

Examining the impact of COVID-19 on Children's Centres in Bristol: lessons for policy, practice and promoting life chances in the early years

All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood
The Early Years: The Damage Done and How to Address It?

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Project overview

1. Investigating the impact of the pandemic on Children's Centres in Bristol
2. We've focused on a) how COVID-19 is impacting on services offered by Children's Centres and b) how have they continued to support families and children.
3. Interviewed (n=49) a wide range of Children's Centres leaders, staff, and early years experts
4. Important because Children's Centres are key institutions that do a lot of preventative work, including around health (improved outcomes for parents and kids). Bristol still has CCs but many have closed elsewhere.



Recommendation 1: a more targeted 'early years recovery fund'

1. Pandemic having negative consequences on very young children's physical, social and emotional development. Potential for long-term damage.
2. Project highlighting the challenges associated with social isolation, reduced physical activity, poor quality housing and food insecurity. Linked to various developmental delays.
3. Response needs to be holistic, ambitious, and inter-connected (relate to work of 'Education Recovery Commissioner')

Recommendation 2: Children's Centre services in every community

1. Children's Centres integral in supporting families despite significant challenges.
2. They can do this because a) they can respond to a wide range of issues, b) are connected to communities c) staff are committed.
3. They are ideally placed to help families deal with challenges ahead. Need further (financial) support but significant health and developmental payoffs.
4. Needs to be an official government consultation about purpose and future of Children's Centres.

Recommendation 3: Develop strategy to tackle food insecurity in the early years

1. Food Clubs have played a crucial role in city's response to hunger and food insecurity. Collaboration between Family Action, Children's Centres and other city stakeholders.
2. Significant levels of food insecurity in families with very young children which worsened significantly during the last year. Food insecurity and hunger hugely damaging for children
3. Strategy and response required to look specifically at food insecurity in the early years. i) high level of need, ii) early years specific issues not given as much attention, iii) Food Clubs as innovative response.



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Final comments

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Happy to share project findings and publications (will.baker@Bristol.ac.uk)