



I. Improving joint working between Local Authorities and the Health sector:  
an introduction to a suite of products. . .

## Improving joint working between local authorities and the health sector: an introduction to a suite of products

Together for Children and the Department of Health held a joint “incubator” workshop in June 2007 which brought together expert contributors from Local Authorities, Children’s Centres, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Department of Health, the NHS and the Care Services Improvement Partnership. The aim was to capture knowledge and experience from both sectors and create some practical products which can be used locally to try and improve joint working arrangements.

We used a range of facilitation techniques to explore how Local Authorities and the Health sector might be able to improve the way we work together through the delivery of Children’s Centres.

The outcome of the incubator is a suite of products: a range of documents designed to be used by colleagues in both Local Authorities and in local Health organisations as they work towards their shared outcomes. An overview of what is contained in the product suite is attached.

Since June 2007 there have been a number of significant changes in policy, not least the publication of the Child Health Promotion Programme

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/DH\\_083645](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/DH_083645)

In order to reflect these changes we have refreshed this suite of products and added an extra dimension which focuses on the role children’s centres have to play in the promotion and support of emotional health and well being for families.

We hope that you find these products useful. If you have any feedback you would like to offer, please contact us at [mail@togetherforchildren.co.uk](mailto:mail@togetherforchildren.co.uk)

Finally, if you have any further examples of good practice of joint working between a Children’s Centre and the Health sector that you would be willing to contribute to this suite of products, then please send a brief overview to [mail@togetherforchildren.co.uk](mailto:mail@togetherforchildren.co.uk)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz Railton'.

**Liz Railton**  
*Programme Director - Together for Children*

## **Health and the ECM outcomes**

The promotion of health and emotional well being is integral to optimum life chances for children and their families, as detailed in the Every Child Matters outcomes. Health inequalities are significant factors in perpetuating the cycle of deprivation in which so many of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society are caught. Poor physical and mental health can severely affect the individual's capacity to learn and to achieve, thus compromising the opportunities to undertake and maintain employment, as well as social mobility. It is important to remember that, for example, mental health issues affect 1 in 4 people in Britain, which is the highest rate in Europe. Mental ill health continues to be a very significant factor in unemployment and recent research informs us that social mobility for the mentally ill has decreased whereas mobility for all other manifestations of disability has increased. This, in turn, can lead to a sense of alienation from mainstream society. The inability to become a full and productive member of society can lead to ever increasing poor health outcomes, thus leading to further marginalisation and even greater social exclusion. Some of the ways in which these issues can manifest themselves are self-medication through drugs and/or alcohol misuse, depression and psychotic illnesses, poor self care and anti-social behaviours. For parents who are affected by these issues, there are connections with poor and inconsistent parenting, which can result in safeguarding concerns and even the loss of their children to the care system. There are huge personal costs to the families concerned, as well as very considerable costs to society in general.

Disability is another significant indicator of poor life chances. Parents who have a disabled child, or who are disabled themselves, are underrepresented in the employment market, often because available childcare has not met their particular needs but also because of discrimination on behalf of employers.

The Children centre programme is in a unique position to address the disadvantages experienced by people who are suffering from health inequalities. In so doing the Children's Centre can deliver real and meaningful holistic integrated services to assist in breaking this cycle of deprivation which impacts so severely on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our communities.

This product seeks to demonstrate some of the methodologies which have developed to promote the emotional well being of children and to build the self-esteem of parents through integrated services delivered at the local level. Research indicates that poor parenting is the most single significant indicator of poor outcomes in life chances, the effects of which are very often life long and permanent. The promotion of positive parent/child attachment and bonding is thus a crucial goal for children's centres. It is very often the case that those who need support the most are those least likely to feel able to access services even when delivered as part of progressive universalism. Some of the reasons for this are a sense of hopelessness and despair, poor self-esteem, shame and chaos of lifestyle making it difficult to prioritise the needs of their children. Whilst it is the case that every parent wants the best for their child, it is also the case that some do not have the personal resources to translate their wishes into reality, largely because of their own experiences of being parented but also from a strong distrust of authority. At heart they are afraid of losing their

children and believe that they will be judged both by staff and other parents. Some parents will be refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced massive trauma in their country of origin, and who experience racism and discrimination as a daily part of their lives. The children's centre, thus, can not only make a contribution through delivery of parenting programmes and the imparting of behaviour modification support, but through creation of a culture of acceptance of difference and breaking down the barriers of discrimination which have served to divide people.

One of the most significant methods by which centres can increase engagement is by way of robust outreach services, which can be utilised to advise families of resources available to them and to "hand hold " the most vulnerable to directly access services. Health visitors have a key role, also, in the engagement process and are in a unique position to assess the holistic health needs of families. The Family Nurse Partnership pilots offer dedicated enhanced support to young parents and a link to the evaluation of the pilots is available from the DH website -

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NationalServiceFrameworks/Children/Earlyyears/DH\\_086232](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NationalServiceFrameworks/Children/Earlyyears/DH_086232)

A range of case studies are appended, which demonstrate successful outcomes in strengthening the emotional well being of children and families. These examples of effective practice demonstrate, in addition, the impact which positive emotional well being can have on capacity to develop the self through education and employment prospects.

You may also find it useful to look at the TfC Child Poverty Toolkit and the Priority and Excluded Families toolkit as they both have material that may prove useful when addressing issues relating to the emotional health and well being of families

<http://www.childrens-centres.org/Topics/AllTfCSupportProducts.aspx#tool>

| PRODUCT   | PURPOSE  |
|---|--|
| 2 How can Children's Centres contribute towards Health priorities?<br><b>** NEW MATERIALS**</b> | A planning product to demonstrate the benefits of Health involvement in Children's Centres, which shows how closely Department of Health and Children's Centres objectives are aligned and allows you to plan how you will work locally to achieve these objectives  |
| 3 Successful joint working needs...   | An overview of the key things we need to do to overcome the barriers and make our joint working a success, which summarises essential actions that show how you could put this into practice...  |
| 4 Who should we engage with in Children's Services and Health?                                  | A product to help you to identify who you might need to engage with to further your integration of Health and Children's Centres in your area. This product provides an illustration of the organisational structures that make up Children's Services and local Health structures along with some accompanying explanations...  |
| 5 Developing a Children's Centre: when to engage with health?                                   | A product to assist you in planning your Children's Centre which shows you when to engage in the right way - highlighting the activities that should involve joint LA/Health working at each stage of the Four Stages to Developing a Children's Centre.   |
| 6 What might our joint priorities be?<br><b>** NEW MATERIALS**</b>                              | A product which offers some suggested principles for joint working, as proposed by a joint health/Local Authority working group. They are offered as a starter for 10 which you can use and develop locally. Each principle is accompanied by examples of existing effective practice which you can adapt to your local context. |
| 7 Hearing from others...  | Interviews with practitioners which explore both barriers to successful joint working, and which identify areas of excellent practice that exist already.  |
| 8 Where can I find out more?<br><b>** NEW MATERIALS**</b>                                       | An index of further reading or viewing on the topic.   |