. Each Children Centre is supposed to work with families in the electoral ward in which it is based. The budget (money) given to each Children Centre is based on number of families living in the ward and the level of poverty in the area. Low Hall Nursery School and Children's Centre mainly works with families in Markhouse Ward.

4. Overcrowding

Our activities are getting very busy and we know that in some cases parents are getting turned away including local parents. A number of parents at the meeting live in other wards but choose to come to this Centre for the reasons given above.

We talked about why they don't use their nearest Centres and what could be done to encourage them to use it more. Comments included:

- not always feeling welcome at their local Centre
- having difficulty physically getting into their local Centre due to lack of clarity/changes in which gate/door to use and which buzzer to press
- being unaware of what was happening in their local Centre
- not feeling 'at home' in their local setting because of their own cultural or social background – activities at some Centres felt 'cliquey'
- staff not always being visible when they went to activities at another Centre especially if no receptionist was present.

When asked what would encourage them to use their local Centre more parents said it would help if staff were more visible and more welcoming to both parents and children.

Some parents living in the Markhouse area also go to other Children's Centres. Their experiences vary as to what they can access. They reported that some Children's Centres were giving priority access to those in their catchment area, some were just restricting access for trips, some were turning away parents not in their area, some were always letting them in or if activities were over subscribed using a 'one out – one in' policy when full.

Way forward

Coral explained how it was impossible for this Centre to put on enough activities to suit all parents five days a week. So it was important to be aware of other local activities such as toddler groups in schools. These are listed on the back of our timetable. Also:

- Coral agreed to share the comments made at this meeting with other Children's Centre Coordinators and the person responsible for overseeing Children's Centres in the Borough.
- Coral will take forward the suggestion of putting our timetable/flyers in local parks etc to make sure local families know what is happening

- Staff here will continue to monitor how busy activities are and if parents do have to be turned away for health and safety reasons use a 'one out, one in policy'. Parents visiting for the first time will not be turned away
 - Consider putting on a third 'stay and play' session
 - *NB if you have been dissatisfied with your local Centre please to write to the Centre Coordinator or Head teacher so they are aware of your experience.*
5. As we were a large group and it was very noisy we then spilt into two groups, one to discuss behaviour and the other the newsletter.

Newsletter group feedback:

- Parents/carers found the newsletter useful to 'look through and see what is going on'
- To help more local families be aware of what's happening they suggested putting our timetable on the notice boards in local parks. Also putting flyers/timetables on park railings
- Try to have some text in different language in each issue (we spoke about the difficulties in which languages as we have at least 45 different languages spoken by our local families)
- It was suggested to sometimes have articles about a particular community/ethnic group
- Maybe have a library of parent's stories about their involvement with the Centre on our website
- Topics for future issues:
 - write up of trips that have happened
 - recipes
- * Peter who is a journalist offered to help with the newsletter – thank you!

Behaviour group feedback.

Sallie Poppleton our teacher joined this group. Parents and carers talked about their concerns of keeping their own children (or if they were a child minder, the children in their care) safe if another child was getting upset and for example hitting out. The following was discussed:

- Talk to a member of staff if you're not sure how to deal with a situation.
- Having difficulty sharing and sometimes hitting or biting is normal behaviour in young children. However although it's normal behaviour it's not something to be encouraged and there are strategies we can put in place to deal with this and support all parents involved.
- Try and be aware of the reason for the behaviour. Many children who come to our groups have never been to an activity like this before. They take time to settle in and get used to being with other children.

6. Other things we discussed were:

- Stopping outdoor water play until weather warmer. Parents felt their children were getting more colds/coughs as even if they brought spare clothes children who enjoy water are wet again in 10 minutes. Unlike summer they felt they their children couldn't be left in wet clothes till end of session.

Next meeting

Tuesday 4th February 2010 at 10.00am. This will run along side the Under 1s Plus group again and we will make sure we have enough crèche/play workers to look after the children. Among other things we would like to discuss holiday activities and healthy eating policy at the Centre.

A big thanks to all of you for your time and suggestions