

Summary of Family Centre Parent Engagement Sessions March – May 2019

5 family centres visited:

- Little Squirrels (Bishop's Stortford)
- Arlesdene (Broxbourne)
- Westfield (Watford)
- Beane Valley (Watton-at-Stone)
- Broadwater (Stevenage)

User Perception of Family Centres

- Parents place a high value on the service Family Centres provide. It was described as *"a service you don't know you need until you come here."*
- As well as providing a safe environment for children to play in, Family Centres are an important community hub for developing networks and relationships for parents.
- Despite the increased cost of sessions (£1.50 to £3 for most) parents still feel the centres offer good value.
- It's felt that having the same branding (logo, pink polo shirts for centre staff etc.) is reassuring for consistency and service recognition.
- Parents said they had been adversely impacted by the reduction of sessions since the rebranding from Childrens Centres to Family Centres, and that *"there were more sessions before."*
- The biggest issue for parents is re-registration following the move from Children's Centres to Family Centres. Parents don't understand why they have to do this. As this can only be done online, it presents a further barrier. Additionally, grandparents, childminders etc. who accompany children to the Family Centres need to register separately. Some centres give out slips of paper to parents with web details to get them to register online at home, but take up via this method is poor. Where possible, staff get parents to re-register at sessions on an iPad.

Finding your local Family Centre

- Parents have no problems finding their local Family Centre.
- They first come into contact with centres via referrals from health visitors, clinics, school contacts, social workers, and word of mouth recommendations from other parents.
- They also get a lot of information from the "Red Book" given to them after the birth of their child. This contains support information, including details about local Family Centres.

Staying up to date

- Parents stay up to date with events via Facebook. This is the most popular method. The [Hoop app](#) and WhatsApp groups are also well used.
- Hard copies of calendars provided by the centres also serve to keep parents well informed. One parent commented that the What's On calendar has *"replaced the website"* for them.
- Staff at some centres send updates directly to parents via email and text.

- Communication between staff and parents is good across all centres, with the development of relationships over time. *“Staff are good at letting us know about events.”*
- Parents are busy. If there’s something they really need to know they will usually phone their centre, especially once relationships with staff have been established. They already have good knowledge about where to go for info.
- Parents don’t generally book onto sessions – most just turn up and pay on the door.

Web browsing

- Parents are familiar with IT and use smartphones for web browsing. If information isn’t immediately apparent they prefer to search rather than scroll.
- Most parents have never used our website before. Of those that have, the primary reason was to register their child. The second reason was to look for events, but parents prefer to use Facebook for this.
- Reasons why Facebook is popular: Parents said it’s part of their daily lives. *“It takes no effort to use, I’m on it anyway.”* They use it throughout the day, and feeds are regularly updated, so they trust it. The information comes to them, they don’t need to look for it.
- Most parents (e.g. 6 out of 7 at Westfield, Watford) said they wouldn’t use our website – they have no need to.

Online tasks – 8 tasks tested - listed in ranking order – Easy/Medium/Hard

Find the phone number for the family centre service (8 users) – overall rating: Easy

- 8 users were quickly able to do this. 7 rated it as “Easy” and 1 as “Medium”

Find information about bottle feeding your baby (6 users) – overall rating: Easy

- 6 parents tried this – all able to quickly find info. 5 rated as “Easy” 1 rated as “Medium.”

How would you cancel an event you have booked? (2 users) – overall rating: Easy

- 2 parents tried this – found service phone number and said they would phone to cancel

Where would you go for antenatal (post birth) information (7 users) – overall rating: Easy because of prior knowledge

- Starting on the [Healthy families=happy families page](#) – 7 users selected [Health visitors](#) due to their prior knowledge.

Find a breastfeeding group near you (5 users) – overall rating: Medium

- 1 user (a father in his 30’s) was unable to find breastfeeding group on the site, nor did he know the difference between the types of breastfeeding group listed.
- 4 users (all mothers in their late 20’s to early 30’s) were able to find breastfeeding groups. They rated this as being “Medium” (not “Hard” or “Easy”). They knew the differences between the types of group listed. They said they knew these because of their previous

knowledge.

Find a midwife clinic near you (4 users) – overall rating: Medium

- 2 users said they would phone to enquire and would never use the web for this, so declined to take part in this test.
- 2 users went to “What’s On” and searched “midwife Cheshunt” – they knew from prior knowledge that Well Baby Clinics offer midwife support so they would contact one of them.
- 1 user ranked this task as Easy – they used the hamburger menu and search bar, entering the term “midwife”
- 1 user ranked this task Medium – they found it via the Parent Survival Kit

Find childcare in your area (3 users) – overall rating: Medium/Hard

- 2 parents tried this together – they came to the [HCC Childcare and free early education page](#)
- 1 user ranked this Medium – they used the hamburger menu, entered “childcare in Welwyn Garden City” but found no results. They found childcare info through the Parent Survival Kit

Find a parenting course near you – (4 users) – overall rating: Hard

- 1 parent tried went via Survival kit--The Grown Up Stuff—and ended up on the [HAFLS Family Learning Courses page](#). They thought they had found parenting course info.
- 1 parent searched for a parenting course and ended up on the [Family Lives](#) website, but was unaware they had changed sites. They found no results and said they would normally use Google.
- 1 parent searched via “What’s On.” They didn’t see the purple dot which scrolled down to the lower part of the page containing links to info.
- 1 parent ranked this as Easy – they found info via the Parent Survival Kit

Issues with website

- Incorrect/out of date event listings – these erode trust in the site. Where differences appear on our site and Facebook, more trust is placed in Facebook. Our site was described as “unreliable.” Short notice cancellations are quickly updated on Facebook. Updates on our site aren’t as efficient.
- Event search inaccuracies - It emerged that when searching for all events within a mile of a local Watford postcode (WD24 6DL) the top event was a baby massage event in St. Albans.
- Only the main centre hubs are listed in the “Find your local family centre” postcode search – parents aren’t clear why this is – or what a hub actually is.
- Parents don’t like our search filter tool. They’d prefer to be able to search for an event by a specific day, not “in the next 7 days, in the next 30 days” etc. Because results span a longer time frame than they’re interested in, they say they have to scroll through a long list of results to find what they want. This puts them off using it.
- When parents enter the search term “Broadwater childrens centre” on Google the top result is for [a centre in Tottenham](#). Parents think this is unusual as they expect the top result to be relevant to the area they’re searching from (Stevenage).
- Users are missing the purple dot on the home page– it isn’t obvious that selecting this leads to more information further down the page.

Recommendations

- Get centres to raise awareness of the Family Centres website by promoting it on their Facebook feed.
- Ensure providers regularly check the accuracy of their uploaded event info – inaccuracies quickly erode confidence in the site.
- Explore how emergency updates e.g. last minute cancellations can be updated on our site.
- Enable search by specific centre – perhaps a list for parents to select from.
- Briefly explain what a “hub” is in the postcode search results, and why only hubs are listed there.
- Staff suggest having standard countywide event descriptions to make it easier and quicker for parents to read through e.g. a resident living between 2 centres might think identical events differ in some way because of the wording.
- Amend filter tool to enable a wider range of search time frames e.g. by specific day and date.
- Have a prominent link to the What’s On calendar.
- Consider how the registration process can be simplified – the suggestion from parents is that it was simpler when it was a paper form.
- See how we can improve the Google search result for “Broadwater family centre”
- Consider how the purple dot link can be amended so that it’s more obvious – one parent suggested we have a link there saying “more” instead.

Conclusion

- Users enjoy using this service and their needs are being met – primarily by Facebook, WhatsApp groups, the Hoop app, event calendars, and centre staff.
- Additional information is provided by health visitors, clinics etc.
- Networking and community is an important part of this service.
- Most parents have never seen the family centres website before, and those that have rarely use it.
- There are concerns from parents about the reliability of our events info, and our search facility which doesn’t allow searches to be carried out by specific day/date.
- The only essential user requirement our site provides currently is that parents have to use it to register a child for the service – all their other needs are being met elsewhere.