

Children's Commissioner podcast

Doncaster family hubs episode transcript



Anne

Today I'm at a family hub in Doncaster to talk to some of the families who use this service and the staff who support them.

This is a universal service, which means anyone can access what's on offer. From antenatal classes to mother and baby groups, as well as counselling services or debt management support. It's all integrated and it's all under one roof.

What's unique about this family hub is that they are piloting a new early intervention scheme called 1001 days.

I started by asking the staff what the schemes aims are.

Staff

In Doncaster we've setup a small pilot which our team is part of, and we are tasked to work with families through the anti-natal period all the way through to the child's second birthday.

The health visitors and midwives are delivering the standard service that they would normally be delivering anyway as part of their work, but key workers will deliver three contacts anti-natally, and seven post natally and there will be more contact with families through the first 1001 days. To make sure that parents are ready and prepared for parenting role, for that transition to family life, and to try to address some of the issues that might be coming out at a very early stage, so that real early intervention

Anne

So typically, when you talk about preparing families for the birth and to move into family life. What sort of things are you trying to help parents with?

Staff

So, the whole spectrum really. If they need any support with parentings skills, anything around the environment and also starting to support them to understand what their baby will need to grow and develop.

Anne

The scheme is only four weeks into its two-year length, but already families are feeling the benefit.

Parent #1

For me it was getting help with getting to know people, that's what I needed mainly to know that someone was there to support me if I needed that a little bit.

Anne

Lots of places don't have a family hub like this, and there are a lot of families that would like the kind of support that goes on here. If you had to say why more families should have one, what would you say?

Parent #1

It's for support, I think for every family it would be ideal if there was one close by to them to access the facilities there. Even if it's just the play groups. You get these ones in churches, but they're not as good, cause when you come to a hub they get to know you and there's so much support there and I would recommend the hub to everyone to be honest.

Parent #2

So when I got involved, cause I'm a single dad, I started bringing my little girl when she was one-ish. I found between newborn and one, I found coping by myself at home was pretty alright, and then it got to the stage where she needed more social interaction – then I started to come to groups. There are loads of family hubs in this area, and I didn't know initially, and when I started going to one, you start chatting to people and then you start going to more, and they're great – they're free, which was perfect for me as I was on low income. And having a little place where she can have a little bit of snacking, a little bit of play, and it was just so perfect.

Anne

I joined the mother and baby group. All their babies were born during lockdown and their sessions have been held online during the pandemic. But today, for the first time, these mums get to meet face to face.

Parent #3

I've only really taken part in the virtual baby group, I've not really taken part in anything else as yet cause it took me a while to pluck up the courage to ask to join. Cause I wasn't in the right head space to be exposed to all the mums and babies. And then I think it was about two months ago I finally asked to be a part of it, and honestly it gets me through the week, just knowing I have that hour where I can talk to other mums, talk to Adele and Jodie, see the other babies. My upstairs, my computer screen is absolutely fascinating.

Parent #4

He's so cute though, when he does that.

Anne

And even though you've been doing this virtually, it feels like you all know each other.

Parents

Yeah, Yeah. We said that when we walked in, it feels like we're all friends

Anne

Is this is the first time you've met?

Parents

Yeah

Anne

So you've actually never physically been in the same room as each other, just seen each other on the screen? It feels like you've known each other for years

Parents

I think it's because we all have a shared experience and we've all had babies in lockdown, we've all had to adjust to being parents, without the support of our parents necessarily or external support that we would normally get.

Anne

For these mums, the hub played a vital role during covid. When other services were falling away, the hub stepped in to fill the gaps.

Parent #5

I struggled with breastfeeding as well, and I rang the family hub and Adele, Jodie, the people who had run the groups, cause I went to three groups before we lockdown, and the same day I got a call back, Adele couldn't have spent longer on the phone trying to coach me, talk me through it, things like that, and I felt that there's a real stark difference between the support from the family hubs and the health visitors who just disappeared into thin air.

And I requested baby massage and been fobbed off, but Adele and Jodie with these virtual baby groups have been a life saver, I feel like they couldn't have done any more for us at all.

Anne

Having dedicated teams working closely, in collaboration with families, is an important part of effective family support. It helps families to improve confidence and skills and strengthens families' relationships. For this young mum and many like her, this early intervention has kept things from spiralling out of control and kept her

family together.

What do you think would have happened if the hub wasn't here? For the families?

Parent #6

[Laughing] Worse than we are now! I'll be honest, if it wasn't for... this is the first hub I've really mainly had more time at... it's fantastic, they're so supportive. I came down to Gemma last year and I was in a right state, and if it wasn't for Gemma talking to me I don't know what I would have done, because my family was away... I don't live near my family, and I think I would have... I probably would have given my children up to be honest and disappeared. Because that's how I felt and cause I didn't know what to do.

Anne

That's a big change

Gemma

Yea she was one of my success stories. She's done everything, we've worked really well together.

Anne

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