



A Better Start case study



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Small Steps at Home



A Better Start

A Better Start is funded by the Big Lottery Fund using National Lottery funding. It is a ten-year programme focused on developing and testing new approaches to promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD). The A Better Start partnerships have developed locally tailored strategies to promote ECD, focusing on three key child development outcomes: diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication

Small Steps at Home is a home visiting service that is available to families who have a new baby or are expecting a baby. It is delivered by Family Mentors who are a new peer workforce.

Small Steps at Home is being delivered in the Small Steps Big Changes area of Nottingham.

A Better Start early childhood development outcomes the service aims to improve are **social and emotional development**, **diet and nutrition**, and **speech, communication and language**.



What are the key aims of the service?

Small Steps at Home aims to provide families with a framework of activities that are tailored to the needs and interests of the child, leading to improved child developmental outcomes in communication and language, diet and nutrition and social and emotional development.

The programme is being delivered by a new 'peer workforce' of Family Mentors. Designed to work alongside the existing workforce of health visiting, early help and libraries, Family Mentors have been recruited from the local community and are mums, dads, grandparents and people with lived experience of parenting.

Who is the service for?

Small Steps at Home is a universal service offered to all families, who are expecting a baby or have a new baby and live in one of the Small Steps Big Changes wards of Nottingham. Between April 2015 and December 2017, over 900 families have taken up the offer to receive the Small Steps at Home programme.

What is the evidence base for the service?

Small Steps at Home draws on learning from early child development and health in relation to the three A Better Start outcomes. This includes evidence based standard recommendations from the Department of Health, UNICEF baby friendly initiative, National Institute for Clinical Excellence, Healthy Child Programme, Early Years Foundation Stage and The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. The benefits of home visiting were also highlighted in the 'What Works' evidence review led by Dartington Social Research Unit.

[https://www.abetterstart.org.uk/sites/default/files/What%20works%20-%20Main%20text%20\(2%20December%202013\)_0.pdf](https://www.abetterstart.org.uk/sites/default/files/What%20works%20-%20Main%20text%20(2%20December%202013)_0.pdf)

Evidence increasingly suggests that an approach based on peer delivery (getting alongside people who need support and doing activities *with them* rather than *to*) is more likely to support motivation and engagement.

https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2014/02/Many-to-many_Feb2014_11865.pdf

Research into peer support has shown that if peer workers are well trained and supported they have the potential to bring a range of benefits to those receiving support, including:

- increased self-esteem and confidence
- improved problem solving skills
- increased sense of empowerment
- improved access to work and education
- more friends and better relationships
- more confidence in social settings
- greater hopefulness about their potential.

An evidence review by Parents 1st and Institute for Voluntary Action Research for the Big Lottery Fund, found that offering peer support from people with ‘lived experience’ of the parents’ own issues could give vulnerable parents the assurance that they would be understood and not judged, and enable a relationship built on trust to develop.

<https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/a-better-start/systems-change/volunteer-evidence-review>

Learning from the following programmes and approaches has informed the evidence base for the Family Mentor service:

- Parent-Home Child Programme
- Reggio Emilia approach to early education
- Aspley Peer Support Mentors employed by Nottingham City Council
- Nottingham Breastfeeding Peer Support service

<http://www.parent-child.org/home/proven-outcomes/key-research/>

<http://www.reggiochildren.it>

<http://www.nottinghamcitycare.nhs.uk/find-a-service/services-list/breastfeeding-peer-support-service/>

How is the service run?

Local voluntary sector organisations have been commissioned to deliver Small Steps at Home through employing Family Mentors. In Aspley and Bulwell (North) the service is being led by a consortium of Groundworks Greater Nottingham, Bulwell Community Toy Library and Home-Start Nottingham. In St Ann’s and Arboretum (South) the service is provided by Framework, working with St Ann’s Advice Group and EPIC Partners.

Parents asked Small Steps Big Changes to create the role of Family Mentor so that local families could benefit from the wealth of experience of local community members in raising children. They worked in partnership with the local workforce and Small Steps Big Changes to fully design the service and to commission its delivery through local voluntary sector organisations.

Family Mentors are recruited through an assessment process that focuses on their approach, attitude and personal qualities rather than on specific work experience or qualifications. Supported and guided by Small Steps Big Changes Programme team, newly recruited partnership colleagues take part in a training programme to support the development of babies and young children. This training includes:

- The Small Steps Big Changes Way
- Small Steps at Home Programme
- Triple P Positive Parenting Programme
- Child Development Building Blocks

- Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)
- Overview of the Healthy Child Programme
- Overview of Unicef's Baby Friendly Initiative

These courses complement the lived experience that Family Mentors have, enabling the time they spend with families to be as beneficial as possible.

Core content of the service

Small Steps at Home is a manualised programme that covers a wide range of topics to suit each stage of a child's development. The content has been designed to offer practical tools and techniques for parents to use and adapt to suit their own family. Parents are able to explore these topics through bite-size activities in their own home. They are invited to choose some of the topics so that the visits respond to the unique circumstances of each family.

Parents receive two visits from their Family Mentor during the latter stages of pregnancy, with their first visit taking place at around 22 - 27 weeks. The most intensive support is offered after birth through weekly visits, reducing to one visit every fortnight once their baby reaches 8 weeks of age. From 6 months until their child's fourth birthday, families are offered monthly home visits.

Example topics covered through Small Steps at Home programme include:

- *During pregnancy:* getting ready for birth, exploring attitudes towards breast-feeding and establishing support networks.
- *After birth:* attachment and understanding baby cues, establishing routines and safe sleeping.
- *Growing babies:* complementary feeding, preventing home accidents and encouraging baby's first words.

Each visit incorporates Activities and Tip sheets provided by the Family Mentor, as well as a menu of topics to choose from for the next visit. Families receive a full copy of the Activities and Tip Sheets to keep at home in a specially designed Small Steps at Home box.

Family Mentors receive a Small Steps at Home handbook to guide the topics they cover with families during each visit.

How is the service being evaluated?

Small Steps Big Changes have recently appointed a local evaluation partner.

Inputs, outputs and activity levels are being measured and will be evaluated in relation to children's outcomes in: diet and nutrition; speech, language and communication; and social and emotional development.

Further information

<http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/groups-activities/small-steps-at-home>

Small Steps Big Changes

“There are many ways ‘Small Steps at Home’ can reinforce a strengths-based approach and elements of the early years’ curriculum.”

Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

“The ‘Small Steps at Home’ programme has given us a great opportunity to work together. We have designed it to support and reinforce elements of the Healthy Child Programme.”

Phyllis Brackenbury, Director of Small Steps Big Changes

“The programme has helped me a lot to understand my children’s development and the different stages they learn and progress. I’ve learned what’s good and what’s not good, such as weaning, understanding their different moods and how to try different methods. It’s made me feel more confident as a parent and helped me try new things such as foods, routines and understanding my baby’s different feelings for different tasks and how they react.”

Parent, Nottingham



Blackpool
Better Start



For more information about A Better Start
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