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## Understanding family support at Sure Start Blacon (Cheshire)

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# Understanding family support at Sure Start Blacon (Cheshire)

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# Rationale for the study

- Local perspective: how well was this model of provision working
- National perspective: family support as part of the 'core offer' of children's centres
- Theoretical perspective: understanding the model – early preventive intervention vs. 'child rescue' model

# Methodology

- Case study, using qualitative methods
- Observation
  - job shadowing in relation to home visits and one-to-one sessions with five different members of staff
  - five observation sessions (five core services)
- In-depth interviews
  - 12 staff
  - 20 parents

## Quantitative data

1<sup>st</sup> April, 2004 – 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2005

- One-to-one support: 2,432 contacts (18% of all contacts with the local programme that year)
- Pop-In: 304 contact (from 54 individuals from 26 families)
- Drop-In: 89 contacts (80 individuals, from 56 families)
- Basic Skills: all adult education services – 689 contacts (161 families)
- Pre-birth Experience: 404 contacts (137 individuals from 71 families)
- Parenting Programme: no data available

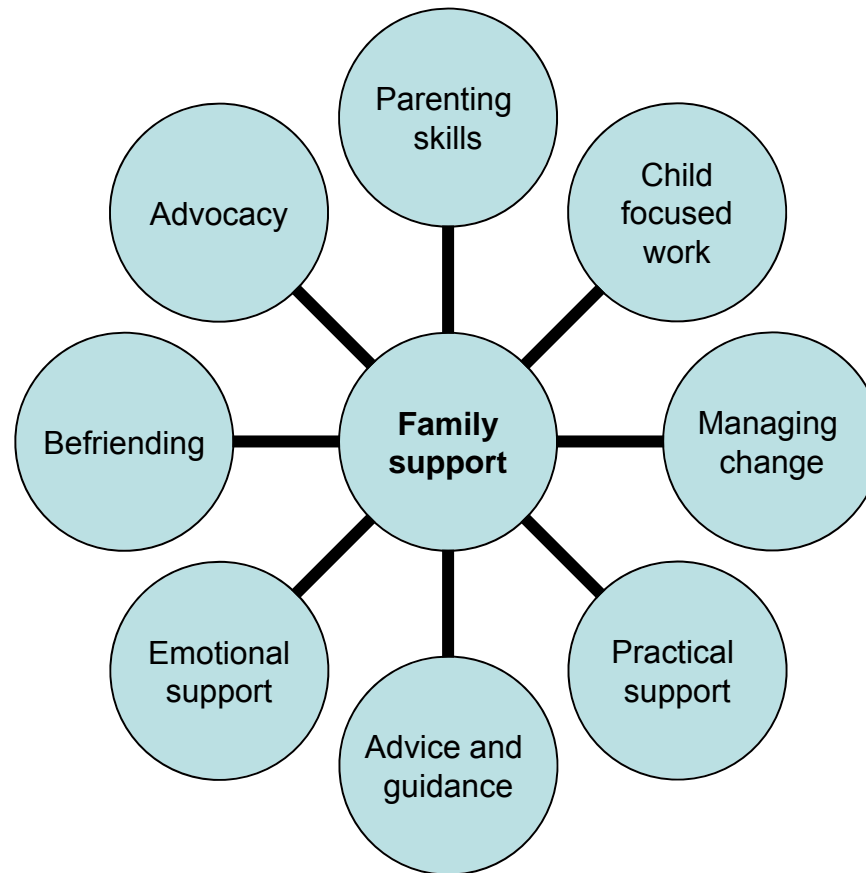
## Findings: defining the model

### How families engage with family support

- Weekly allocations meeting
- Factors that influence engagement
  - ‘She talks nice to us and that ... not many people talk nice to me.’ (17)*
  - ‘She came to the house and did a couple of sessions here with my daughter because I couldn’t make it to the group ... they understand that things happen and they don’t hold it against you.’ (15)*

# Findings: defining the model

## The ways in which families were supported



# Findings: the impact of family support

*'We work on 'time outs' and things like that and 'start charts'. We had a week of hell when 'time outs' first started, he would refuse to go on the bottom step. Now he just goes ... it is heaven. It is perseverance ... I don't think I would have bothered with anything like that if it hadn't been for Sure Start helping me ... I have definitely got more coping skills ... I don't find myself as strung out and stressed with things anymore ... I am a lot happier and so is my little boy.'*  
(14).

## **Findings: professional perspectives on providing family support within an integrated multi-disciplinary team**

- Low intensity ↔ high intensity
- Holistic and needs-led
- Early intervention, not time-limited
- A special relationship with users
- Professional identity and role definition
- Professional integration

# Conclusions

- Family support ... not a service but a way of doing things
- Relationships between professionals and users matter ... profoundly
- *Indirect* pathways to outcomes often seem to characterise family support work
- Role development of all or specialist family support worker?

# Implications for children's centres

- Model of service provision for family support
- Professional-user relationships
- Type of worker
- Blending Sure Start staff with non-Sure Start staff into multidisciplinary and multi-agency teams