

Public Sector Equality Duty

Case Study

Support for pregnant women, their partners and new parents, through the Children's Centre programme 2020/21

Background

The children's centre programme provides a range of universal and targeted support services for parents-to-be and families with children up to age 5. The centres also host a range of services delivered by partner agencies, including health visiting, midwifery and peri-natal mental health.

The Equality Issue

The rapid increase in cases of Covid-19, which led to a national lockdown in March 2020 and the subsequent and ongoing pandemic has meant that services have had to be delivered differently and in flexible and creative ways in order to ensure continued access to services for the most vulnerable.

Access to maternity services within the hospital was prioritised for the most medically vulnerable women, and the Council was required to close all non-essential services and public buildings to control the spread of the virus. Furthermore, frontline health workers including Health Visitors and Staff nurses were redeployed from children's nursing services to support the NHS in delivering critical care services as staff came under increasing pressure from mounting cases of Coronavirus.

Antenatal and Postnatal support

The children's centres collaborated with maternity services to ensure access was maintained to 4 children's centres to deliver the same volume of ante and postnatal clinics as prior to the pandemic.

The service very quickly adapted the 'Your Bump & Beyond' antenatal programme to be delivered to individual parents-to-be via a series of weekly calls. The 5-week programme was condensed into 3 weeks and delivered flexibly to accommodate expectant parents, run by a team of CC practitioners trained to facilitate the programme. We reflected on our local communities and used some of our bilingual staff to support those parents for whom English is not their first language and provided flexibility of programme times/dates. The sessions have evolved throughout the pandemic to include virtual groups as part of our offer.

Through the past year we have supported over 200 expectant and new parents across the borough, through provision of the following:

- 1:1 telephone calls or video calls at a convenient time for partners to be involved, including evenings and late afternoons
- Virtual groups of up to 8 expectant parents and their partners
- 1:1 breastfeeding support delivered over the phone, virtually and in the centres
- Created short films of nappy changing/bathing/breastfeeding to share with expectant parents as a tool for after they have given birth (shared via our private Hillingdon YouTube channel)
- 1:1 face to face baby care appointments for the most vulnerable expectant parents, e.g. young mum-to-be on a CP plan was provided with 1:1 sessions on bathing, nappy changing, breastfeeding and bottle making/sterilising
- Referrals to Talking Therapies for some expectant parents who were extremely anxious about giving birth due to Covid, as well as for those who had not been able to carry their pregnancy to term and lost a child
- Increased the involvement of expectant Dads where possible as Covid restrictions meant they were not able to attend routine maternity appointments.

Further Support Services

- Midwifery appointments continued in 4 children's centres until September 2020; this has now expanded to 11 centres
- Practitioners were able to support parents with a range of issues or concerns
- Families known to be vulnerable families were called weekly by practitioners offering telephone support/advice re. sleeping, weaning, parenting etc.
- Films/videos of activities parents can do at home with their children/babies were shared on Facebook
- Infant feeding coordinator was enabled to continue to facilitate a specialist breastfeeding clinic from South Ruislip CC
- Health Visiting service recommenced face to face Health Reviews and breastfeeding support within the CC's in September 2020.
- Referrals were accommodated by CC staff teams from a range of partners/professionals
- Perinatal Mental Health team have been able to facilitate face to face sessions at Barra Hall CC.

Outcomes

- Antenatal and postnatal contact maintained in the community wherever possible.
- Telephone and online support available and access and referral to specialist services.
- Establishing contact points for parents-to-be and making connections during a time when support services were reduced.

- Identification of priority groups and families for face-to-face service delivery as it resumes.
- Extremely useful feedback to evolve and shape service delivery going forward, as we move out of the pandemic and into recovery of services
- A sample of quotes from parents:

“Despite the fact that there was no face to face learning at the centre, phone calls I had was just as helpful! I felt like I was looked after, and M (my mentor) was amazing to talk to! She was extremely supportive and helped me not only generally but also mentally to look at my pregnancy journey in a more positive way. I was always looking forward to her calls every week.”

“The phone calls were very helpful. The information was explained very well. We did a lot of research online, but it was so much better on the phone.”

“I think it would be helpful to have classes like this online, i.e. video calls using platforms like Zoom. Topics that could be covered in more depth would include Infant Death Syndrome.” (Online groups are now available using MS Teams.)

(With thanks to Zoe Chinery, Midwifery and Breastfeeding Lead for Children’s Centres)