Report on pre-natal library offer pilot project – Dudley Libraries

Summary

The project is a result of ASCEL identifying a gap in library provision at the pre-natal stage. It is one of 3 pilots nationally that have received funding from ASCEL. The project involved running a 4 week course for expectant mums that focused on bonding skills.

Aims/outcomes

* Support for expectant mums to give their baby the best possible start
* Expectant mums understand the benefits of communicating with their bump
* Expectant mums stay healthy and maintain low stress levels during their pregnancy
* Parents are aware of what the library has to offer and start their baby on a library journey at the earliest opportunity

Project description

To launch the project, known as Bump, Baby and Beyond, we held a celebration event at Dudley Library on Friday 24th March. We invited a range of service providers including: Dudley Leisure Centre, Family Learning, Family Nurse service plus volunteers including: Breastfeeding Buddies and NCT. Local businesses were also invited including Tesco who ran a healthy eating stand, Body Shop and Partylite plus local cake decorators and photographers. The library offer was showcased including Bookstart, the range of resources for children, online information service and rattle’n’rhyme sessions. In addition other activities were available including language, music and yoga sessions for babies. Over 200 people attended the event and several of these joined the library. The event largely appealed to mums and dads with babies and young children and only small numbers of expectant mums attended.

The 4 week Bump, Baby and Beyond course started on Friday 12th May and ran until Friday 2nd June. The sessions were held at Dudley Library between 10.30 and 12.30. The programme was planned in partnership with Homestart Dudley and Public Health Dudley and covered:

Week 1 – Your baby can hear you! This session was led by a health visitor and focused on the development of hearing in the reasons why communication in-utero helps with bonding. This was followed by a laughter yoga session to help the group gel and feel comfortable with each other and with the prospect of trying out new skills. The craft session was then introduced – a chance to learn how to crochet a baby blanket over the course of the 4 weeks with expert tuition and all materials provided.

Week 2 – Using songs, rhymes and stories. Professional storyteller, Sally Tonge, led this session and introduced expectant mums to a range of songs and rhymes they could use to communicate with their bump. The group and Sally then joined a Rattle’n’Rhyme group that was running in the library. Following this mums were introduced to Bookstart and the Bath, Book, Bed campaign. They received a free nursery rhyme book.

Week 3 – Relaxation. A professional yoga teacher led this session which focused on the benefits of relaxation plus a pregnancy yoga session designed to help with aches and pains during pregnancy and improving labour.

Week 4 – Breastfeeding and healthy eating. A Breastfeeding Buddy was on hand to talk very informally about the benefits of breastfeeding followed by a Park Ranger who introduced an interactive quiz on healthy eating and highlighted the range of free activities in local parks.

Recruitment for the programme

The number of expectant mums taking part in the programme was disappointingly low (5). A higher number did express an interest in joining the programme but were unable to due to work commitments.

Homestart Dudley was chosen as a partner for this project with the thought that they would be able to identify and recruit expectant mums who needed an extra level of support. This did not happen as, at the time of the programme, they did not have any expectant mums in their case load. Homestart Dudley did, however, promote the programme through their social media channels.

Similarly, The Family Nurse Service was asked to promote the programme to teenage mums but the take up was not as we would have hoped for (1).

Contact details were collected from the Celebration event via a prize draw but only 1 contact for an expectant mum was achieved by this method.

Public Health Dudley promoted the event through all their channels.

Promotion by Dudley Libraries included:

* Posters and flyers distributed at all key destinations for expectant mums including ante-natal sessions. Leisure centres, doctor’s surgeries, shopping centres, through schools
* Promoted by library staff at ante-natal swimming sessions, pre-school settings
* Promoted extensively via social media, mumsnet and library website

Outcomes

Feedback forms from the celebration event told us how much mums and dads appreciated and enjoyed taking part in taster sessions including music tots, makaton and baby yoga. They found the stall informative and asked for more craft activities.

Feedback forms were filled in by participants at the start of the 4 week programme and again at the end. They told us that they felt more confident about communicating with their bump by the end of the project.

Participants told us they had increased their awareness of the library offer for babies, young children and families.

Participants told us they had increased their awareness of how to stay healthy and stress free during their pregnancy.

One participant added “Thank you for letting me take part it was good fun”.

As part of the final week of the programme we had planned to film mums talking about their experience of being on the programme but mums did not feel comfortable doing this (apart from one mum who gave birth prior to week 4!)

Instead we filmed the member of staff who had run the Rattle’n’Rhyme session with Sally Tonge. She told us how much she had gained from Sally’s input and how it would help her to improve her sessions in the future. As a result of this we have arranged a further training session with Sally for a wider staff group.

The project strengthened partnerships with Homestart Dudley and Public Health Dudley who both input into the programme, however, this may have drawn the focus away from the key message about the benefits of communicating and subsequent bonding through songs and stories and would need to be re-balanced in any future programmes.

Recommendations/thoughts for future practice

* Hold a showcase event aimed solely at expectant mums
* Hold a regular monthly session for expectant mums that they could dip in and out of
* Consider holding events for expectant mums on a Saturday to accommodate those still at work
* Retain the focus on communicating skills and the library offer whilst still including information from partners
* Invite expectant mums to take part in existing Rattle’n’Rhyme sessions in preparation for them coming along with their babies.

Conclusions

We have received several enquiries since this project finished as to what other events/activities we are planning for a pre-natal library offer. This, together with the enquiries we received when the project was first advertised, lead us to conclude that there is a demand for more activity in this area – we just need to plan it carefully so that the maximum number of people can take advantage of it. We also need to ensure the focus of any future activity is on the library offer. Every session should include some content around this so people could expect that sessions will cover a range of different topics but that there will always be some content around communication skills as the foundation blocks for a reading journey.

This project involved a snapshot evaluation but long term it would be beneficial to think about longitudinal evaluation including examining the effects on school readiness. Such evaluation would require additional funding.

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