

£1 Investment in Early Years = £7 Saved for Future Investment: Stop the Closure of Kent Children's Centres

5 December 2013

We welcome the statement that not all 23 children's centres in Kent at risk of closure will now close. However we are still very concerned as it is not clear for parents in Kent whether their local children's centre will remain open.

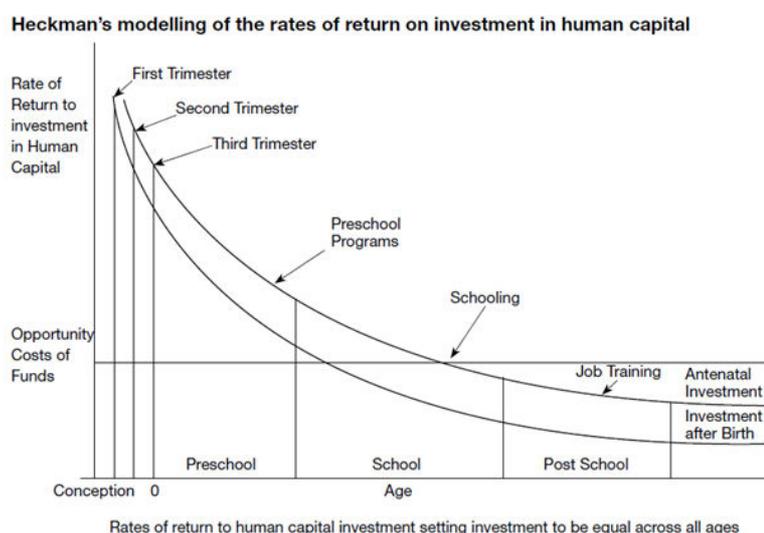
There is a sound evidence base for investment in under-5s, as well as investment in young parents, especially mothers. Therefore children's centres in Kent should not be closed or hours reduced.

- By investing £1 at this age Kent County Council saves £7 in the long term¹;
- Investment in children's centres can be part of a growth strategy in relation to building human capacity with the skilling up of young parents, especially mothers, and the potential benefits of generating billions of pounds for the economy over the coming years;
- Services in children's centres have been developed in an integrated way that makes sense to local people. Local parents have been involved in the planning of the centres and the services provided. Services have been brought together and this could be a model for other services;
- Children's centres in Kent are valued by parents and have been shown to work;
- Young children and families, mainly mothers, have been the worst affected by the financial crisis with a wide range of financial cuts, including loss of the Sure Start maternity grant, loss of child tax credits, loss of the child trust (where government contributed the first £50), loss of child benefit and others;
- In many areas there are no local services for early years except through children's centres. Kent cannot afford to cut its children's centre services as there are practically no other services available for this age group;
- Making suggestions in the consultation document of the local Library signposting families to local services do not mean anything when there are no services in the area other than those provided at the children's centre.
- Kent does not compare favourable to other areas of the Southeast in relation to investment in early years and the county can address this through funding all the children's centres;

¹ Karoly, et al (1998). Investing in our children, what we know and what we don't know about the costs and benefits of early childhood interventions. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corp. MR-898-TCWF

- Poor outcomes for children in relation to education in Kent is an issue and the evidence tells us that investment in the very early years can make a difference. It also shows fewer children living in workless households, reduced crime and disorder especially burglary²;
- The early years are really important and have a greater impact on outcomes than health, education, etc.;
- Children's centre buildings are important; they signal that early years and parents matter and closing them gives the signal that young children and parents are not a priority and this could have huge implications across the county for children and families, and education outcomes in general, in the future.

Heckman's model of human investment capital speaks for itself:



There is huge support for children's centres in the county. Thousands of parents have signed the petition. Many parents have protested on the streets with their children. For the first time many have become activists in their communities and have engaged with their local political processes.

We hope the County Council can find the £1.5M, a very small sum relative to the county's overall annual budget, and continue to support and fund all their children's centres, allowing all young children across the county can have the best possible start in life.

Yours Sincerely

Frances Rehal MBE

² Barnes, J. (2007) 'Targeting deprived areas: the nature of the Sure Start Local Programme neighbourhoods', in J. Belsky, J. Barnes and E. Melhuish (eds) *The National Evaluation of Sure Start: Does Area-Based Early Intervention Work?* Bristol: The Policy Press

