

Family Information Service
Annual Review, April 2009 – March 2010

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1. Introduction

This annual update provides a summary of the main achievements of the Family Information Service during 2009 – 2010 and outlines some of the key developments planned for 2010 onwards.

Solihull Family Information Service (FIS) provides information, advice and assistance to families with children aged 0-19 years and 0-25 years with additional needs and disabilities.

Information is provided on a range of topics including:

- Registered childcare, including what is available locally, what to look for when choosing a quality childcare setting and help with childcare costs;
- Things to do and places to go, including positive activities, sports and leisure clubs, uniformed groups and local events for families;
- Services for families offering support in areas such as health, finance and benefits, family support, parenting and safeguarding.

The FIS offers information to parents via a telephone helpline, email, website, and face to face at a variety of venues across the borough. The service also supports people who work with children, young people and families to access information on their behalf.

The FIS vision is to:

- provide a fully accessible information service to all families in Solihull with information available in a range of formats and at a range of venues;
- ensure that parents are given information to make informed choices about services for their children and family.

2. Background

Access to high quality information can help parents and carers in their parenting role and can be key to improving outcomes for children and young people. In particular, it can support;

- Early intervention – information can support access to the right services at the right time.
- Empowerment – parents are in a better position to make the right choices for their family if they have access to the information they need.
- Engagement – parents are more likely to get involved if they understand what is available.

The local authority has a legal duty to ensure that prospective parents and parents of children up to the age of 20 can access the full range of information to support them in their parenting role, (Childcare Act 2006, Section 12).

To address this, Solihull Children and Young People's Trust has developed an Information Strategy for Parents and Carers to ensure that information is high quality, accessible and co-ordinated. The Family Information Service is key to this

strategy and acts as the hub for family information, managing and delivering information to families and those working with them.

The information strategy and action plan can be found at www.solihull.gov.uk/cypt (go to key documents)

3. What have we achieved this year?

3.1 Service Restructure

The Children's Information Service was restructured and renamed the Family Information Service in April 2009. The following was developed;

- New job descriptions for all staff and new staff recruited, including a new Family Information Officer with responsibility for providing information to parents of children with a disability (funded through the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare project).
- Revised policies and procedures, including impartiality, confidentiality, enquiry handling and staff induction;
- A revised communications plan with new leaflets, posters and factsheets;
- An outreach program to reach more families across the borough;
- A brokerage service to provide additional support to families to enable them to access childcare and other services;
- A new database to store information about family and children's services, with new processes to ensure accuracy and regular updating;
- A service level agreement with the Children's Social Care Team to find childcare places for vulnerable children (Sponsored Daycare Scheme)
- A core leaflet pack which brings together a range of leaflets for parents, both local and national. This has been given to schools, Children's Centres, libraries and health centres to help them provide information to their parents.
- Service Level agreement in place with Children's Centres and strong partnerships with libraries and Job Centre Plus.
- Partnerships with some schools

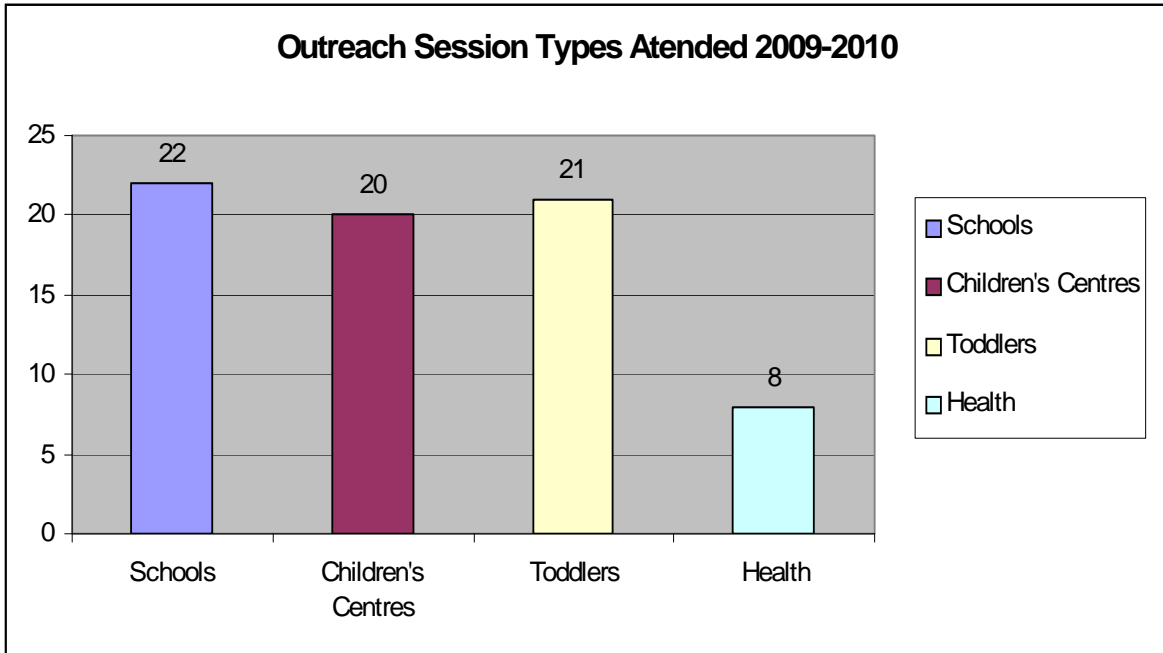
3.2 Information Delivery

Information has been delivered to parents and practitioners working with them in a number of ways. The following has been achieved this year:

- A 32% increase in the number of enquiries into the service in comparison to 2008/2009, with a total of
 - 2988 telephone helpline enquiries
 - 669 email enquiries
 - 114 enquiries taken at outreach
 - 32,886 web hits on One Voice Service Directory Website
- A total of 178 families have been supported through the brokerage scheme.
- In partnership with the Children's Social Care team, 60 childcare places have been found for vulnerable children.

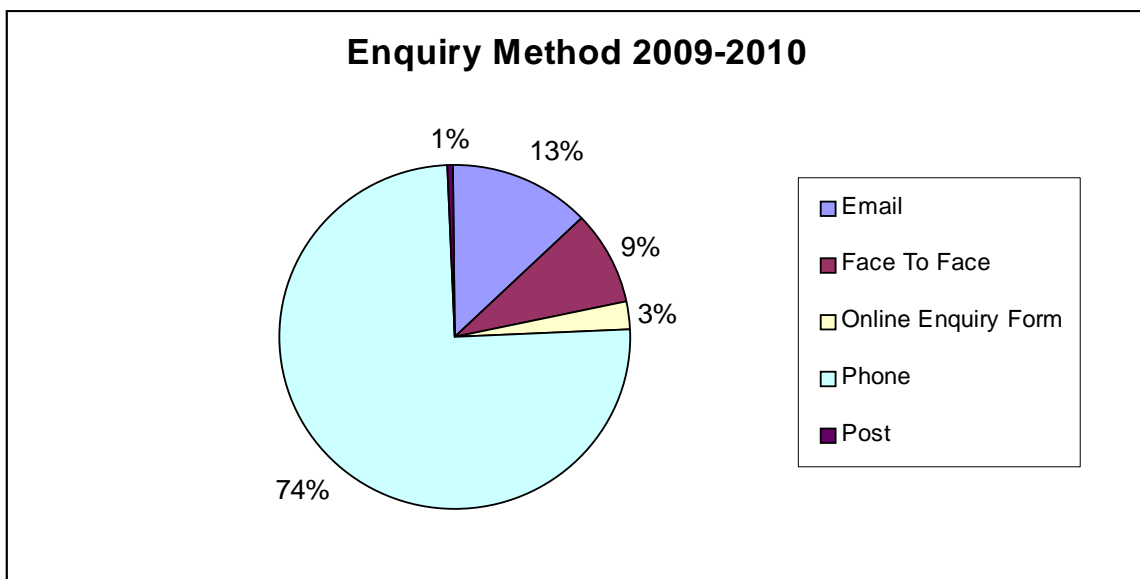
- Over 75 parents of children with disabilities or additional needs have been supported to access childcare, activities and services for their children
- Outreach is now provided in all children’s centres and throughout a range of other venues across Solihull – over 70 outreach sessions were delivered. (see fig 1 below)

Fig 1.



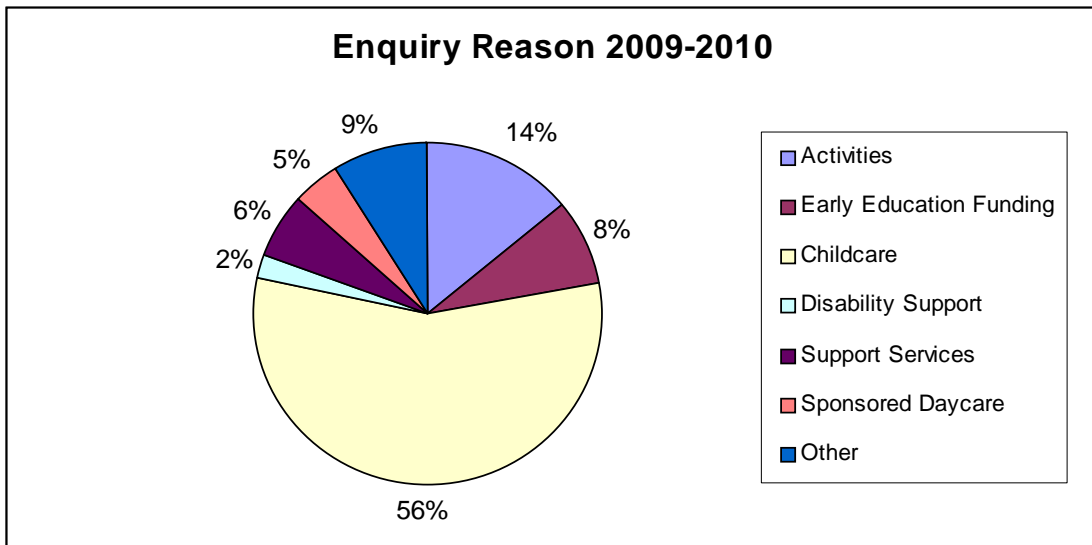
- The FIS was contacted via a number of methods, with the telephone helpline being the most popular (see fig 3 below)

Fig 3.



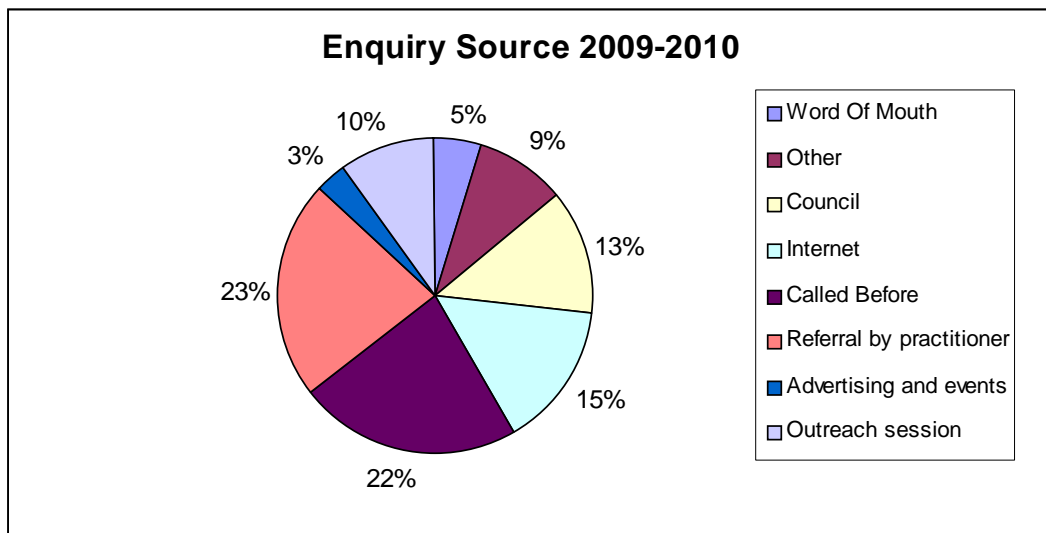
- Parents have contacted the FIS for a variety of reasons, with childcare being the most frequent reason, (see fig 4 below)

Fig 4.



- Parents hear about the FIS from a number of different sources, as fig 5, below shows.

Fig 5.



3.3 Information Management

The service has two Information Assistants who take responsibility for keeping the information on childcare, activities and services accurate and up to date. The following has been achieved this year:

- A new database has been developed, in line with national guidelines;

- All database records now feed into the national Family Information Directory, giving people everywhere access to information about childcare, activities and services in Solihull through www.direct.gov ;
- All previously held records have been cleansed and updated;
- A total of 1051 records are held on childcare, activities and support services;
- Information on vacancies at childcare settings are updated every 6 months for daycare and 2 months for childminders;
- All other records are also updated every 6 months;
- Links have been made with toddler groups, parenting services, health and libraries who provide information to the FIS regularly about changes to their services.

3.4 Marketing and Communications

Marketing and Communications has focused on building links with key partners and promoting the service directly to parents through leaflets, web, advertising, outreach and attendance at events. The following has been achieved this year;

- A number of re-launch events were held in March and April 2009 throughout the borough, with 2 sessions for practitioners to introduce them to the new service
- A communications plan has been developed to increase awareness of the service with both internal and external partners;
- New leaflets, posters and fact sheets have been produced, including a leaflet for schools on how FIS can support them to meet the extended services core offer (see fig 6 for details) and a range of fact sheets including tips on how to choose a quality childcare place, tax credits and benefits, how to choose safe activities and childcare information for families of children with an additional need or disability.
- Attendance at 30 team meetings across a range of services including health, schools and Children's Centres to raise awareness of the service.
- Over 20,000 copies of the FIS leaflets have been distributed to a range of venues including schools, health centres, libraries, Children's Centres and Job Centre Plus offices as well as directly to parents through enquiries outreach packs and events.
- Distribution of 22,000 copies of the Summer Activities booklet to all parents in the borough via schools and Children's Centres
- A number of adverts in local press and magazines, including a large article in Your Solihull and Solihull News.
- Induction packs provided to newly registered childcare providers
- FIS leaflets added to every Bounty pack and red book provided through Solihull hospital to new parents
- FIS leaflet added to every Bookstart pack distributed through the Solihull library service
- Attendance at a range of events including Solihull Carnival and North Solihull Festival.

3.5 Feedback from Customers

Feedback forms are sent to all of our customers asking for their views on the service they received and how we can improve. Response rates are at approximately 14%.

Throughout 2009-2010:

- 92% of customers rated their satisfaction with the service as satisfied or very satisfied
- 91% of customers reported that the information they received from the FIS is accurate
- On average 86% of customers reported that they found the service they needed from the information received from FIS.

We also received a number of very positive comments including:

'Excellent experience on contacting your service - helpful and informative.'

'The lady I spoke to was very nice, knowledgeable and even offered more than I had asked for. Excellent service.'

'Thank you very much for this information. You gave me more than I expected and this was appreciated'

'I was very impressed with the info that I received, it helped me a lot in finding a nursery for my first child. I have recommended you to others'

'Once again I wanted to thank you for your help! It has been invaluable and I can't believe how easy you made it for me at what is an emotional time!'

'You offer such a fantastic service! Well done... I will definitely recommend you to all my friends.'

'I found your service excellent. Within a couple of days of emailing you about activities in my local area I was sent a comprehensive list.'

There have also been some suggestions on how we can improve the service we provide. These include;

- Increased marketing and advertising of the service needed:
'Should have a way of making parents more aware of what you offer'
'Advertise your services. People need this service'
We are currently reviewing our marketing strategy and are looking at new ways to promoting our service in the future.
- Toddler Group details not up to date:
'I wanted playgroups on Fridays within walking distance of B92 9AX. The details often didn't say when the groups were held just that there was a group.'
Toddler groups are now updated every 6 months.
- Parents not aware of all the different childcare options available to them:
'Make a book for new mums to give info on current nursery and childcare options in Solihull'
We have developed a 'Childcare Choices' booklet that clearly outlines the different childcare options available to families. The booklet also contains advice on what to look for in a good quality childcare setting and how to get

help with your childcare costs. Over 5000 copies have already been distributed to parents and practitioners.

3.6 Case Studies

Information can make a huge difference to families and to outcomes for children and young people. Here are just three examples of how the FIS has helped.

Case Study 1

Joe phoned the Family Information Service for advice on the complex issues he was facing. The parent had questions about childcare; flexible working to enable him to care for his daughter, Abby; financial support; how to have the changing needs of his daughter assessed and how to support relatives to learn how to care for his daughter.

Ali, a Family Information Officer contacted national organisations such as 'Working Families' and 'Contact a Family' on Joe's behalf to get information about flexible working to care for a disabled child. She also contacted childminders to find a vacancy with someone who could meet Abby's needs and gave Joe details about paediatric nurses who could support family members.

Ali also gave Joe information about a workshop for parents of disabled children as well as a local drop in group and told him about how he could use LINCS to ensure staff from different organisations worked with him and his daughter as a team.

From the information and advice Joe received, he was able to deal with the immediate childcare and financial issues and work towards accessing further support for himself and Abby through drop-ins and the LINCS process.

Case Study 2

Emily contacted the FIS after her husband had died suddenly. Her children were struggling to deal with their bereavement and Emily didn't know who could help. Karen from the FIS offered details of a number of services who could provide one to one support and family counselling as well as peer support groups for the children. Emily came back to the FIS to say that she'd found the information invaluable and had been able to access support for her children.

Case Study 3

Amanda had just moved to the Solihull area and had been offered a job. Her son was at school and could access the before & after school club during term time, but the school didn't provide anything during the holidays. Sarah from the FIS gave Amanda information about the range of activities and schemes running throughout the school holidays as well as details of local childminders. Amanda felt this was the better option for her and Sarah contacted childminders on her behalf to find those with vacancies. Amanda found a place for her son with a childminder and was able to accept her new job.

What's planned for 2010-2011?

As well as on-going improvements, the FIS will work towards the following in 2010-2011;

- Achieve the Families First Award, which is a national quality award for Family Information Services
- Engage customers further in the development of the service
- Develop a new marketing strategy to increase the number of parents and practitioners who use the FIS
- Develop a new parents website, with an improved local on-line search for childcare, activities and support services
- Increase the number of outreach venues from which the FIS is available
- Build closer links with more schools and support them to provide information to their parents
- Provide more support for parents on a low income to take up formal childcare
- Improve information, advice and assistance for parents of children with a disability, through the integration of Parent Champions into the FIS
- Develop robust systems for reporting issues and gaps in services
- Offer information to parents on how to access support through the LINCS model
- Develop the Parents' Network to give parents regular information about activities, events and initiatives in the borough.

More detail is available in the FIS Performance Plan and Action Plan 2010-2011. Please contact the FIS for a copy or go to www.solihull.gov.uk/familyinfo

5. Meet the Team

Information Officers - provide information, advice and assistance to families. They also offer outreach sessions at a range of venues across Solihull including Children's Centres, schools and health centres.

South Solihull - Karen Biggs
North Solihull - Sarah Holley
Central Solihull - Claudette Schlitter

Information Officer (Inclusion) – Alison Bermingham

Alison provides information, advice and assistance to families who have children with additional needs and/or disabilities. Also links with a range of practitioners to inform them about the FIS as well as to provide information directly to families they are working with.

Information Assistants – Sandra Boora and Tom Cure

They maintain information on our database on registered childcare, activities and support services, ensuring the information is accurate and up to date. They are also responsible for gathering the monitoring data for the service to ensure we are providing a high quality service to families in Solihull.

Family Information Service Manager – Rosie Bunten

Rosie manages the Family Information Service and ensures the service is delivered to a high quality and that it continues to develop and improve.



Karen Biggs
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Tom Cure
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Rosie Buntan
Family Information Service Manager
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6. Contact Details

For more information including ordering copies of our leaflets and posters or to invite us to speak to parents or at team meeting please contact us:

Solihull Family Information Service

Telephone: 0800 389 8667
Text Message: 07740 046 045
Minicom: 0121 704 8058
Email: familyinfo@solihull.gov.uk
Website www.solihull.gov.uk/familyinfo