

‘Sure Start works’. The evidence is there among the users of Callis Grange Sure Start Children’s Centre.

‘My life has been turned around. I’m a different person now’ says M., mother of three. ‘I’m giving back to my community by volunteering to help others as I’ve been helped.’ She was living in poor conditions, a victim of domestic violence and dependent on various benefits. She has gained qualifications, trained as a Walks Leader and is a regular volunteer at the centre.

‘This centre is so convenient for me and my family. It’s within walking distance. I don’t need transport to get here at a cost I can’t afford.’

Callis Grange Children’s Centre opened three years ago and since then has become an integral part of the community. Parents and carers who were suffering from isolation at home with young babies and toddlers have been welcomed and have found new friends and a support system that has enabled some to continue their education and progress into employment . At least one has now gone on to higher education. One took a job with anti-social hours, gained experience and has now moved to a better-paid position with more sociable hours enabling her to reduce her dependence on benefits.

Parents have gained GCSE-equivalent qualifications, learned parenting skills, had help with benefits from CAB volunteers, organised events and raised the funding.

The centre had a ‘good’ in its first Ofsted inspection where inspectors highlighted some very good practice ‘It is well-led and managed (and) staff are committed.’ The two areas that brought the centre from ‘outstanding’ to ‘good’ were being dealt with at the time but not implemented. One to involve more fathers proved more difficult since a number of attendees were single mothers and others had partners in employment who couldn’t attend during opening hours.

It is claimed by KCC no-one is more than a 15 minute drive from a Sure Start centre but many parents don’t have access to a car, can’t afford the bus fares nor can they allow the time it would take to access another centre when time constraints mean they have to be back to collect children from nursery or school. This centre is vital to the community as it’s where parents can access many different services from the midwife to further education classes.

Thanet as a whole has the highest child poverty rate in the county with 31.2% under 4 years of age in this category. The rate in Beacon Road Ward and Broadstairs isn’t as high as in other areas of Thanet, but a considerable percentage of families do live in conditions that mean that unemployment, poor educational and employment skills prevent them and their families from achieving their potential.

Callis Grange Children’s Centre is helping to redress the balance, raising self-esteem and aspirations mean we must ensure the centre continues to operate full-time. The short-term benefits are evident but the long-term benefits may not be known for years when the children currently attending themselves become parents.

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