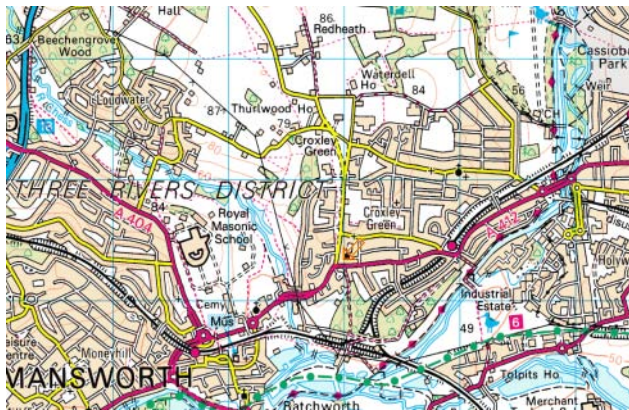


CROXLEY GREEN CHILDREN'S CENTRE CONSULTATION

Summary of Project and Key Findings (May 2009)

Background

In preparation for the launch of Croxley Green Children's Centre (CGCC), Opportunity Links Ltd. worked with Morris Minors Preschool, the lead agency, to consult with parents in the Croxley Green community. The new Children's Centre is seeking to understand the issues affecting local families and explore how these can be met through local service delivery and new activities and initiatives. A socio-demographic profile of the community was developed using statistical data and parent participation was sought through an online survey and focus groups.



About Croxley Green Parents

Croxley Green rates among the least deprived areas of the nation and Hertfordshire County. Employment rates and household incomes are well above the national average. Families overall enjoy a high level of economic well-being. Our survey found that most mothers are either part time workers (42%) or full time homemakers (38%). Only 8% of mothers are full time workers and most fathers work full time. However, despite the economic security, safety and high standards of living in Croxley Green, some parents face economic hardship and many face challenges in raising young children.

About Croxley Green Children

At the last census (2004) 715 children under age 5 lived in Croxley Green. The consultation sample included 84 children under 5. 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 parents found the amount of care they received to be adequate, although some felt that costs were too high and some needed additional hours or more flexible arrangements to align with work schedules.

Parenting Challenges

Parents described many of the challenges they face in parenting their young children:

- Day-to-day routines and behaviour such as sleeping and bedtime, eating, toilet training, discipline and getting children to listen were the challenges parents mentioned most often.
- Parents have difficulty finding information on childcare, school and nursery programs and activities for young children. Gaps exist in activities for certain age groups.
- Parents need general information on parenting, knowing what is "normal" and expected behaviour for a particular age and adapting to the lifestyle changes that come with being parents.
- Working parents struggle with finding the right "work-life-family" balance. Lack of information on childcare and resources for working parents adds to the challenge.



- Isolation and lack of contact with other parents can be especially challenging for parents of newborns and those new to the area.
- High cost of childcare and services prevents many parents from utilizing all the services they need.

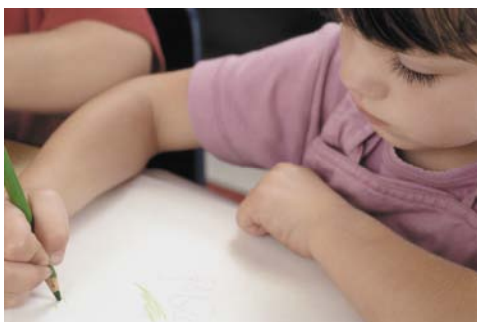
Recommendations

We looked at parents' needs, their feedback on services they are using and their ideas about what would help. The most important recommendations are:

- Parents value opportunities to meet for mutual support and to share knowledge. Opportunities for parents with similar needs should be organized on a regular basis and include both formal information on parenting issues as well as informal opportunities for socializing.



- Pre and postnatal services and health visitors are important services for new mothers. Support groups, drop in sessions and expert advice on infant care, breastfeeding and health care should be in place for new mothers. First Aid training would be welcomed by parents.
- Parents need more information on childcare options, preschools and nurseries, selecting and applying for school places and activities for young children.
- Many mothers are contemplating returning to work. Parents need more information on the range of employment, career and skills training available in the area. Information on tax credits and other ways of paying for child care is needed.



Encouraging Parents to use the Children's Centre

Parents told us what would make it easier to use services.

- Days and hours of operation and location of services need to be carefully considered. Services need to be targeted both to working and non working parents with evening and weekend hours as well as services that operate while children are in school. Travel time and convenience needs to be considered when selecting locations.
- Cost of services is an important factor. Fees need to be reasonable to encourage participation.
- Parents would like a greater variety of programs and activities available to them and would especially like activities that include the family or that fathers can participate in.
- Drop in services and programmes with flexible hours available on an as needed basis would help parents when they need it.
- The Children's Centre should become a central hub of information on children's services. A dissemination strategy should be developed that includes e-mail, the internet as well as printed sources. Parents are eager to find out more but do not always find the information they need.



For more information on this consultation or a copy of the full report, please contact the Children's Centre manager on enquiries@morrisminorspre-school.com