

Stepping Stones for Families' Family Wellbeing Service: an evaluation

WHAT WAS THE EVALUATION ABOUT?

We know that young children's life chances are improved by positive family relationships, good parenting and access to high quality, accessible, affordable early learning and childcare (ELC). We wanted to explore the impact of a 'Family Wellbeing Service' on parental and child wellbeing. We specifically wanted to understand which aspects of the Service were important and why.

The Service is delivered by a third sector organisation, 'Stepping Stones for Families', which works with nurseries to provide holistic support to parents of pre-school children in north east and north west Glasgow. At the time of the evaluation, the Family Wellbeing Service (FWS; the Service) was approaching the end of a five-year funding package from the National Lottery Community Fund.

WHAT DID WE DO?

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health and Stepping Stones for Families commissioned Nick Hopkins Consulting to ask parents of children using the Service, as well as Stepping Stones and nursery staff, about the impact the Service has had on parents' health and wellbeing, parenting skills, parent/child and family relationships and children's confidence and capacity to learn.

WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

Parents were happier, and to some extent, healthier, as a result of engaging with the FWS. They were less anxious, less stressed and in some cases, less depressed. The Service had boosted parents' confidence while reducing their social isolation. Parents also had a greater range of skills and techniques for managing their children's behaviour and were more confident as parents. Relationships and attachment between parents and children had also improved; in some cases, markedly.

Children were calmer and more engaged at nursery following parental involvement with the FWS. Nursery staff and Stepping Stones staff were clear that the Service had resolved some child protection issues and prevented others from worsening. In addition, some children were seen as more appropriately clothed, better fed and generally healthier following engagement with the Service.

The holistic, practical nature and overall approach of the Service were seen to be crucial to its positive impact on the lives of the parents and children who engaged. FWS workers were felt to be committed to the families with whom they were working, acting with their best interests at heart. They also treated parents as being of value, working with them in a friendly, welcoming, and non-judgemental way, no matter what issues they presented.

WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

There did not appear to be any major aspects of the Service that discouraged engagement, although a potential barrier was parental uncertainty about the independence of the Service from the nursery and, more importantly, from social work services.

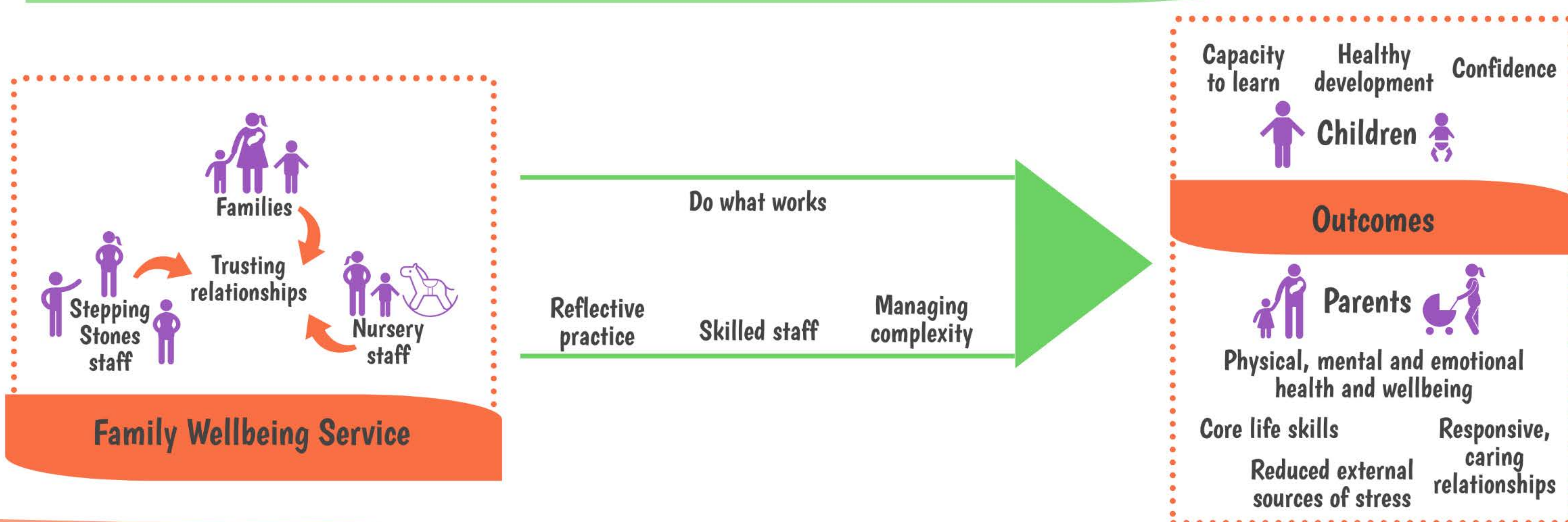
The Service had helped some parents to engage with other services, supporting parental involvement in decisions affecting them. Increased confidence reported by parents meant that, in some cases, they had accessed further services, suggesting better involvement and influence. The range of improvements that families experienced contributed to parents feeling more in control of their lives, and in a better position to make appropriate decisions for them and their family.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The evaluation found that the Family Wellbeing Service provides clear added value to statutory pre-five provision – overall feedback on the Service was excellent. The success of the Service is dependent on trust in two sets of relationships: between the nurseries and Stepping Stones staff; and between Stepping Stones staff and parents. That trust has clearly been established and is the basis for effective referral relationships.

At one level, the model is simple – do what works to help parents in their lives. But it is also sophisticated, reflecting learning over time, and delivered by highly skilled staff making nuanced and difficult judgments about how best to support people in complex situations, and undertaking multiple tasks as they do so.

Issues of severe poverty and destitution, of parents lacking the financial resources to feed and clothe their children were prominent. Continuing austerity and the ongoing reduction of incomes of families with children, particularly lone parent families and those with disabled children, will make such issues ever more common, placing a greater burden on families, and demanding a response from nursery and child support services that are themselves under pressure.



WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

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