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family finances

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cards

FREE activities
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children's
centre

chatter



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for families in Sunderland
Issue 6: January to March 2012

**Sure Start
Children's Centres**


Sunderland
Children's Centres

Hello...

Welcome to the sixth edition of Children's Centre Chatter, which is full of useful information for you and your family.

Inside this edition you are invited to give us your views on our proposals about how Children's Centres will run in the future.

You will also find out how the new Children's Centre membership card scheme has been received by families at Highfield Children's Centre and if it has made registration at activities easier.

Don't forget, if you'd like to find out the latest Children's Centre news and information first, you can sign up to our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/SunderlandChildrensCentres.

See you soon,
Sunderland Children's Centres

contents

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|----|---------------------|
| 3 | Share your views | 8 | Every penny counts |
| 4 | Bite size news | 10 | Daddy comes too! |
| 6 | New membership card | 11 | We love our centres |
| 7 | 10 steps to child safety | | |

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Sunderland
City Council

Keeping children and young people safe is everybody's business...

Sunderland Children's Centres are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. Staff and volunteers share this commitment and consider the safety of all children to be paramount and central to their work.

If you have concerns about a child's safety or well-being please speak to a member of staff as soon as possible.

This information can be made available in large print, Braille, audio and other languages. Please contact Communications on 0191 520 5505 or email communications@sunderland.gov.uk for help.

All information correct at time of going to press.
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children's centre changes

an invitation to share your views

During November, December and January you are invited to give us your views on our proposals about how Children's Centres will run in the future.

We need to review the services we deliver in order to respond to reduced funding, whilst also improving the services we deliver to you and your local community.

We are asking if you:

- Agree with reducing administration and management costs by keeping the 17 main buildings to deliver activities and sessions, but only have five (one in each area) formally called Children's Centres
- Agree that we should prioritise families who need extra help
- Like 'Area Boards' (one for each of the five areas of the city) made up of parents and community members to identify what services are required locally, to meet the needs of families living in the local area.

With this edition of Chatter you will find a leaflet containing information about the proposed changes and a feedback form for you to complete and return to us by Friday 13 January 2012.

Keep checking www.sunderlandchildrenscentres.co.uk for a summary of the feedback we have received and how you can continue to be involved in changes to Children's Centres in the future.

Bite size news

What's going on in your Children's Centres



Healthy living in the East

Families in the East and Coalfield areas of the city are supporting a study to see how technology may help to change the behaviour of families and further promote healthy living.

Amy Fielden, a PhD researcher from the University of Northumbria is conducting a study to see how parents use the internet to find information relating to healthy eating, physical activity and wellness and how useful the information is. Amy then hopes to create an online tool that better meets the needs of families and encourages families to live healthier lives.

Feedback from the study so far has been that families would like a tool that helps them plan meals and buy healthier food on a limited budget.

Health champion helps local community

Volunteers in the North of Sunderland were given the opportunity to extend their learning by taking part in a pilot training programme to become 'Health Champions'.

The Health Champions programme is made up of five courses that focus on health subjects such as 'alcohol intervention' and 'understanding health improvement'.

John Conlon, a volunteer at Sunderland Children's Centres and also at a local youth group for children with additional needs, recently qualified as a Health Champion. John said: "Becoming a Health Champion means I can support my local community with any health issues they may have and advise them where to go next for help or information."





New space brings new opportunities

New Silksworth Children's Centre and New Silksworth Infant School have been working in partnership to improve activities and services for families in the area.

The Children's Centre has been transformed to offer activities to a wider age range of children and more structured activities for families.

Kelly Stanford, 30 from Silksworth and her daughter Olivia are reaping the benefits of improvements at the centre. Kelly said: "Olivia was too old to attend the Time for Rhyme sessions, but now there are activities suitable for her age. The new Stay and Play session gives Olivia what she needs to learn and play before she attends nursery."

Getting it right for the local community

Families in Houghton-le-Spring are enjoying a new session at Burnside Primary School after a change to the activity timetable.

Workers assessed the activities they offer to families and rearranged them to suit the needs of the community.

An activity that was previously held on a Friday was moved to a Wednesday, when a larger room with outside space could be used. This means more families can access the session and benefit from the wide range of activities.

Jean Clennell, a grandparent who attends the new Wednesday session said: "There's much more room for Evie and the others to play, and now it's on Wednesdays, we can come more often."



We are good...

Shortly after Wessington Children's Centre received a transformation to make access for families easier, Ofsted dropped by to carry out the centre's first ever inspection.

The results are in and Ofsted judged the centre as 'good overall'. Ofsted comment on the 'highly effective team that is determined to make a difference for children and their families'.

Mum of four, Julie Owens from Columbia agrees with the report. "Sure Start is a positive environment for every parent and child that attends. It's a well deserved result for the centre."



Highfield families try out new membership cards



In September parents from Highfield Children's Centre started to use new Children's Centre membership cards as part of a pilot to test out a new way of registering for activities.

The scheme, which will make registration onto Children's Centre activities much quicker and easier, is set to launch to the rest of Sunderland in spring 2012.

To ensure the electronic registration and membership cards work as well as they can for families, the pilot in Highfield ran over two months, from mid September to early December.

During this time families were able to tell us how they found the system and what some of the issues were, so that the system could be fine-tuned before being launched city-wide.

Patricia Bruce, a grandparent from Grindon took part in the pilot. She said: "It's so much easier, less hassle and a lot quicker. You don't need to wait for someone to write your details down because they are all stored on the system. The card fits in your purse, so it's easy to carry around."

Look out for details about when Children's Centre membership cards will be launching at your local centre this spring!

10 steps to child safety

Children can't be wrapped in cotton wool, but steps can be taken to keep them safe and prevent accidents or injury.

RoSPA, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents offers a wide range of advice and information for parents on home safety. Here are a few simple steps you can take to help keep your child and family safe:

- 1 Keep fires and heaters guarded
- 2 Take extra care with hot drinks
- 3 Keep pan handles turned inwards so your child can't reach them
- 4 Fit approved safety gates to the top and bottom of your stairs
- 5 Store medicines and chemical products in a safe place where your child can't see or reach them
- 6 Keep pull cords on curtains and blinds short and out of reach
- 7 Keep matches and lighters out of sight and reach of children
- 8 Never leave young children alone in the bathroom
- 9 Keep curling tongs and hair straighteners out of reach even when cooling down
- 10 Choose toys that are appropriate to the age of your child.

A full list of home safety advice and tips can be found at www.rospa.com/homesafety

You can also access information about child safety through your local Sunderland Children's Centre or by contacting your health visitor.



Every penny

Did you know there are a number of benefits available for families? Make sure you know what you're entitled to. Here are just a few of them...

Tax Credits

Child Tax Credit is available for some parents who are responsible for at least one child or young person. Working Tax Credits are for parents who work, but are on a low income. You may qualify for both tax credits. For further information visit www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits

Free school meals

If you are in receipt of Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Child Tax Credit then your child may be entitled to free school meals. Visit www.direct.gov.uk to apply.

Childcare vouchers

If you are employed but don't get help towards childcare costs through Working Tax Credits some employers offer childcare vouchers – another way to save money on your childcare bill. For more information, speak to your employer.

Giving your child a healthy start

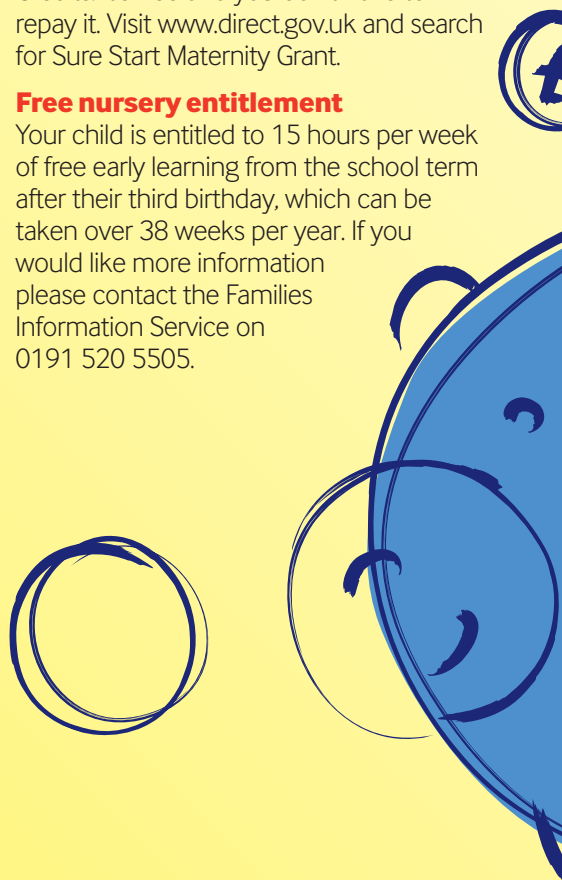
Women who are at least 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four and are in receipt of benefits may be entitled to Healthy Start vouchers. The vouchers help families purchase products such as milk, plain fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and also infant formula milk. Free vitamins are also available through the scheme. To find out if you qualify visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk or telephone 0845 607 6823.

Sure Start Maternity Grant

A one-off payment of up to £500 for families who are on low income and receiving certain benefits such as Tax Credits. It's free and you don't have to repay it. Visit www.direct.gov.uk and search for Sure Start Maternity Grant.

Free nursery entitlement

Your child is entitled to 15 hours per week of free early learning from the school term after their third birthday, which can be taken over 38 weeks per year. If you would like more information please contact the Families Information Service on 0191 520 5505.



counts



Ways to manage your money better

Have your benefits changed? Are your finances affected by the current financial climate? Do you want or need to manage your money better?

Here are just a few hints and tips to help families who may be struggling with debt or want to plan for special occasions such as Christmas.

- Plan for that special occasion (birthdays, holidays and Christmas). With a little bit of planning and watching the pennies, debt and money worries can be avoided. Save through savings bonds, building societies or even credit unions
- Avoid using unlicensed lenders such as loan sharks at all costs. Borrowing from a loan shark can seem like a quick fix, but you will pay back considerably more and often be harassed for re-payments. If you know a loan shark report them by calling the 24/7 confidential hotline on 0300 555 2222
- Speak to the Citizens Advice Bureau who can offer great advice and support on how to deal with debt and manage your money.

For free, impartial and confidential advice on debt, housing and benefits issues or to speak with someone at the Citizens advice bureau telephone 0191 416 6848 or visit www.citizensadviceunderland.co.uk

Daddy comes too!

Sunderland Children's Centres offer a great range of activities for families such as Messy Play, Stay and Play and Busy Bodies.

Centres run activities for all the family, so dads, granddads and even uncles are welcome to all sessions too.

If you feel worried or anxious about attending a session for the first time, why not try one of the Dads and Kids groups first and see what is on offer?

Keith Lawther, a dad from Washington admits he was a bit sceptical about attending his local Children's Centre, but once he made the step through the door he didn't look back. When his son Billy was born, Keith's wife Paula attended their local Baby Days session to get Billy weighed. Keith still wanted to attend the group even when Paula returned to work.

Keith said: "I was a bit unsure about going to Baby Days on my own, but because I went along with Paula for a couple of sessions I felt comfortable and was happy to take Billy on my own. Billy and I are now regular attendees at our local Children's Centre and take part in activities such as Stay and Play."

Centres are a great place to spend quality time with your child or grandchild in a relaxed and friendly environment. Come along and see what activities are running in your area.



We love our children's centres...

We receive lots of comments and feedback from parents about Children's Centre activities and services. Here are just a few...

"Children's Centres are a great place for children and grandparents to spend quality time together."

Susan Carson



"It's a great opportunity to help develop Gabriel's social skills in a safe and relaxed environment."

Ian Davison



"Centre's are great for kids. They can sing together in big groups and have fun. It's lovely being able to spend quality time with Summer Rose, especially when I work shifts."

Chris Martin



"I have volunteered with Children's Centres for five years and gained 35 qualifications with the support of the friendly team."

Lisa Stewart



"Sunderland Children's Centres are an invaluable service. There is a great choice of activities and the staff are really friendly and child-orientated."

Lesley Avison



Tell us what you love about your Children's Centre.

Email your comments to childrenscentres@sunderland.gov.uk or write on our Facebook wall www.facebook.com/SunderlandChildrenCentres

Give a child a better future through fostering



Tel: 0191 520 5555

Email: adopt.foster@sunderland.gov.uk

www.sunderland.gov.uk/fostering


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