



Working with children and families

Family centres

RONNIE FLYNN

Possill Park Family Centre is in Glasgow. It offers support to families who may need extra help.

WOMAN

The family centre up at Possill Park's really quite a lovely building, we've, we're fortunate enough to have such a big building. We've got a play room, and a family session room. We've got lots of other wee offices, and parent rooms and things that we can use for different activities. Again we've got the maths classes and the English. We've got science classes. We've got the computer bus that comes on a Wednesday morning. We do cookery classes, booking cooking. I think there's thirty five families use the centre at any one week, quite a lot of that's like a book in session on a Monday, that's for families that aren't fortunate to have like a regular play session. We've got a family session which means that you come with the children, and you stay for the two hours period and play with your children along with a worker for support in the room. The play room is where you go in and you leave the children for your two hours, and either go to your class, or just go and do whatever basically you've got to do and come back within the two hours. But we've lost quite a lot at the centre as well, a lot of the classes that we're on. It's not just as busy as what it used to be.

RONNIE FLYNN

Easterhouse, a second family centre in Glasgow, is also run by Stepping Stones in Scotland. However, unlike Possill Park, they are having trouble with their premises.

WOMAN

Well their family centre's okay but our family centre's a bit, falling to bits and it's not in very good condition and it's basically needing all done up. We're actually needing better and bigger premises because the premises we're in, we're actually, we had to fight with our local councillor to get because we had a building before that, that was great, you know it was better rooms, bigger rooms, it was warmer, it was whatever, but now we're in this building it's no' ideal for the kids or the mothers. We're restricting on heating the now because we can't even afford to pay the heating bill, because the heating bill's quite high so we're all kind of sitting, and the mothers, the children's room's fine, they make sure that's warm, but our room's always quite cold and we're always having to slip our jackets on, because the money's not there to pay for the heating.

RONNIE FLYNN

Many of the families feel they need long term support. This is offered by the project.

WOMAN

Well I've been going for ten years and I've seen people come and go for the last ten years. But I've seen people leave and they've gone on to further education, they've got bags of confidence, because they had no confidence when they came to start with and I feel that about myself as well. I ended up with a bit of confidence, doing maths and English. Well there's a morning and afternoon group. So in the morning it's, there's not very many in the morning at the moment, there's about four in the morning, one's a granddad, a granddad brings his granddaughters to the centre. In the afternoon there's about seven of us, and it varies, some have got two kids, some have got just the one, so there's about ten maybe.

WOMAN

I'm a lone parent, and it was just myself and my daughter in the house, and I was feeling awfully depressed until I went to the family centre, where I could interact with other adults, and my daughter was gaining the skills to interact with other children.

WOMAN

I'm a single mother as well and it got me to mix with other adults, and it helped the kids as well before they went to nursery school. So all my friends were really working during the day, and I just moved into a new house, and I felt really isolated and found it very hard to get back into the way of things. So during the day I was really isolated, and I started going to the family centre, and I got an awful lot from it. Even more so for her as well, and it must have done something because the following year, my sisters and my sister-in-law and then my son had their babies, so we're now all going to the family centre.

WOMAN

To me it's an extended family, it's, you can share problems, information, ideas, actually helps bring out skills that I never thought I had, to becoming the worker. It helped my child develop through play, by interacting with other children.

RONNIE FLYNN

The work at the family centre is varied.

VIOLET

I do child care and working with other families, not just working with the parents you're working with, like you're maybe meeting their granddads, you're meeting their brothers and sisters, it is a family thing. And I'm in the play room, on a family session to work with the other children, work with the mums to give them support to help them bond with their child through play.

RONNIE FLYNN

Families are referred to the centre by a Health Visitor or Social Services, or may see advertisements in the local surgery. But the centre families also take an interest in recruitment.

JANIS

I met a mother once that was bringing up three young kids, and she just looked totally isolated, for she hardly spoke to anybody. So I just walked up to her, this is like a few years after I had built my confidence up, because I would never have, because it took me like long enough to build my courage up to actually go myself to the family centre, but I just approached her and in fact I actually told the co-ordinator at the place that there was a mother that was there that needed help and whatever, she looked as if she needed help. And she gave me a leaflet to give her and I gave her the leaflet and I just left it there. I explained what it was about and right enough, and what she would get out of it and whatever. She came for a wee while and then she fell away again. It depends on the person at the time. Some people can come, and then they never look back, and then other people come and you see them for a couple of weeks and then they just disappear, and you never ever know what happens to them and all that kind of thing.

RONNIE FLYNN

Apart from child care and advice, the centres offer an education programme. This has encouraged many of the parents to improve on their qualifications.

JANIS

Well I've just started it about seven weeks ago and it's great because I was never good at maths. I've actually passed four assessments, and you, after a while it leads on to like SVQ in maths so, if I get that then I'll be pretty chuffed with myself. And English as well, is roughly the same. I'm really enjoying that as well, and a lot of the mothers were getting it. There's a mother on our project that's had a kid young in life and she never finished her schooling at all so, she's doing really well, she's the top of our class at the moment in maths. She's actually high-tech computer things like that, the calculators that, so she's really come on, she's going

to pass in a few weeks, that she's going to complete her course. So that's something that she never thought that she'd be able to do so, it is a good help.

ROSE

We're in the community involvement group with the manager, on a Wednesday morning. I'm on the computer bus, learning word processing, spread sheets, databases. And a Thursday morning I'm in the maths group, been in that for a couple of months,

RONNIE FLYNN

When we spoke to the women at Easterhouse, their centre was under threat. But they were prepared to fight back.

WOMAN

Well it's the government they always say it's cut backs, cut backs all the time, they're just cutting everything away, and leaving us with nothing, do you know what I mean? It's the government are just refusing to give us the money basically. They say it's, they need it for bigger and better things, but they're not actually looking out for the families it will actually support, and need the support, at the family centres. And they're just closing us down.

WOMAN

The commitments task group got together basically, when was it, last August, really just because we were all fed up with the cut backs. It was made up out of a group of parents and grand parents that use the centre, and just, we're fed up with the cut backs, we got together, had a conflag, went approached our manager Janet, asked her what we could do about it, because every year, morale goes down. About March, the members of the staff are offered redundancy notices, so morale goes down a bit, cut backs, they don't start planning new schedules for fear if they don't get the money to keep the centre running the way it is. So the group got all got together and we started our wee campaign. We went round the co-op, the market, various places, post offices, getting petitions made up, getting people to sign them. Letters of support from other organisations in our area, that come to use Stepping Stones, maybe just for using our meeting room and getting the child care there. Basically just that.

WOMAN

Sometimes decisions are made before we have got the chance to say anything. Come March, April, the decisions are made and you feel there's nothing much you can do. You're going down and like protesting outside the chambers but, the things have been done so you've no chance. So we thought well, if we get together the now and try and do something because these decisions are made, and serious decision peoples and show them what we've got, and what we need to keep, we don't want to lose any more, and over the past few years we have lost quite a lot. And we feel if they take any more away then it's really threatening our centre. We've campaigned and we've got, I think we've got a few people to sit up and kind of listen, and to take notice about family centres and about, with the children, plus the parents get out of the family centres, and we're really needing the support of decision makers to help us to keep these going.