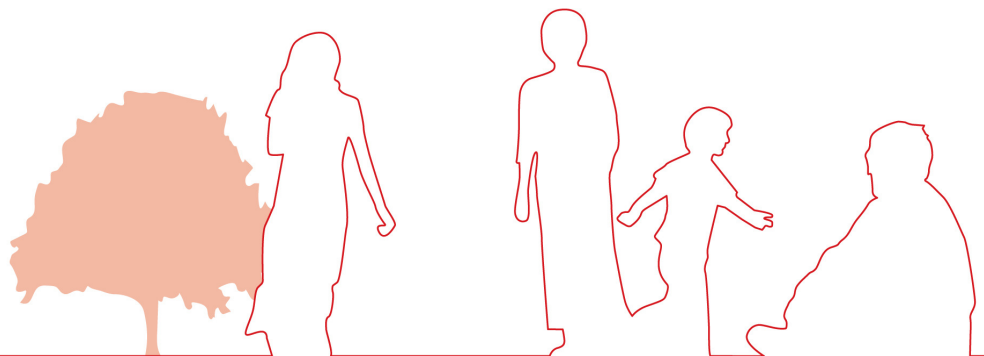


# Croxley Green Children's Centre Consultation

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## Executive Summary

The Government is committed to delivering a Children's Centre to every community by 2010. Children's Centre programmes are based on the concept that providing integrated education, care, family support and health services is a key factor in determining good outcomes for children and their parents. Services are to be tailored to the needs of individual children, their families and the communities in which they are based.

In Hertfordshire, phases one and two of the roll out are now completed and phase three centres are scheduled for implementation in 2009/10. In preparation for the launch of the Croxley Green Children's Centre in November 2009, Opportunity Links worked with Morris Minors Preschool, the lead agency, to consult with Croxley Green parents. Croxley Green Children's Centre is seeking to understand the issues affecting families and explore how these could be met through current local service delivery as well as new activities and initiatives. Parents were consulted with through an online survey and focus groups during April and May 2009.

The Croxley Green Children's Centre area in the Three Rivers District of Hertfordshire Council is a relatively affluent community relative both to the nation as a whole and the rest of Hertfordshire. Parents are extremely interested in and involved in the community and in raising children and the consultation was successful in producing a detailed and broad base of parents' thoughts, ideas and experiences.

A total of 65 parents were consulted in the survey representing 84 young children or 11.7% of the under 5 population. A focus group of seven participants provided more detailed information. Mothers in the consultation were generally full time homemakers or employed part time, while fathers were generally full time workers.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the consultation, the following recommendations should be considered in the planning of the new Children's Centre:

**Flexible childcare options:** While most parents indicated that they had adequate childcare arrangements, a number of employed parents need greater flexibility with arrangements and expanded cover. Summer programmes and after school and holiday activities are needed for 3 -5 year olds. Crèche services would increase participation in some parent activities.

**Opportunities for parents to meet:** Parents gain a great amount of support and information from each other. New parents and newcomers are especially enthusiastic about networking and socializing. Ongoing activities such as monthly meetings for both providing formal information and socialization should be arranged.

**Workshops and information sessions on parenting:** Parents face a number of challenges in raising young children. Day-to-day challenges include eating and sleeping routines, toilet training, managing behaviour and discipline. This type of information could be provided more formally through workshops and informally through discussion groups.

**Childcare information:** Parents need help selecting schools and nurseries, understanding application procedures and knowing what is available. Parents need information on finding baby sitters and occasional care. Links with the Council's Family Information Service would be helpful.

**Prenatal and antenatal information and support:** Parents do not always feel well supported in preparing for new babies and caring for them. This includes the social aspects as well as health issues. Parents don't always know where to find this information or what services are available. Services such as breastfeeding support, and home visits by health visitors are extremely valuable and effective. Drop in services for advice and support are also needed.

**Programmes and services for fathers:** Activities should be available for fathers to participate with their children on weekends. Activities that can be enjoyed as a family are valued by parents.

**Returning to work:** Many mothers are planning to return to work when their children reach school age. The available services such as JobCentre Plus and skills training are generally underutilized by parents. The Children's Centre should help connect mothers with employment, career and education resources and encourage their use.

**Work-life Balance:** Parents who are working, single mothers and those contemplating returning to work find it difficult to achieve a balance between work and family. Parents could be supported with workshops, information and mutual support to find this balance.

**Childcare costs and financial support:** Some parents struggle with the costs of returning to work and paying for childcare. Fees for activities and services need to be considered carefully to ensure participation among parents who need them most. Parents may need more information on financial help such as Working Tax Credit and Childcare Tax Credit to understand how returning to work will affect the family's overall budget.

**First Aid Training:** Parents would value the opportunity to be trained in first aid. This was the most important service of the many adult services parents were asked about.

**Creative and varied activities for children:** Some parents felt there was not enough on offer in the area such as music and dance and other creative activities, or that certain age groups (e.g. 3-4 year olds) had fewer options. Parents would value the provision of a greater variety of activities for young children.

**Information strategy:** The Children's Centre should work in partnership with the Family Information Service, in order to become a central hub of information on children's services and activities in the area. Parents felt that they did not know enough about what was on offer in the area and did not know how to seek out this information. The marketing of the new Children's Centre will be crucial for its success. A varied information dissemination strategy should be developed that includes e-mail and the internet as well as printed sources.

**Days and hours of operation:** Parents' schedules differ from family to family. To maximise participation, activities and services should be offered at times that suit both working and non-working parents. Evening and weekend activities will encourage fathers and working mothers to attend. Some activities may be more suitable for parents to attend during pre-school hours.

**Convenient locations:** Parents seek services that are close to their home. For some, access by public transportation is important. In planning services, CGCC should use venues that are convenient to parents.

**Consult with parents on an ongoing basis:** This consultation should be viewed as a starting point to an ongoing dialogue with parents. Additional feedback is needed from parents of newborns, those new to the area and others who may be more isolated. Informal feedback should be sought whenever possible.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 The Croxley Green Children's Centre Consultation

The Croxley Green Children's Centre (CGCC)<sup>1</sup> consultation was initiated in response to a request to Opportunity Links from the management of Morris Minors Pre-school in March 2009. Morris Minors Preschool has been appointed as the lead agency for Croxley Green Children's Centre in the Three Rivers District (3R2). This is a new Phase 3 Children's Centre in the Hertfordshire roll-out which is due to be designated by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009, with some services anticipated to begin earlier.

Management of the CGCC wished to consult with parents in the Croxley Green community to understand the issues affecting local families, explore how these are met through current local service delivery, and consider development of new activities and initiatives to support planning for the new Children's Centre.

### 1.2 About Opportunity Links

Opportunity Links is a national, voluntary sector organisation which works closely with central government, local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors to manage and deliver information to families, young people and those in later life. The organisation is committed to supporting local authorities and Children's Centres in meeting their responsibilities under the Childcare Act 2006 and the Children's Centre Practice Guidance. OL is committed to helping parents and families make important life choices on childcare and flexible working and to supporting services that provide vital information to families.

### 1.3 The Project and Report

The project incorporated two methods of consultation; first, an on-line parent questionnaire, including both quantitative and open ended questions, and second, a series of focus groups to explore parents, needs and interests in greater detail.

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<sup>1</sup> The name of *Croxley Green Children's Centre* is in the final stages of the approval process. For simplicity, this report uses this name.

The project objectives were to:

- Explore the experiences of local parents of under 5's in using children's services and activities, parenting supports and employment resources to inform service design and implementation in the phase 3 CC.
- Identify unmet needs of local families with children aged under 5 and explore how they could be met.
- Discover how and encourage local parents to get involved in their children's centre.

The deliverables of this consultation were:

- A written report laying out background information, data analysis and conclusions from the research.
- A list of recommendations that come from the data.
- A parent-friendly summary of the major findings to be distributed to the local community.

## 2.0 Background to the Children's Centres

### 2.1 The Role of the Children's Centres

The Government is committed to delivering a Children's Centre to every community by 2010 with a total of 3,500 across the country. Hertfordshire will have 82 Children's Centres by 2010. Phases one and two of the rollout are now complete and Phase 3 Children's Centres are scheduled for implementation in 2009/10.

Children's Centre programmes are based on the concept that providing integrated education, care, family support and health services is a key factor in determining good outcomes for children and their parents. A Children's Centres' role is to enhance integrated services already in place within the community and extend the benefits to more families.

All Phase 3 Children's Centres are situated in less disadvantaged and more affluent areas of England and therefore offer a less intensive level of support than those in Phases 1 and 2, which serve families in the 30% most disadvantaged areas. Local authorities have greater flexibility in deciding what services should be provided in the more affluent areas and this must be based on an assessment of local needs.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is a universal level of service that must be provided in all Sure Start Children's Centres as follows:

- Parental outreach for isolated parents/carers and children at risk of social exclusion.
- Information and advice to fathers and mothers/carers on a range of subjects including local childcare, looking after babies and young children and local education services.
- Support to childminders via a coordinated network.
- Activities for children and parents/carers at the centre, e.g. playgroups, drop in sessions, crèches. These could be existing services which the children's centre is being built around.
- Links with JobCentre Plus and local job training providers and further and higher education
- Effective links with Family Information Services run by the local councils

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<sup>2</sup> *Sure Start Children's Centres Phase 3 Planning and Delivery*, Department for Children, School and Families, 2007. [Http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk)

- Access to community health services including antenatal services and health visitors in particular for children with special needs and disabilities.

Services within Children's Centres are expected to be tailored to the needs of individual children, their families and the communities in which they are based. Children's Centres therefore need to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis for their own communities which will support the relevant existing and developing needs analysis of the area.

## **2.2 Croxley Green Children's Centre and Local Children's Resources**

The lead agency, Morris Minors Preschool, has been operating in Croxley Green since 1998 and currently operates a 32 place nursery. Delia Morris, Director of the Preschool, has been selected as Centre Manager. Mick Morris, Morris Minors Administrator, has acted as liaison to the consultation and is managing the planning and implementation of the new centre. A location for the new centre is being sought.

The Croxley Green community already has a number of programmes, activities and services aimed at young children and families. Croxley Library offers children's story time on Friday afternoons; Baby Rhyme sessions and an IT suite for parents.

Doctors' Surgeries are located within Croxley Green and Watford General Hospital and the Health Centre in Rickmansworth are only two miles away.

School nurseries operate at Malvern Way School, Yorke Mead School and Harvey Road Schools. Yorke Mead School also operates a Summer Play scheme. In addition to Morris Minors Pre-school, other private, voluntary independent preschools operate including, St. Oswald's Pre-school and New Road Pre-school.

A number of activities are run through the local churches. St. Oswald's church offers a drop in session for mums and toddlers on Monday mornings, the Croxley Green Baptist Church offers a toddlers group, and All Saints Church offers activities for mums and toddlers.

## 3.0 Socio-Demographic Overview of Croxley Green

### 3.1 Description of Croxley Green

The Children's Centre area (3R2) is situated within Three Rivers District which is one of the smallest districts in Hertfordshire, covering 34 square miles in the south-west of Hertfordshire, with a population of 84,000. The area is urbanised with industrial, commercial and business activity. Three Rivers is situated near the Motorway and is easily accessible to central London by rail and underground, making it a growing and prospering business and residential area.

Croxley Green has a Parish Council and active Residents Association. Croxley Revels on the Green is an annual event in June with fun and games for local families. The Green is also used for visiting fairgrounds and events such as Classic Car shows.

### 3.2 Under 5 Child Population

The table below shows the population of children to be served by the Croxley Green Children's Centre area (3R2). The area has 715 children under the age of five plus 2,254 aged five to eighteen, with a total of 2,969 children.

**Table: Number of children by age group in the Croxley Green Children's Centre Area**

Age 0 -1	Age 2-4	Total under 5	Age 5-18	Total Children
270	445	715	2,254	2,969

Source: Office of National Statistics 2004 Mid Year Estimates. Reported in Community Profile Needs Analysis, Hertfordshire County Council, Nov. 2007

### 3.3 Indices of Deprivation

The Office of National Statistics developed a range of indicators based on smaller geographical areas; Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA). The Croxley Green CC area (3R2) includes 8 LSOA's. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2004 measures seven key indicators: crime, environment, housing, employment, income, health and education, giving a score for each. An overall score is given and also ranked.

None of the eight LSOA's within this CC area was ranked within the 50% most deprived within England. Even the most deprived of the eight LSOA's within Croxley Green was still placed within the 20% least deprived in the country. The least deprived of the eight areas placed it within the 1% least deprived in the country. Seven of the eight LSOA's were placed within the 10% least deprived in the country.

In relation to Hertfordshire, which as a county is one of the least deprived in the nation, none of the eight LSOA's were ranked within the 50% least deprived. In relation to all 82 children's centres within Hertfordshire, Croxley Green (3R2) is ranked 79<sup>th</sup> least deprived. Compared with the remaining areas of Three Rivers, Croxley Green has even less deprivation than its immediate surrounding communities. This indicates that while there is some variation in deprivation within Croxley Green, it is overall an affluent and prosperous area where families enjoy a high level of health, safety, economic security and well-being.

### 3.4 Ethnic Composition

The ethnic composition of CGCC area is displayed in the table below. Ethnic groups have been combined (e.g. different groups of Irish, British European, etc. are combined under "white" because of the small population size for the ethnic minority groups in the CC areas). The Croxley Green area has slightly more whites than the District, County and East of England and slightly fewer of all other ethnic groups than the district, county or East of England.

**Table: Proportion of individuals (%) in each ethnicity category comparing Croxley Green Children's Centre with Three Rivers District, Hertfordshire and East of England.**

	White	Mixed Race	Asian	Black	Chinese/ Other
Croxley Green CC	95.4	1.2	2.3	0.5	0.6
Three Rivers District	92.0	1.3	4.9	1.0	0.8
Hertfordshire	93.7	1.4	3.0	1.1	0.5
East of England	95.1	1.1	2.3	0.9	0.7

Source: Office of National Statistics 2001 reported in Community Profile Needs Analysis, Hertfordshire County Council, Nov. 2007

### 3.5 Employment and Financial Well being

Financial well-being can be measured using several indicators that have data at either the District or Children's Centre level from the 2004 Census including receipt of workless benefits, annual gross pay and participation in free school lunch program.

Annual gross pay for male workers is higher in the Three Rivers District than compared with the County and the nation as a whole. Male workers in Three Rivers in 2006 had gross annual pay for full time employment of £35,927, compared with Hertfordshire at £31,559 and England at £26,202. Of the 10 districts in Hertfordshire, Three Rivers had the second highest annual gross pay for male workers.

The Department of Work and Pensions 2004 data on families with children under 5 receiving workless benefits is presented in the table below. In Croxley Green 83 children under the age of five lived in households receiving workless benefits comprising 11.6 %. The rate of workless benefits for Three Rivers is 15.4% and the Hertfordshire county rate is somewhat higher at 16.6%. This indicates that Croxley Green employment levels are higher than surrounding areas.

**Table: Number of children under 5 dependent on workless benefits 2004**

	<b>Under 5's Receiving Workless Benefits</b>	<b>Population aged under 5</b>	<b>Percent Receiving Workless Benefits</b>
<b>Croxley Green CC</b>	83	715	11.6%
<b>Three Rivers District</b>	766	4970	15.4%
<b>Hertfordshire</b>	10,530	63,394	16.6%

Source: Department of Work and Pensions reported in Community Profile Needs Analysis, Hertfordshire County Council, Nov. 2007

Children Eligible for Free School Meals is yet another index to measure child poverty and economic well-being. Children are generally eligible for free school meals in households where parents are receiving Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance, income related Employment and Support Allowance. In addition certain immigrants and those receiving child tax credit with incomes under £15,575 are entitled to free school meals. The table

below shows the eligibility for free school meals in Croxley Green. Relatively few children are eligible for these meals in Croxley Green CC (2.3%) when compared to the whole of Hertfordshire (7.6%). The national rate of 15.8% of all children further illustrates the relative affluence of Hertfordshire and Croxley Green.

**Table: Percent of total school age children eligible to receive Free School Meals 2006**

	<b>Percent of total school age children eligible to receive Free School Meals 2006</b>
Croxley Green CC	2.3
Three Rivers District	5.3
Hertfordshire	7.6
National	15.8

Source: Annual Schools Census/ Pupil Level Annual Schools Census, 2006 reported in Community Profile Needs Analysis, Hertfordshire County Council, Nov. 2007.

### **3.6 Childcare providers**

There are 37 providers in Croxley Green of which 90% are childminders. There are two day care providers and one full day care and one out of school day care provider. CGCC has 8 children per childcare place in total compared to 6 for the district and 7 for the county. The ratio of full day care places to child is 28 to one compared with the district (11) and county (9) averages indicating a shortage of full day care places. There is also limited out of school day care with 65 children per place compared to district (26) and county (24) averages. (Source: Hertfordshire Child Care Sufficiency Assessment 2007)

### **3.7 Summary**

The demographic data above illustrates the relative affluence of the Croxley Green community in relation to the county and the nation. Families enjoy a higher standard of living and less deprivation. Family incomes are higher and use of public benefits is lower. The area is less ethnically diverse than other parts of the county. There are a range of amenities such as health facilities, a library, churches, and childcare providers.

## 4.0 Methodology

### 4.1 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this consultation was to provide CGCC with a broad range of information on the interests and needs of parents in relation to Children's Centre services. The consultation aimed to investigate parents' experiences of using children's services, community programmes and benefits. This includes the level of use, satisfaction with services and feedback on making services more relevant to their needs. The consultation also aimed to gain insight into what additional community services families would benefit from and how these services should be planned and implemented to best meet their needs.

Data for this consultation was collected from:

1. An online survey for parents to a sample of parents of under 5's in Croxley Green.
2. Two focus groups with parents. As far as was possible these aimed to include a diverse sample of parents including fathers, working mothers and non-working mothers.

### 4.2 Survey Methods

A ten question online survey was developed using "Survey Monkey" ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) a web site that enables the creation of easy to use surveys, data collection and analysis. The questionnaire included a balance of "tick box" questions that were quick and easy for parents to respond to, along with open ended questions where parents could comment more extensively and freely.

The survey asked for information in the following areas;

- A. *Information on Children and Childcare services:* Respondents were asked how many children they had and in what age groups; current childcare/nursery school arrangements for their children under age 5; if these arrangements were adequate for their needs, and if not, to explain why not.
- B. *Children's Services:* This section asked respondents to rate the importance of a variety of children's services that might be offered through the Children's Centre. In

an open ended question parents were asked to tell us what have been the biggest challenges they and their families face in parenting their children under age 5.

- C. *Adult Services and Benefits*: Parents were asked which adult services would they or their spouse would be likely to use in the future.
- D. *Encouraging Families to use services*: Parents were asked what would encourage them, or make it convenient or easy for them to use Children's Centre Services. We asked them to rate these items in terms of how important they were.
- E. *Employment Status*: Parents were asked about employment status for themselves and their spouse or partners.

Parents were also asked in the questionnaire if they would like to be part of the focus groups. Parents who indicated interest were invited to attend.

### **4.3 Focus Group Methods**

All parents who indicated interest on the online survey were invited to participate in the focus group discussions. In addition, the flyers announced the focus groups, and parents at Morris Minors Preschool were invited. A total of seven mothers with children under 5 years of age were consulted in the focus groups. They included mothers who were working part time, unemployed and looking for part time work and those who were 'stay at home' mothers. There were two single parents in the group.

The focus group lasted one hour and a discussion guide was used (appendix) to conduct the group, which included the key areas and themes to be explored in the discussion.

### **4.4 Survey Distribution and Response Rate**

Parents were invited to fill in the online survey over a four week period. Flyers with the browser link were sent to the library, local churches, preschools and the primary schools in Croxley Green. The initial response rate was low due to difficulty parents had in typing the link into a browser. A shorter link was provided and outreach flyers resent but the link continued to present difficulties for potential respondents. With short time scales the researchers were unable to make the link more easily available, e.g. through the Morris

Minors web site. Email addresses were not widely available for parents to facilitate sending the link directly to families.

In order to increase the response rate, a paper version of the survey was produced and distributed through the preschools. Additional paper copies of the survey went out to Morris Minors' parents, St. Oswald's Preschool and the church toddler group and Library. The survey link went out in emails to all enquires which were received from potential new parents, with encouragement to pass on to friends.

In all, 65 surveys were completed. Survey responses represent a total 84 children under the age of five and a total of 123 children.

When compared to the total population of children under the age of five in the Croxley Green Children's Centre area (715) the overall response rate of 11.7 percent is achieved.

## 5.0 Questionnaire Findings

### 5.1 Children and Childcare Enrolment

A total of 65 families completed the survey. Nearly all of the questionnaires (61) were completed by mothers. Two fathers completed the survey and another two respondents did not answer the question about who was completing the survey (mother, father or other).

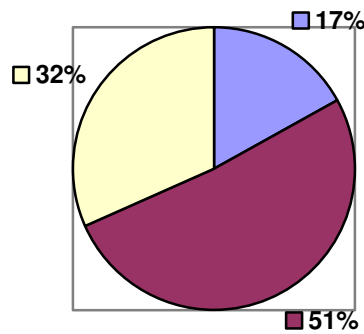
The returned questionnaires represent a total of 123 children, 84 of whom are under the age of five. Average family size is 1.9 children. The table that follows shows the proportion of the sample and total Croxley Green population by age group. Zero to 2 year olds comprise 38% of the CC population but only 25% of the sample population. When compared to the overall population of children under the age of five, the sample somewhat under-represents the youngest age group. This should be considered when drawing conclusions about parents' preferences and interests. Further consultation with parents should ensure that parents of the youngest children are included.

**Table: Children by age group and proportion of the sample and population**

	Number of children	Proportion under age 5 in sample	Proportion under age 5 in CC population <sup>3</sup>
<b>Newborn to 2 years old</b>	21	25%	38%
<b>Age 2 to 4 years old</b>	63	75%	62%
<b>Ages 5 and over</b>	39		
<b>Total children</b>	123		

The pie chart below illustrates the distribution of ages of children in the sample. Over half of the children represented in the sample (51%) are between the ages of 2 and 4. Almost one-third (32%) are over age 5 and 17% are under 2 years old. It is expected that children over 5 would be a smaller group. They are primarily the older siblings of children targeted for the consultation.

**Graph: Proportion of children represented in the sample by age group**



■ Newborn to 2 years old 
 ■ Age 2 to 4 years old 
 ■ Ages 5 and over

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Statistics Mid year 2004 estimates for CC area 3R2.

## 5.2 Employment Status

The table below shows employment status of respondent families. The most common arrangement is mothers who are part time workers (42%) and fathers who are employed full time (83%). Over one-third (38%) of mothers in the sample are full time homemakers. Only 8% of mothers hold full time jobs. A small number of fathers are employed part time (2%) and 3% are unemployed and looking for work. Only 5% of mothers are seeking employment.

These results provide a profile of the family structure of the sample that indicates that in most families mothers are spending significant amounts of time in raising young children rather than in careers. At the same time many women are balancing part time work with parenting. These results also indicate that most families in the sample have a high degree of economic security with one or both parents earning income and a salary coming into nearly all households.

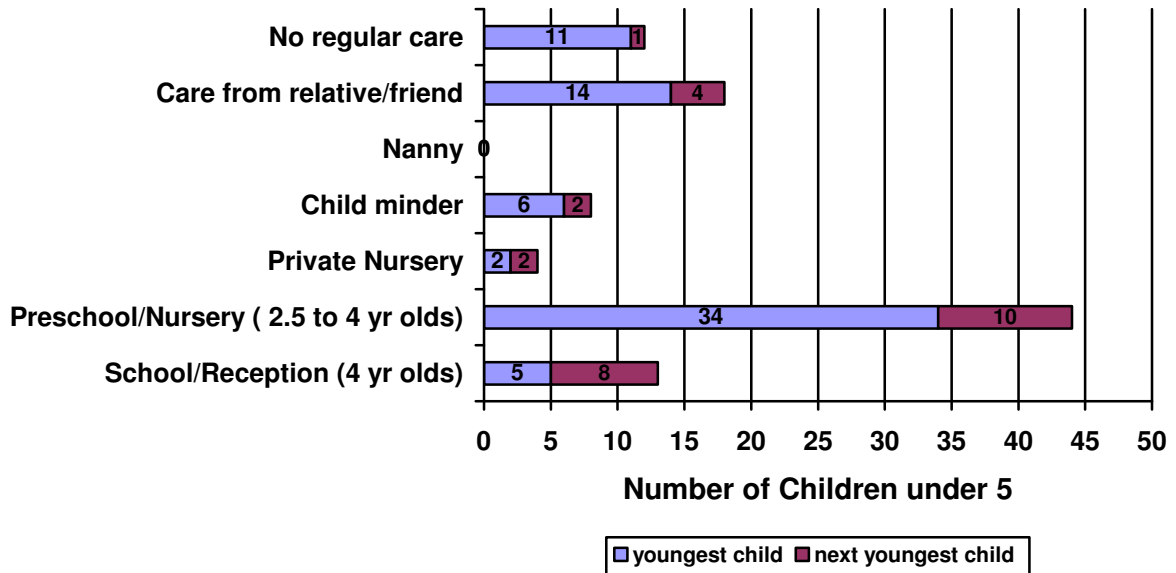
**Table: Employment status of parents**

	Mother %	Father/ Spouse/Partner %
Employed Full-time	8	83
Employed Part-time	42	2
Not currently employed (but looking for work)	5	3
Full time homemaker	38	0
Other (e.g. student, disability leave)	2	0
No Response	6	9

## 5.3 Childcare arrangements

We asked parents about childcare arrangements for all of their children under age 5. The most common type of care used is *Preschool/Nursery school/playgroups*. A total of 44 of the 84 children in the sample who are under age 5 were enrolled in preschools, nursery schools or playgroups. A total of 18 children were cared for by a relative or friend, and 13 children were enrolled in reception or school. Relatively few families use private childcare, with only 4 children enrolled in a private nursery and 8 cared for by childminders. No children were cared for by private nannies and 12 children were not enrolled in any type of regular care.

**Graph: Types of childcare and numbers enrolled for children under age 5**



#### 5.4 Adequacy of Childcare arrangements

We asked parents if the childcare arrangements they had were adequate for their needs. Most parents (89%) said that their current arrangements were adequate for their needs and only 12% of parents said they were not adequate. Eight parents commented as to why. They are outlined in the comment box below.

#### Comment Box: Additional Childcare needs

Additional Childcare Needs	# of comments
Crèche or other type of flexible drop-in care is needed	2
The cost of care is a barrier to getting more care	2
More hours needed generally, Friday afternoons	2
More programmes or options are needed for 2 to 2 1/2 year olds	1
Difficulty in arranging cover	1

#### 5.5 Use of Children's Centre Services

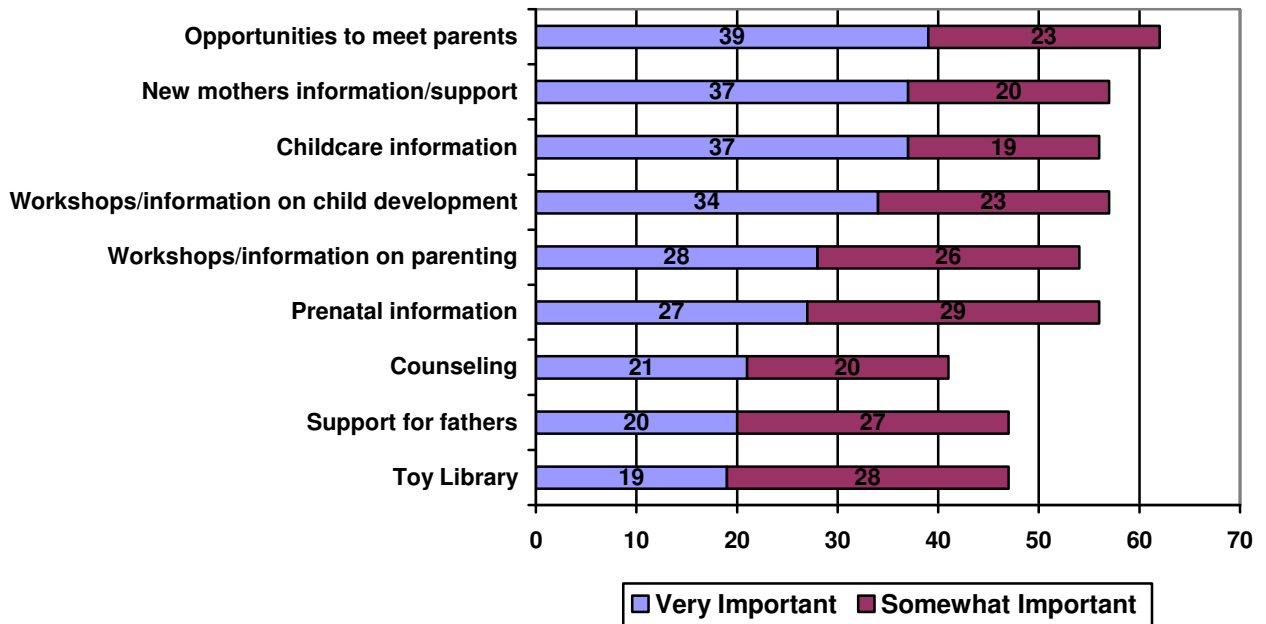
We asked parents to rate how important a range of children and parenting services that could potentially be offered through the Children's Centre would be to them. The following services were listed for parents to rate:

- **Childcare information**, advice and referral
- **Workshops/information on parenting** (e.g. toilet training, bedtime and sleeping, and eating)
- **Workshops/information on child's development** (e.g. speech, language, learning)
- **Toy Library**
- Information and support groups for **new mothers**
- **Prenatal information** and support groups
- **Opportunities to meet** with other **parents** with young children
- **Counselling** for specific issues (e.g. relationships, depression)
- **Support for fathers**

The bar charts below shows these results. *Opportunities to meet and network with other parents* is rated the most important service with almost all of the parents (95%) rated this as either very important or at least somewhat important. Both *New mothers information and support* and *Childcare information* are also extremely important to parents with 87% and 86% respectively rating these as either very important or somewhat important.

Parents indicated that are interested in receiving *information on* topics related to both *parenting* and *child development* with 82% and 88% of parents respectively, finding them important. All of the services that parents were asked about were rated at important by at least two thirds of the parents.

**Graph: Parents rating of importance of children, family and parenting services**



## 5.6 Use of Adult Services and Benefits

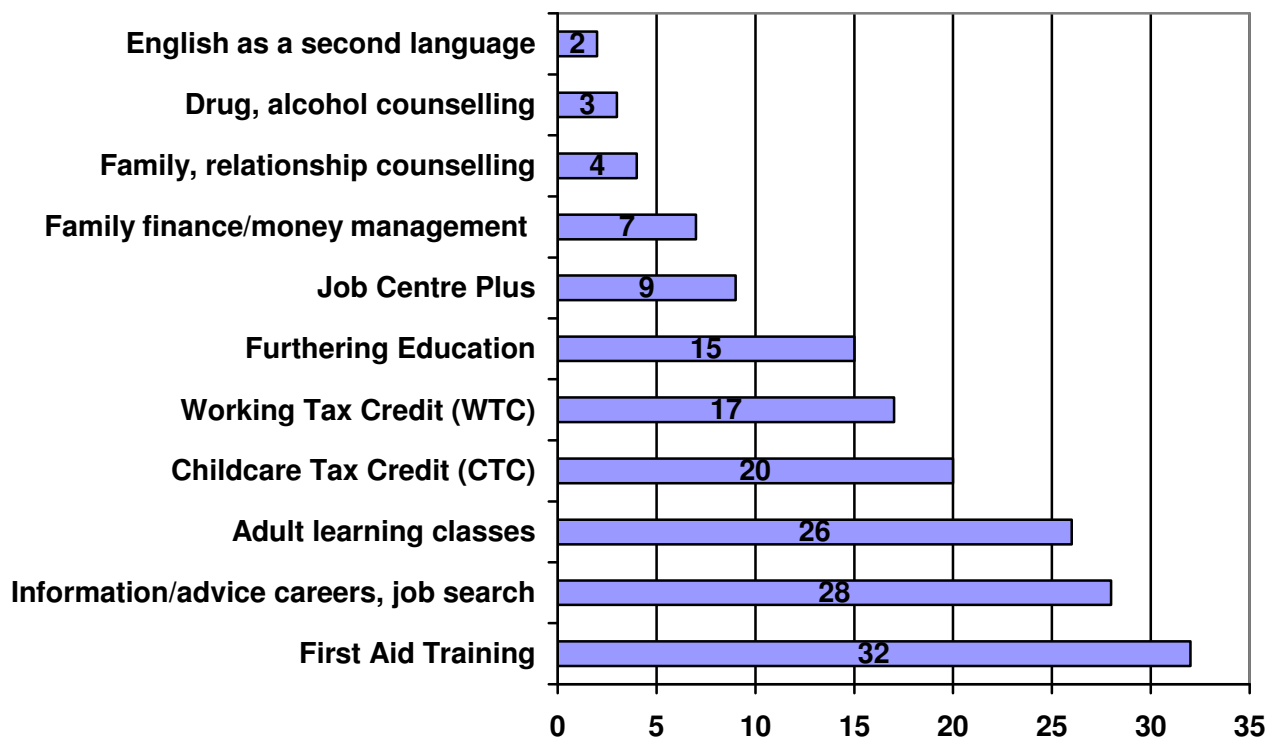
We asked parents which adult services and benefits they or their spouse would be likely to use in the future.

### Type of Service

- **Information/advice on careers or job search**
- **Job Centre Plus**
- **Adult learning classes, (e.g. computer/IT)**
- **Guidance/information on furthering your education**
- **Working Tax Credit (WTC)**
- **Childcare Tax Credit (CTC)**
- **First Aid training**
- **Drug and alcohol education/counselling**
- **Family finance and money management**
- **English as a second language**
- **Referrals for family or relationship counselling**

The bar charts below shows these results. Parents were most interested in having First Aid training. Over half (58%, n=32) indicated that they would be likely to use this if offered in the future. The respondents (who are primarily mothers) also expressed great interest in returning to paid employment and getting help in doing that in the future as well as increasing their skills with classes. Information and advice on careers or job search was ticked by 51% (n=28) of parents and adult learning classes by 47% (n=26). One third of the parents are also interested in Tax Credits, WTC (31%) and CTC (36%). Other adult services such as counselling are less likely to be used in the future; however, a few parents indicated a need. As expected, English as a second language is not a service needed by many parents because of the relatively low immigrant population in Croxley Green. Also, parents who completed this questionnaire are likely to be comfortable with English; however it is notable that two parents in the sample indicated a need for it.

**Graph: Number of parents likely to use Adult Services in the future**



## 5.7 The Challenges of Parenting

We asked parents to tell us what the biggest challenges they face relating to parenting of their children under the age of five. Three comments per respondent were allowed. 61 of the 65 parents included at least one comment with a total of 120 comments. The text boxes below highlight the types of comments parents made.

<b>The Challenges of Parenting</b>	<b># of comments</b>
<b>Child behaviour, discipline and development:</b>	
• Sleeping and bed time routines	13
• Eating	10
• Toilet training	8
• Behaviour, managing behaviour, listening etc.	6
• Discipline	5
• Tantrums	5
• Speech development and developmental issues	2
• Separation anxiety	1
• Establishing routines	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Childcare/school information and arranging childcare:</b>	
• Finding information on and choosing childcare and preschools	10
• Work and childcare, covering hours outside school hrs	6
• Applying for and getting school/preschool places	3
• Finding baby sitters and occasional or extra care	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Parenting Support</b>	
• General information and support, dealing with new babies and siblings, knowing what is normal, having parents agree on methods, adapting to relationship changes and making time for partners.	16
<b>Work Life Balance</b>	
• Returning to work, juggling work, childcare and family and	13

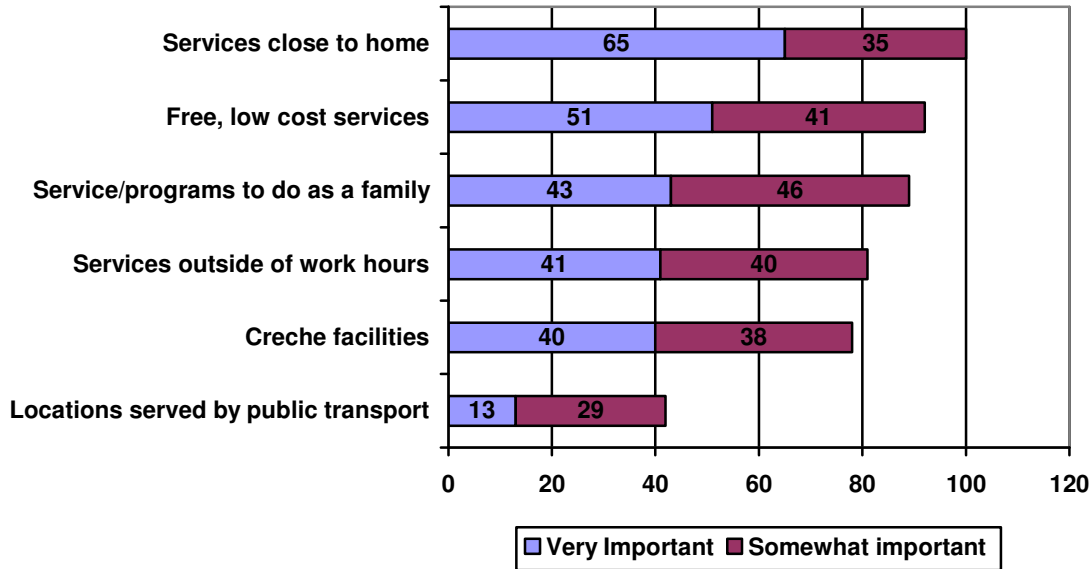
achieving a balance between work and family. Dealing with exhaustion and adapting to a change in lifestyle.	
<b>Socialization and Networking</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having contact with and meeting other mums, feeling isolated and lack of contact with other parents to discuss issues.</li> </ul>	7
<b>Cost of Services</b>	
The high cost of childcare and financial burdens of having children.	8
<b>Lack of Activities</b>	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More activities are needed for young children to socialize and be stimulated.</li> </ul>	

### 5.8 Encouraging Families to use Children's Centre Services

We asked respondents to tick the items that would help and encourage them and their families to use Children's Centre Services in the future. The results are displayed in the table below. Parents find it most helpful to have services located close to their homes. All 63 of the parents who responded to this question indicated it was either very important (65%) or somewhat important (35%). Parents with young children are reluctant to travel far to use services. The cost of services is an important factor in encouraging parents to use them. All but three parents indicated that cost was very important (51%) or somewhat important (41%). Programmes and services to do as a family were important to a total of 89% of families, though more of these indicated somewhat important (46%) as opposed to very important (43%).

Having services available outside of work hours (82%), and Crèche facilities were also important to the majority of parents (78%). However, because the community consists of some *stay-at-home* mothers, part time workers and some full time working mothers, the Children's Centre should explore further with parents what times of day are best for providing services and for what activities crèche services may be needed. While only 8 parents (13%) said that public transport was very important, it would be helpful to further explore how parents travel to various locations.

**Graph: What would help and encourage you and your family to use Children's Centre Services in Croxley Green**



### 5.9 Questionnaire Summary and Conclusions

The survey represented a total of 11.7% of the under five population of Croxley Green. Mothers work in part time employment, though many are full time homemakers. Relatively few mothers work full time. Fathers are usually employed full time. Families have a high degree of economic stability and parents are very involved in raising their children.

Parents use the existing childcare services in the area with most young children enrolled in preschools or nurseries. Care from friends or family members is also common. Most families are satisfied with the number of hours of childcare they currently use, though for some, the high cost of private care is a deterrent to parents using more childcare. Many mothers express an interest in returning to work but require more information on childcare.

Parents reported on many challenges they face in parenting their children under age five. Parents expressed concern about many aspects of child behaviour, discipline and development including sleeping and bed time routines, eating, toilet training, discipline, and managing behaviour.

Parents who work struggle to find the right balance between work and family and do not always have the necessary supports in place. They also struggle with the high cost of quality childcare and finding out about childcare options.

Croxley Green parents are very interested in using Children's Centre services. Most importantly, they would value opportunities to meet other parents to share concerns and for mutual support. Parents were enthusiastic about the full range of services they were asked about, especially workshops and information on parenting and child development and help for new mothers.

There is a great need for more information on children's services in Croxley Green. They especially need information on childcare and school places.

Mothers who are contemplating returning to work are interested in learning more about adult services such as further education, adult learning and information and advice on careers and job searching.

First aid training is of interest to many parents. This was the most important service parents indicated among the many that parents were asked about. There is also strong interest in activities they can do as a family, or that fathers could do with their children.

To further encourage parents to use children's centre services, they should be provided close to their homes and in convenient locations. Cost of services should be reasonable and should be available during hours that meet the needs of working parents and of stay-at-home mothers.

## 6.0 Parents Focus Group Findings

### 6.1 Background

A total of seven mothers with children under 5 years of age were consulted in the focus groups. They included mothers who were working part time, unemployed and looking for part time work and those who were 'stay at home' mothers. There were two single parents in the group.

The participants all lived locally and had been living in the area for a reasonable length of time, and therefore had a good knowledge of the services available in the area. Most of them had their parents or in-laws also living locally and thus had family support nearby.

Despite being a relatively small focus group, the mothers who participated in the group were very relaxed in sharing their experiences and able to articulate their views extremely well.

Overall the mothers were positive about living in the Croxley Green area. They liked the fact that the services were local and thus easily accessible. They felt safe and it had a nice sense of community. One mother said, ***"It's got a nice community feel about it. It's safe and people are friendly here."***

### 6.2 Views about Existing Services

The main concern mothers had was about the lack of suitable childcare services in the area. Lack of flexible and affordable childcare were the two main issues raised. Most of them relied on their extended family for childcare - both for short and long term care. Some were paying family members for childcare because they could not afford to pay for formal childcare.

They felt that the cost of childcare was prohibitive to mothers going back to work.

One mother who considering going back to work after maternity leave said,

***"One of the main reasons I didn't go back to work was because of the cost of childcare. It wasn't cost effective for me to go back to work."***

The mothers also talked about lack of information about childcare and children's activities in the area. They said they did not know what childcare options were available to them. They only knew about childminders, which they felt was an expensive option and unaffordable for them.

They said it was frustrating trying to find information about activities for children. Some of them use the internet to find out about local activities but found the information on the net was limited. Two of them mentioned sources like Netmums and a magazine called 'Raring to Go' as ways of finding out about local activities for children. One mother said, ***"I find getting my hands on information very frustrating. There is probably lot of activities for children, but the problem is finding out information about them."***

The mothers were positive about the health services in the area, particularly about the role of health visitors. They found the support of their health visitor invaluable, not just in giving health advice but in signposting mothers to local services, encouraging them to develop good parenting skills and providing moral support to the new mums. One mother shared her positive experience with the group and said, ***"When the clinic at New Road was open it was fantastic. The quality of health visitors was marvellous. It wasn't just about health advice. They were linked with the GP, nurses and all the other services."*** For many of the mothers the health visitor was the only person they knew they could talk to about any matter to do with their child and even their personal problems.

However, they were very concerned at the recent closure of the baby clinic at New Road. The clinic has been relocated to Rickmansworth which they said was a long distance from where they lived. They felt this would have major implications on the services and support for new mums living in Croxley. For many new mums the health visitor is the only person they have contact with. Without their support and involvement many new mums could slip through the net.

Most mothers were not aware of any parenting services or support other than what they had received from their health visitor. One mum talked about the breast feeding support which she had received about a year ago from the Breast Feeding Support Group at Watford hospital. She had contacted them as she was having difficulty feeding her baby and was getting very stressed and on the verge of giving up breast feeding. The group sent a worker to her house who then advised her on how to breast feed, gave practical advice and spent time with her. She found the service invaluable and felt this was the only factor that encouraged her to continue breast feeding her baby.

With regards to employment and training advice many of the mothers said they were not aware of services in the area. Some of them were not looking to go back to work for various reasons and thus had not given this any consideration. Two of the mothers were looking to go back to work part time, but were not aware of any service to advise them on training and career advice. They said they would like to talk to some one about what work options they had, childcare options available, find out information on availability and costs of training to help them back to work.

The following key gaps in services were identified from the discussion with mothers:

- Need for accessible, flexible and affordable childcare. There was a need for early morning and evening (breakfast and tea clubs) childcare to enable mothers to go back to work.
- Need for clear and accessible information about local services and activities for children and families.
- More antenatal and post natal support for mothers like breast feeding support, new mum's support groups, home visits by health visitors and professionals.
- Advice and information for mothers to make the transition back to work.

### **6.3 Expectations for the New Children's Centre**

Most of the mothers in the group had heard about Children's Centres but were not aware of the services they provide or the role that they play. Some mothers thought they were drop off and pick up services for children attached to local schools. One mother in the group compared it to Home Start and thought it was a charity to help families at risk. However, they were enthusiastic and positive about the opening of CGCC.

The group felt that there was a wide range of support and activities that they would want to access through the Children's Centre - namely help and support for new mothers, activities for parents and children, parenting courses and childcare support.

The mothers made the following suggestions about the activities and services they would like from their local Children's Centre:

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### **Childcare Services**

- Morning and afternoon childcare similar to breakfast and tea clubs. They would like the childcare in the mornings from 8 am and from 3-5 pm in the afternoons to help working mothers or those looking to go back to work.
- Crèche facilities for mothers to use this service for short term childcare, for emergencies or to attend training.
- Pre-school group or club for 3-4 year olds. They felt that the existing toddler groups catering to this age range were not suitable for this age group. This was because most of the other children in the group were toddlers and the 3-4 year olds didn't really fit in. Furthermore, the activities that were offered were aimed more at the younger age group. The older children didn't find these interesting.
- Creative activities like dance and music class group for 3-4 year olds.
- Toy library that could offer larger, more expensive toys and games.
- Mothers would like to have summer activities, after school clubs and holiday provisions for 3-5 year olds.

### **Health Services**

- Antenatal and post natal support service in the form of drop in service where the mothers could see a health visitor, get the baby weighed and get advice on issues to do with the baby and mother's health. This was more relevant now because of the closure of the local baby clinic.
- Breast feeding support and baby massage classes for new mothers.

### **Family Support Services**

- Counselling and 1-2-1 support for mothers experiencing emotional problems or difficulties in their personal life like separation and divorce.

- A social networking group for parents to meet informally on a monthly basis e.g. coffee morning. The mothers would like the children's centre to facilitate such a group which gives parents a chance to make friends, network and share parenting experiences.
- They suggested that the group could be held at a designated time every 4 weeks with childcare support like a crèche attached to it to enable mothers to attend.
  - Advice, information and guidance on the following topics:
    - weaning
    - Toilet training
    - First aid and emergency training
    - Dealing with fussy eaters
    - Child dental health
    - Behavioural issues like temper tantrums
- They were happy to attend workshops and more formal training on the above provided the cost of the sessions were affordable.
- The timings of the sessions would need to take into account different needs of families. Working mothers would prefer to have the sessions in the evenings and stay at home mothers would like the sessions to be in the mornings between 10-12.

### **Employment and Training Advice**

- Mothers would like information and advice to get back to work. This would include information on types of training available, childcare options, grants and other funding available to cover the cost of training and advice on preparing a CV and for job interviews.

### **Information Provision**

- They would like the Children's Centre to be the information hub for children's services and activities in the area. They would like to see the centre link the parents to local services. The mothers would like to have information about activities in the area like

karate clubs, football clubs, swimming lessons, and dance and music classes. Some mothers noted that there is more information available for children aged five and very little available for children under the age of five.

### **Communication Strategy for the Children's Centre**

- The mothers were asked what the best ways would be for them to find out about the Children's Centre and the activities they provide. They suggested the following methods to disseminate the information:
  - Website
  - Leaflets at GP surgeries and schools
  - Through health visitors and midwives
  - Libraries
  - Local publications like 'My Croxley', "Raring to go's and net mums.

They felt that the information about the centre would need to address the misconceptions many parents have about the centre. Since many parents did not know what a children centre provided it would be important for the information to address the following:

- Explain what a children centre is
- Clearly describe what services it provides
- Who it is targeting and specify the target audience

### **6.4 Focus Group Summary and Conclusions**

The focus group clearly identified the needs of families in early years' provision and the gaps that exist in this area.

Accessible and affordable childcare was a key concern for mothers and they would like to see more flexible and cost effective childcare services.

Lack of information about local services was another issue for most parents. They were hoping that the new Children's Centre could be an information hub for parents living in the area.

There was a clear need to have more advice and guidance on parenting issues - both in the form of information leaflets and workshops. There is a clear role for the Children's Centre to address some of the issues raised in this context. Mothers' felt that there was a lack of informal, softer support on offer and there was a need to initiate opportunities for parents to meet other parents for mutual support.

Marketing the Children's Centres as offering services for all is crucial. Parents felt that it should not be viewed as only for those with problems and that the Children's Centre should be viewed in much the same way a community views its library and leisure services: 'accessible and belonging to everyone'.

## **Appendix**

### **CROXLEY GREEN CHILDREN'S CENTRE CONSULTATION DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR PARENT'S GROUP**

**Welcome and introduction**

**Understanding needs of parents and identifying local services in the area  
Mapping local provision**

**Perception of Children's centre**

**Planning and designing your children centre**

**Explore the services listed in the questionnaire**

**Outreach service-**

**Information and communication**