

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE - 18 DECEMBER 2006

REPORT ON: EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 706-2006

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to formally acknowledge receipt of the Report on the Evaluation of the work of the Community Family Support Project completed by Dundee University in June 2006, and the very positive outcomes for children and families receiving services from the Project highlighted by this evaluation. A copy of the full Evaluation Report has been passed to each of the Group Secretaries and is available for inspection in the Members' Lounge.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:

- 2.1 Formally endorses the findings of the Community Family Support Project Evaluation Report and supports the future development of this service.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The revenue costs of this Project are £ 200k per annum and are funded through the Social Work revenue budget.

4.0 SUSTAINABILITY POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 One of the key outcomes of this Project has been to improve access to services for families on low incomes or dependent on state benefits. The Project has developed a range of new locally based services and facilities in areas of unmet across Dundee. This reduces the need for children and families to travel distances to facilities that are located outwith their own local neighbourhoods.
- 4.2.1 The Project's aims and objectives match very closely with those of Dundee City Council's Policy for Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion. The Project is specifically targeting geographical areas and population groups where there is evidence of poorer health status and outcomes, is developing new access points for services for people in poverty, and is promoting social inclusion.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The Project provides a targeted service to children and families living in the peripheral housing estates in Dundee from bases in those communities or adjacent neighbourhoods. This supports Dundee's Family Support Service's aim of ensuring that children in need and their families, wherever they live in the city, can have access to family support services. The Project is in this way helping to further many of the key aims contained in Dundee City Council's equal opportunities policies by identifying unmet needs, targeting vulnerable groups and communities, forming new partnerships and improving participation in community life.

BACKGROUND

- 6.1 Dundee's Family Support Centres (previously called Child and Family Centres) provide family support services to children in need and their families living in the many local neighbourhoods served by each Centre across the city. In 2000 it was recognised that there were a number of communities throughout Dundee, who did not have direct access, or ease of access to family support services from a locally based Family Support Centre. These communities included St Mary's, Charleston and Hilltown/Stobswell.
- 6.2 The Community Family Support Project established in 2003 is a service development initiative funded through Changing Children's Services, which was built on the success of the Sure Start Outreach Worker initiative. The Community Family Support Project is aimed at children in need aged birth to 12 and their families, who live in the targeted communities of St Mary's, Fintry, Mill O' Mains, Charleston and Menzieshill. (Committee Report No: 290/02)
- 6.3 The Project brings together Dundee's Family Support Centres, One Parent Families Scotland, Youth-link Dundee and Home-start Dundee with other key voluntary sector providers of family support services in Dundee to develop and promote access to community based services for families in need. Through the Project the combined funding from both Sure Start and Changing Children's Services Fund is used in the targeted local areas to promote and support the development and delivery of co-ordinated and integrated services for families with children in need aged birth to 12 and their families.
- 6.4 During the past three years the Project has developed a wide range of new services for children and families living in the targeted communities. One of the key outcomes of the Project has been the establishment of the 'Open Door' community flat in the St Mary's area, where there are very few locally based services. The flat acts as a resource base within and from which a range of providers come together to offer direct access to co-ordinated family support services for children and parents living in the St Mary's area.
- 6.5 The services developed and delivered in St Mary's and in the other targeted areas include information, advice and practical help, as well as a range of new individual and groupwork supports for children and parents, all provided within their own local communities. One of the main aims of the initiative has been to support parents who find the task of parenting particularly difficult or stressful and to assist them in helping their children to grow, develop and fulfil their potential.
- 6.6 The families receiving services through the Project have consistently provided very positive feedback to the staff involved about the value of these services to them. But with a view to more formal evaluation of the outcomes of the Project, research was commissioned from Dundee University and was undertaken by Norma Baldwin, Professor of Child Care and Protection. The Evaluation Report was completed in June 2006 and indicates some very positive findings about the value attached to Project services by families and staff themselves.
- 6.7 Amongst the most significant findings of this evaluation are the positive outcomes for individual families, the high quality of relationships with users, the creative use of resources and the strength of partnership working. A Summary of the Evaluation Report is attached for reference.

7.0 CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Depute Chief Executive (Finance) have been consulted on this report. There has also been consultation with the local elected members involved, with Project staff and with local residents.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Reference has been made to Dundee's Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Dundee Family Support Strategy (as contained in Committee Report No 479-04)

Alan Baird
Director of Social Work

7 December 2006

Community Family Support Project: Evaluation Summary

'Can't believe the difference it has made to so many parents' lives, having someone to support us'. Service User

'Sometimes you learn the hard way. Some fantastic work has been done and individuals and families benefited'. Manager

The Community Family Support Project has worked with 1326 users since its inception in 2003. During the 12 months of April 2005 to March 2006 there were 145 individuals who had initial contacts with project workers and 244 regular service users. In addition there have been 616 people who have called in at the St Mary's flat since it opened in August 2005.

The Evaluation

Thirteen service users – 9 mothers and 3 fathers, with a total of 24 children – provided detailed information about their experiences. Four of the key project workers and 7 managers – from voluntary and statutory agencies across health, education and social work – answered questions about their experience of the project.

Respondents to the evaluation were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of the project, in providing up-to-date information, co-ordinating services, supporting initiatives, developing partnerships and making creative use of resources. The high quality of relationships with users and across diverse staff groups was notable.

The following key points and themes emerged from the evaluation:

What Changed for Parents Through Attending the Project?

Parents identified benefits from their time on project activities:

- Spending quality time with their children
- Support networks
- Gains in confidence and self esteem
- Practical help and ideas about handling children's behaviour; improved parenting skills
- Better 'team working' in families, in understanding and disciplining children
- Personal time; feeling like a valued individual
- Interesting activities
- Healthier cooking and eating
- Access to useful information: activities, health, training, etc.

What Changed for Children?

Parents identified benefits for their children:

- Spending more time with mothers
- Spending more time with fathers
- More interesting activities
- Opportunities to socialise, learn sharing, play
- Increased confidence, willingness to mix, to separate from mother
- Increased happiness
- Support group for an autistic child.

Future of the Project

Service users were generally of the view that they wanted the project to:

'Just carry on as usual'.

They hoped for an increase in activities available – number and frequency – and were particularly keen to see holiday activities extended. Their appreciation of the welcoming, facilitating and supportive attitudes of workers was unanimous, with a high proportion suggesting that their commitment and help had been exceptional:

'She (worker) needs a medal!'

Benefits Identified by Professionals

Workers and managers appreciated the effectiveness of the project in improving co-ordination of services, encouraging access, making creative use of resources and sharing resources and ideas. Partnership working seemed to be well established, leading to a better strategic overview and planning for particular localities. Flexibility and networking skills in outreach and community development work, alongside support for vulnerable individuals, were seen to have improved. They were appreciated as realistic and effective responses to the complex and multiple needs of service users.

Professionals involved with the project singled out for emphasis:

- The importance of flexibility in outreach work and in co-ordinating projects.
- The value of a project director with community development, networking and people skills and the ability to bridge gaps, disseminate and share.
- The long timescales involved in establishing community support and in capacity building.
- The importance of allowing time to get to know neighbourhoods and cultures, and to recognise and respond to difference whilst acknowledging common interests.
- The constraints of funding cycles in supporting long term work.
- The importance of recognising the complexity of work with vulnerable and hard to reach families, being realistic about costs, including costs of making contact.
- The importance of collaborative working to clear goals.
- The importance of universal, simple and straightforward reporting processes for the collation of information for monitoring.
- Recognition of the skills and experience within the team of workers involved.
- Using information about specific improvements where agencies are working well together to inform other initiatives.

'Continual evaluation with parents ensures that the service is tailored to their needs.'

'I have had a good support network from colleagues and workers in the area.'

'I devote more attention to planning, service delivery detail and evaluation.'

Workers and managers