

CHANGE

childcare & nurture

glasgow east

Seldom Heard Voices Report



Community Engagement Phase 2

Introduction

Following a review of our community engagement work in year one of the project, it was determined that we would require a second phase of work to be carried out. The focus for this second phase would be on groups or individuals who may face additional barriers to accessing childcare and who may not be engaging with services currently. In order to do this, we created a plan titled 'Seldom Heard Voices', which identified some key local and national organisations working with groups who fit the criteria for this phase. This plan is available on the project Basecamp.

This paper contains a summary of what we were told by families and the local and national organisations representing them, along with our analysis of this. For each group we endeavoured to meet with both organisational representatives and families, however this was not possible for all groups. In some cases, we were unable to directly engage with any families and in others the number of families we spoke to was very low. Our engagement work was designed to follow the National Standards for Community Engagement.¹ When speaking to families we used the same key questions from our phase one activities to ensure consistency. Most sessions were carried out with two members of CHANGE staff present with one leading the conversation and the other taking notes.

Parents with a disability

We met with several key organisations who represent parents with disabilities. This included the Scottish Commission for Learning Disabilities (SCLD), Equal Say Advocacy (ESA) and the Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA). We also delivered a presentation on CHANGE to the Working Together for Parents Network, which is a collaborative project with the Scottish regional group hosted by SCLD and attended by several agencies and advocacy organisations working with parents with learning disabilities. Unfortunately, we were unable to carry out any direct engagement work with disabled parents. We had a session planned with GDA that was cancelled due to lack of parents able to attend, and we were unable to find a suitable date to attend group sessions run by ESA. However, as we met with the organisations above

¹ Scottish Community Development Centre, National Standards for Community Engagement. Available at: <http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards/>

we were able to gather a mixture of anecdotal and experiential examples of issues relating to childcare that were relevant to parents with a disability.

Accessibility

The issue that was highlighted as being most important to this group was the need for services to be **accessible** in a physical and informational sense. The accessibility of a service was discussed in relation to parents who have a physical disability or who have a child with a physical disability. GDA highlighted the difficulties faced by some of their service users around school campuses and community buildings. One example of this was poor monitoring of disabled parking, resulting in bays being blocked or inaccessible due to other vehicles including delivery vans. Another example given by GDA was the Legacy Hub, which is home to the Family Legacy Nursery and is in the CHANGE project area. This has been used by GDA for events in the past, but the car park is not well placed to allow for disabled people to have easy access to the building. This could be a key area for consideration when services are being developed or expanded. There was also some discussion around services making adaptations to premises after they have been accessibly designed. This could include changes to entry and exit points or the positioning of furniture in a way that makes accessing the various parts of the service more difficult.

Car park location and access to premises should be considered

Information

How a service provides information to parents was raised by SCLD and ESA as a barrier to accessing childcare for parents with learning disabilities. Many services tend to have complex, multi-page handbooks that can be difficult to understand. For parents with learning disabilities this can be off putting, especially if they are new to a service and don't have a relationship with the staff. Parents from many of the groups we spoke to during this phase of community engagement told us that they would prefer to receive information about services directly from staff or management rather than a handbook or flyer. ESA put forward the idea of more visual materials being produced to support parents with learning disabilities to understand some of the policies and procedures of a service. YouTube videos and DVDs were mentioned as being two possible ways of doing this, although the cost of

producing these would have to be considered. GDA has held information events and workshops with a range of services providing support to their members. This centralised approach to providing information reduces the number of times people have to travel to receive information or learn about services that could support them.

Parents would like to receive key information directly from staff

Relationships

Many of the requirements of parents could be addressed by developing good **relationships** with staff. SCLD and GDA spoke about the importance of staff understanding the needs of the whole family as well as the child using the service. With the development of these relationships an **early intervention** and support approach could be implemented by a service. SCLD had experienced several cases where child protection referrals had been made as a family had reached a point of crisis but had been unable to ask for help. This could also include services being **flexible** and understanding that children may occasionally miss sessions due to the parent being unwell or having to attend appointments. Loneliness and **isolation** could also be reduced if parents are engaging with childcare services, which could help improve the wellbeing and mental health of disabled parents.

Asylum seeking and refugee families

We met with two organisations working with asylum seeking and refugee families. These were the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and Cranhill Development Trust (CDT). We also received some information from Glasgow Kelvin College about help to pay for childcare for these families. SRC provides support, advice and information to asylum and refugee seeking families. They were able to provide a range of information on the issues faced by families they work with in relation to childcare. CDT manages the East Integration Network, which hosts the New Scots drop-in café where families can meet to learn English and take part in social activities. We were invited to attend one of these sessions and spoke to two parents to gather their views

on childcare. Although this service is provided outwith the project area, families living within our area travel to this service each week.

Isolation

Isolation and a lack of social connections are common problems faced by asylum seekers when they first arrive in the United Kingdom. The current system of housing allocation means that these families don't have a choice where they live² and can be separated from friends and family who have travelled with them, often being sent to different cities. It is crucial that these families are able to engage quickly with community-based services, with childcare services being especially valuable in helping children to integrate and settle in a new area.

Families can become isolated and lack social connections

Information

A lack of **Information** is often a barrier to this with families and groups like SRC unaware of what is available in each area. Many community groups working with asylum seeking families spend time developing local information resources, but this depends on where a group is located and what resources they have. The families we spoke to mentioned schools as good sources of information, although both relied on friends to provide the majority of this. One parent, a father of two children who are currently registered as asylum seekers, told us, "*Friends tell me about outside clubs but it's not always possible to get to them or they are full.*"

Affordability and availability

Families who have refugee status face many of the same barriers to accessing childcare as the families we spoke to in phase 1 of our community engagement work. **Affordability** and **availability** are continually discussed by families engaging with the SRC. Many refugee parents who have found work are in low-income, insecure employment where zero-hour contracts are common. This can mean families struggle to meet the costs of childcare from week to week. SRC has also encountered high costs for the provision of crèche facilities at community events and groups run by them and partner organisations. This has led to people not being able to attend groups or not

² Asylum seekers support information at: <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get>

being able to take part fully as they need to bring children to the group with them.

Early intervention

Families who use childcare services or other community organisations usually experience positive impact on wellbeing. One parent, a mum of two children, told us, *“These clubs are very good and very important for my children. They try new things and have new experiences.”* However, SRC has heard examples of families being wary of formal childcare services as there are cultural differences to how this is delivered. Many families are used to providing informal childcare for each other before travelling to the UK and can be reluctant to engage with nurseries or playgroups. SRC believe it is important for services to be welcoming and to have a positive first encounter with a family. There have been examples of families who are engaged with a childcare service receiving support at the most appropriate time. This **early intervention** approach can prevent children being subject to child protection proceedings and allow families to receive help before a point of crisis. SRC is aware of some cases where child protection services have become involved with families due to families lacking knowledge of child protection legislation in this country. For example, some families may not understand that a child cannot be left alone at home for long periods of time because in the country they have travelled from this would be acceptable if they were attending work or an appointment. In some cases this has led to social work services becoming involved with a family when a concern was reported to them.

Early intervention is important to support families
before a crisis

Parents with disabled children

We held an engagement session with a group of parents of children with autism and other disabilities. The group was parent-led and established as a charity. They meet twice per week and originally met at a community facility in the project area. Due to a change of premises they are now based outside the project area but many of the parents using the service travel from other areas, including Shettleston and Calton. This session was carried out as a

round table discussion and was attended by twelve parents or carers in total with the group being made up of a range of ages and a mixture of male and female participants. Most of the group had used or were using formal childcare, primarily nurseries and out of school cares, along with a range of other support services.

Benefits

During the session the group provided numerous examples of staff practice that had a positive impact on their family's experience of childcare. Parents generally preferred local authority nurseries and not only due to the lower cost. Comments included:

"I used childcare when my child was younger, I used both private and council places but I preferred the local authority one not only financially but also because the private nursery could sometimes give negative feedback to the point where I would send my little boy's dad because I would get upset. My son couldn't help his behaviour because he has additional support needs and I felt the local authority nursery was more understanding of that."

"There has been a change of manager at the service my child uses and they are amazing. There should be other incentives for managers apart from profit."

"My child was in a childcare service (voluntary sector nursery and OSC) from pre-five to school, the staff had respect for the children, and children who he may have had problems with in his future look out for him now and I believe it was that service that taught them that. They give him the thumbs up."

Affordability and availability

The barriers to accessing childcare that were discussed most often were **affordability** and **availability**. Availability is a particular issue for children with a disability as there are very few services that can offer the specialist provision that some children require. One parent spoke of using a service in Castlemilk while living in the east end of the city, saying, *"My child needs to go to afterschool in Castlemilk; there are no services that support children with additional support needs in the local area. She is taken to the service by taxi during term-time but during the holiday periods I need to get her to the service by myself."*

Another parent attending the group had three children all of whom had additional support for learning needs and she described trying to have all three children placed within the same service as *"virtually impossible"*. When services are available the cost of children attending them can be an issue.

There was some discussion about a playscheme provided by the Strathclyde Autistic Society during school holidays. The service is fully registered with the Care Inspectorate and operates between 9am-4pm in a specially adapted school in the Drumchapel area of Glasgow. One parent found the cost of £50 per week to be reasonable, but one parent described having to pay £250 per week as her child requires 1:1 care when attending. Funding for this is available from social work but only for one week per year. The importance of services being available during the summer was highlighted by one participant who said, *“When you have a child with additional support needs the summer holidays feel very long it would be good if there was more going on then.”* The group unanimously agreed that the cost of nursery or out of school care was too high and some stated that they simply couldn’t afford to pay for their child to attend.

There is a lack of specialist provision for children with disabilities

Flexibility

There was agreement within the group that both children and their parents or carers benefit from using childcare services, particularly when services offer a level of **flexibility**. One parent highlighted the importance of services being flexible with arrival and collection times, saying, *“It’s difficult if my child has a dental appointment because I need to take him to Dumbarton (to a dentist that works with autistic children). My work can’t be flexible because they feel they have already given me the hours I asked for.”*

Isolation and information

The group felt that the opportunity to socialise for both parents and children was important for both the child’s development and to prevent the family becoming **isolated**. This helped parents to meet other parents, which in turn often led to the sharing of **information**. There was a consensus within the group that this type of face-to-face interaction was how they preferred to receive information about services. One parent told us, *“We don’t want websites, we have enough to read and fill in with forms. When you have a child with additional support needs you are tired at night you don’t want to trawl through websites. Here we try to give the top 3 best ones so we all use them.”* The group also expressed some confusion as to why childcare providers were not present at school open days or induction visits to provide

information about what childcare services were offered within the school catchment area. Many also relied on information from support services or groups, such as the one we attended, about what benefits or external help they could be entitled to.

Receiving information face to face is preferable to online

Kinship carers

We met with a group of eleven male and female kinship carers, all aged over 50. The group was led by the carers and hosted by a local family support charity, With Kids. All of the group were responsible for the care of school-aged children and, while many had used nurseries in the past, none of them were currently using formal childcare. The group met at a facility on the border of the project area but all of those attending resided within the area covered by CHANGE. The session was held as a round table discussion with written notes made by CHANGE staff.

Affordability

The group described their biggest barrier to accessing childcare as being the high costs. The group told us that **affordability** of services must be improved before they could consider using formal childcare. Although many of the group were not currently working, those who were tended to be in part-time employment in order to be able to look after the children in their care outside of school hours.

Cost is the main barrier to accessing services for kinship carers

Availability

One participant described how both her and her husband had to reduce and adapt their working hours, due to there being no **availability** within the only out of school care that served their child's primary school. When any of the group had work commitments or other appointments that they couldn't

take children to they relied on informal childcare such as family and friends to look after their children.

Flexibility

In some instances, **flexibility** of other services was an issue. One participant told us, *“It’s not just the nursery you need to be flexible, it’s other people as well. One time I had to do a nursery pick up then the school pick up and be at the social work office all within 20 minutes. The social worker wouldn’t change the appointment and I was told it would hurt our case if I wasn’t there.”* The group also told us how some kinship carers, who had children placed with them for reason not related to alcohol or substance misuse, were receiving less support from services. This was because services had funding to address issues around alcohol and substance misuse and could only support kinship carers who had children under these circumstances.

Relationships

The benefits of children having access to childcare provision were also discussed by the group and were broadly similar to what CHANGE has heard throughout our previous community engagement work. Socialisation and the development of friendships with other children were mentioned, along with the opportunity to build positive **relationships** with staff. This was noted as a particular benefit by the group as some children who had entered kinship care had experienced a breakdown in the relationship with their parents. The group also discussed how children had benefitted from being able to meet up with other children living in kinship care through a homework and activity group they had set up with support from With Kids. Comments included:

“They’re getting to meet other kids in the same situation as them.”

“My two are actually excited get homework so they can bring it to the homework club.”

“The kids all get on so well.”

Positive relationships with staff are beneficial to children

There was concern among the group around sustainability of services that they used. One told us, *“(Child) loved a wee club that was running but after a year it stopped. They were disappointed as they really enjoyed it”*. This led to further discussion on how **affordable** leisure activities were and how the group received **information** about what was running in the area. Many of the

group discussed how expensive certain activities were with swimming lessons and school trips highlighted as being difficult to afford. The group, like some others that we spoke to, relied heavily on each other to provide details of clubs and activities for children. This was due in part to a lack of IT skills within the group, with many unsure of how to find accurate information online.

Comments included:

“It’s not just the childcare but a lot of stuff, even those clubs that charged 35 pounds a week for a few hours a day during the summer. Swimming lessons cost a fortune when I looked into them too.”

“You need to be able to use a computer to find things out now and I’m not great with them. I was looking for a childminder at one point but none of the websites were easy to use and some were charging to use them.”

Young parents

We spoke to two young parents involved in an employability programme run by Rathbone. Both were female and aged under 24. One participant was a single parent to a child aged one, while the other was a single parent with three children aged between four and seven.

Benefits

Both parents were currently using local authority nurseries and found that this worked well for them and their children. One of the key benefits mentioned was the location of the nursery. One parent, who also had children attending school, spoke of the benefits of the nursery and school being part of the same campus. The other parent taking part in the session was happy that her child’s nursery was centrally located and had good transport links, while also discussing the importance of having a good **relationship** with the staff working there.

Communication is important – I need a good relationship with staff

Flexibility, availability and information

Although both families were very happy with their childcare arrangements, **flexibility, availability** and **information** on helping to pay for childcare were discussed as being potential issues in future. Comments included:

"I would like to get back into work gradually and would like to get some weekend work just to phase back in again, but childcare is a problem."

"It works just now, I can drop off all three and go shopping, but I'm worried with how it fits with working."

"I don't have a clue about financial support. I don't understand the difference between childcare and Working Tax Credits"

Over the course of the session, some benefits of children attending nursery were discussed including the opportunity for children to be able to spend time outdoors and the support provided in terms of the child's development. One participant noted that her daughter's communication and language skills were helped by attending nursery and being around other children.

Fathers

We spoke to joint-parenting charity Families Need Fathers Scotland (FNFS) about some of the issues that had been raised by some of their members and service users in relation to childcare. FNFS was also able to signpost us to Parent Network Scotland (PNS) who were attempting to set up dad's groups within our project area. Unfortunately, PNS was only able to engage with a handful of dad's over a three-month period and none of those they were working with wished to speak to CHANGE. PNS told us that they had found it difficult to engage with fathers in Glasgow East in the past.

While FNFS was able to provide some information that was helpful for this report, they also told us that many of the fathers they were working with did not want more childcare provision for their child. The nature of FNFS' work meant that most of the fathers they were regularly engaged with were non-resident parents. In these circumstances FNFS often found that the father would rather look after the child, to increase the amount of contact time, rather than have the child be in formal childcare. The other key points put forward by FNFS were the need for services to ensure they fully understand the practical implementation of family law, especially what information must be provided to both parents and the possible benefits of using family rooms in nurseries for contact sessions. Facilitation of contact with a non-resident parent has taken place in nurseries and FNFS have heard positive feedback on the child being more comfortable in a familiar environment.

Parents experiencing poverty

We met with Glasgow North East Foodbank (GNEF) to discuss the work they are doing to support families who are experiencing poverty. The foodbank has several distribution centres with three of these being situated in the CHANGE project area. Although they had not had a great deal of discussion with their service users about childcare they were able to provide some details about the financial circumstances of families in Glasgow East.

Affordability

Affordability of childcare was something that had been raised by people using the foodbank and staff had heard the cost of childcare described as a 'second rent'. Almost all people using the foodbank had also experienced a delay in receiving benefit payments, this was something that had a knock-on effect on all living costs, including childcare fees. The foodbank has excellent links to the local community and they have agreed to help support CHANGE in developing community links. They will also have a representative present as part of the CHANGE hub to advise on community issues.

Analysis and next steps

Our learning from this phase of community engagement work is two-fold. Firstly, the key themes that emerged from phase one of our community engagement work were also present during work carried out to implement our Seldom Heard Voices plan. Families and the organisations representing them regularly discussed **affordability, availability, flexibility, accessibility, information** and **relationships** and how these influenced the use of childcare services. However, there were two further key themes that emerged from this work. Some groups, as we have evidenced throughout the body of this report, experienced **isolation** when they were not engaged with community-based services including childcare provision. The reasons for this varied widely depending on the circumstances of individual families. For example, parents with disabled children could become isolated due to a lack of available or nearby services that could support their child's needs. Asylum seeking and refugee families were more likely to become isolated due to locality and having no support network of family or friends nearby. There was a consensus among all of the families and organisations that we spoke to, that accessing regulated childcare services was beneficial for families, with reduced isolation being one of the key outcomes.

An additional topic that was discussed was the benefits of **early intervention** and other support offered by childcare services. This linked closely to how services developed **relationships** with families. In the case of parents who had learning disabilities, they tended to be very reluctant to confide in staff or ask for help without having first established a large degree of trust. During our discussions with the organisations listed in this report we repeatedly heard how important it was for families to receive support early and not at a point of crisis or when they had become **isolated**. It emerged in our engagement with parents who were using, or had used nurseries, that they tended to favour local authority nurseries and spoke of receiving a higher level of support from these services.

The learning from this phase of our community engagement work will feed in to our tests being run with our CHANGE hub partners, while also informing our future planning for the development of services. This could include considerations around the quality of services or how services are delivered to families. It has also supported what we learned about barriers to childcare access in phase one, while allowing us to ensure we have engaged with a wide cross-section of families and individuals living in Glasgow East.