



**A summary report on the views of staff, volunteers and  
parents/carers at Kingswood Children's Centre,  
Northamptonshire  
August 2015**

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## Summary

During May, June and July 2015 Healthwatch Northamptonshire (HWN) Children, Young People and Families working group visited Library Plus and children's centre services in Northamptonshire to hear from families, staff and volunteers about the services provided for children under 5.

HWN decided to carry out this piece of work following the changes to the children's centre contracts from August 2014, which involved the closure of Daventry East children's centre. (See full report 'A report on the views of staff, volunteers and parents/carers on services for under 5s delivered by Children's Centres and Library Plus in Northamptonshire July 2015' for details).

A team of HWN staff and volunteers, who are all authorised representatives (i.e. have received appropriate training and enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks) delivered the project.

Kingswood Children's Centre, based in Corby, was included in the project because the contracts for children's centres in Corby have not changed and we were keen to compare the new arrangements for children's centres with the previous service provision.

However, Kingswood is currently working in collaboration with the other 3 centres in Corby, which involves working across 3 organisations, to develop a cluster model in line with the other children's centres in Northamptonshire commissioned by Northamptonshire county Council (NCC). This work has to be completed by March 2016.

We visited Kingswood Children's Centre on 23 June 2015 and Kingswood specifically requested this additional report:

**“the centre is always keen to receive all feedback in order for us to review our service delivery and whilst we actively canvass the views of parents it would be really useful to us to be able to refer to feedback provided by parents to a third party”<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Staff quote

### Key Findings

We found that:

- all the parents/carers spoken to were extremely positive about the staff and activities in the children's centre
- a wide range of planned group work and bookable sessions is provided
- referrals come from a range of partners e.g. social workers, schools, health visitors and midwives
- family support workers often visit families who have been referred, initially at home, as it may take time to establish relationships in order for some families to feel relaxed about attending the centre
- most of the services such as Rhymetime and the group work programme are open access, although some e.g. the sensory room are bookable
- families that have been identified as needing additional support are strongly encouraged to attend groups and open access to all families leads to a range of parents who can and do learn from each other
- it is seen as useful to have positive role models in a group and a mix of families as a lot of peer mentoring occurs in the group work programme and is seen to be more effective if another parent suggests an action rather than a support worker
- staff are happy to home visit and work flexibly e.g. to help with bedtime routines or getting a child ready for school in the morning
- lone working is carefully monitored and there is always a senior member of staff on call
- the family support budget is used creatively e.g. a worker may collect a person to help with the initial 'through the door' step
- there is an active board of trustees with good support from a local councillor

- there are monthly meetings with health visitors which enables better referrals and collaborative working
- the uncertainty of the contracting system has put additional pressures on staff and led to some experienced staff leaving
- the data recording system 'Capita One' is taking some time to embed and takes up a lot of staff time
- the centre has now been asked to absorb services for 0-5 years children with disabilities with no additional funding

## Recommendations

Commissioners and providers should:

1. work together to ensure funding levels support the high quality services being delivered by Kingswood
2. inform, support and reassure staff about possible future changes in contracts and how it will affect them

Commissioners should:

3. ensure that there is additional support for data collection using the new Capita One system more efficiently
4. ensure that additional support/resources are identified to deliver services for children 0-5 years with disabilities to ensure parents/carers and children receive a high quality service
5. ensure Kingswood is supported to deliver services to the Eastern European community

### The Sessions

There are a range of targeted activities with open access and bookable sessions throughout the week at Kingswood. They include:

- baby weighing
- baby play
- baby massage
- Rhymetime
- Let's Get Moving
- Health visitor drop-in
- Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB) drop-in
- Growing Your Baby
- Stay and Play
- Little Sparkles
- music therapy
- English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) classes
- Learning Together
- speech and language therapy
- health assessments
- adult education
- volunteers course
- water room bookings
- midwifery services
- sensory room bookings
- JobCentre Plus

There are also outreach sessions at Danesholme and Great Oakley which include Rhymetime, Tiddlercise, Totcise and Babycise.

The centre also delivers the Freedom Programme<sup>2</sup> and the Solihull parenting programme<sup>3</sup> and provides access to a Foodbank.

All the sessions/groups are evaluated by parents/carers/families so that there is a good rationale for each session which can then be changed according to feedback and need.

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<sup>2</sup> Domestic abuse programme

<sup>3</sup> Programme to help understand your child's behaviour

## Staff

The staff at Kingswood Children's Centre were very open and welcoming.

We were told that technically there are enough staff, however over the past 12 months there have been 3 out of 12 staff on maternity leave. This has put additional pressure on staff but has been addressed by working across the Corby area with reciprocal and collaborative arrangements between the 4 centres.

**“I really love working here, it is wonderful”<sup>4</sup>**

Staff are all trained to a minimum level 3 in childcare, working with parents and/or children and families. Early Years workers have been trained to use videos to work alongside parents and children to record and discuss parent and child behaviours.

**“learning a lot from the videos about my child”<sup>5</sup>**

The uncertainty of the contract, as mentioned previously, has led to 3 experienced, well trained staff leaving, leading to additional pressures for the remaining staff.

The centre runs 2 lots of training for volunteers per year. There is a 6 week course involving safeguarding, confidentiality and working with parents/families. It builds self-confidence in the volunteers and out of 15 volunteers recently completing the HomeStart programme 10 of them have now successfully gained employment. An excellent achievement in an area of high deprivation.

Another area of work for the centre is the need to support the local Eastern European community where English is often not the first language. One of the Early Years workers is Polish with good English and can communicate well with the families.

Leaflets on services are also available in a range of alternative languages.

The centre has also now been tasked with supporting services for children 0-5 years with disabilities with no additional funding.

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<sup>4</sup> Staff comment

<sup>5</sup> Parent comment

## Parent/carer views

On the day of the visit there were 15 parents/carers attending a 'Let's Get Moving' session in an excellent outside play area.

The HWN representative was able to speak to 8 of the parents/carers, including one dad and a childminder.

They had all found out about the session through a variety of methods e.g.:

- school
- health visitor
- midwife
- walking past
- friends

The group also mentioned other sessions that they attended at the centre:

- Rhymetime
- health visitor
- dancing
- playing with water (bookable session)
- adult education
- volunteer course

Most of them lived nearby or had transport so access was not identified as an issue and enabled them to attend the centre on a regular basis.

'Experiences during the early years of childhood (including before birth) have lifelong effects on health and wellbeing: giving each child the best start in life and keeping them safe is essential'<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Fair Society, Healthy Lives, The Marmot Review 2010



When asked if there was anything else that parents/carers would have liked to say to staff but haven't found the opportunity, the responses were overwhelmingly positive:

**“want to say thank you”**

**“love it”**

**“it's been a lifesaver”**

**“brilliant here”**

**“you need to be ready to come, which took me awhile because of hard times, but then I enjoy it so much my child enjoys it”**

**“the activities suit me”**

Parents/carers also mentioned the friendliness of the staff and willingness to get to know them and their children. It was observed that when the 15 parents/carers came through from Rhymetime to go outside, the manager knew almost all of them, greeting and talking to each parent/carer.

The childminder also commented on the fact that the centre enabled different activities that could otherwise not be provided i.e. too expensive or messy to do at home, which gave the children in her care, new and varied opportunities to play and learn.

## Conclusion

As with other children's centres in Northamptonshire, Kingswood faces a range of challenges i.e. staffing and funding levels, data capture using the new Capita One system and delivering new services e.g. for children with disabilities.

Despite these challenges it appears to be a well-used and well-liked community hub. It manages to provide a range of services that are well attended by parents/carers and families, delivered by enthusiastic and appropriately trained staff.

## About Healthwatch Northamptonshire

Healthwatch Northamptonshire (HWN) is the local independent consumer champion for health and social care. We are part of a national network of 148 local Healthwatch organisations. Our central role is to be a voice for local people to influence better health and wellbeing and improve the quality of services to meet people's needs. We will report our findings to health and social care decision makers to improve and influence the quality of care.

Our rights and responsibilities include:

- We have the power to monitor (known as “Enter and View”) health and social care services (with one or two exceptions). Our primary purpose is to find out what patients, service users, carers and the wider public think of health and social care.
- We report our findings of local views and experiences to health and social care decision makers and make the case for improved services where we find there is a need for improvement
- We strive to be a strong and powerful voice for local people, to influence how services are planned, organised and delivered.
- We aim to be an effective voice rooted in the community. To be that voice, we find out what local people think about health and social care. We research patient, user and carer opinions using lots of different ways of finding out views and experiences. We do this to give local people a voice. We provide information and advice about health and social care services.
- Where we do not feel the views and voices of Healthwatch Northamptonshire and the people who we strive to speak on behalf of, are being heard, we have the option to escalate our concerns and report our evidence to national organisations including Healthwatch England, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission.





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