Customer led transformation programme
Case study – London Borough of Croydon

Croydon Family Space

46/58

Contents

The Customer Led Transformation Programme

The London Borough of Croydon's work has been funded under the customer led transformation programme. The fund aims to embed the use of customer insight and social media tools and techniques as strategic management capabilities across the public sector family in order to support place-based working.

The customer led transformation programme is overseen by the Local Government Delivery Council (supported by the Local Government Association).

The fund was established specifically to support collaborative working between local authorities and their partners focused on using customer insight and social media tools and techniques to improve service outcomes. These approaches offer public services bodies the opportunity to engage customers and gather insight into their preferences and needs, and thereby provide the evidence and intelligence needed to redesign services to be more targeted, effective and efficient.

About the London Borough of Croydon

With a population of 363,400 people, the London Borough of Croydon has the largest overall population of any London Borough. With nearly 90,000 residents aged between 0 and 19 the borough is also home to the largest population in London of children and young people,. As well as being an area of considerable ethnic diversity, Croydon contains a significant mixture of affluence and deprivation across its neighbourhoods, with some areas classified as being within the 10 per cent of most deprived in England.

Deprived areas are mainly concentrated in Croydon's major social housing estates and in the north of the borough while wealthy areas are predominantly found in the south. Outcomes regarding health issues vary enormously: there is an 11 year range in life expectancy.

Children in Croydon

The diversity is of course reflected in Croydon's children and families:

- Birth rates: Croydon's birth rate (70 per 1000 women) is higher than the London average of 68 and the national average of 62. There are about 5,000 births per year in Croydon – and this number is likely to rise.

- Ethnicity: Many of the births recorded in Croydon are to mothers who are members of black or minority ethnic groups, as well as mothers who were born outside of the country. By 2026 the black and minority ethnic population in Croydon will be greater than 50 per cent, making Croydon a minority–majority borough.

- Child poverty: One in four children in Croydon grow up in poverty and there is a relatively high percentage of lone parents who are in receipt of benefits. The figure currently stands at 3.1 per cent of the population versus the London average of 2.8 per cent and the national average of 1.9 per cent.

- Housing: One in six children lives in overcrowded housing. We also know that in Croydon there are a small number of homes requiring safety visits from housing colleagues. In 2008/9 258 households were visited which were home to children under five.

- Other health indicators: Croydon's teenage pregnancy rates are higher than the average across London and the rest of the UK. There are high rates of obesity in some wards, with more than 25 per cent of children classed as obese versus a national average in the low 20s.

Croydon's Total Place pilot

The initial ethnographic research highlighted to Croydon that information did not flow in the way that it should either to professionals or to families. Both groups said that they did not have access to the information that they need, and that they spend significant amounts of time chasing 'leads' to try and find what they were looking for.

The stories captured also suggested that when families and professionals did find information it was often 'by luck' or by chance – and that this dictated and drove the types of support that they received. The stories and experiences captured indicated that very little information flowed to parents directly, but instead flowed (as with funding) through to professionals who then translated it to parents and children.

During the research, many parents referred to searching for information online, or using the web for social networking with friends. Many were also observed to have access to the Web via smartphones. Hence, the council recognised that there was a potential for using the Web to address these customer's needs. The resulting proposition was to build a powerful online tool for parents and professionals which would enable easy access to all sources of information about services locally.

Background

This project builds on the customer insight work of Croydon's Total Place Pilot, which focused on improving Children's Health and Wellbeing between the ages of nine months and seven years of age. Croydon focus on 'early years' was based on substantial evidence that a good start in life in terms of physical, emotional and cognitive development results in better individual and social outcomes later in life.

During the Total Place Pilot, Croydon gained customer insight from more than 60 families. This enabled Croydon Council and partners to map the 'customer journey' and identify where service improvement was required.

The Total Place initiative generated a vast amount of insight on the theme of Children's Health and Wellbeing, and proposed a range of projects to address the issues identified. Hence, the 'Family Space Croydon' project documented by this case study was one of a portfolio of complementary projects which emerged from the Total Place findings, including:

- 'Preparation for parenthood': a project which set out to generate greater value from the many contacts that prospective parents have with health care professionals during pre and post natal care. The project sought to identify as early as possible those who may require additional support and thereafter provide these people with timely onwards response – leading to cost savings in the long term.

- 'Early Identification': this project set out to equip Croydon's frontline family practitioners (health visitors, child minders, nursery nurses etc) with training in family assessment tools to use with parents in order to support earliest identification of need (including mother, father and child).

- 'Geographically based Family Partnership Teams': a project seeking to develop a 'virtual team' comprising health, social care and children's centre professionals with a pooled budget who could provide an improved experience for families through much tighter integration between services, professionals, communities and families.

A full list of the projects proposed by the Total Place project is available in the pilot's final report – 'Child: Family: Place' – available from: http://tinyurl.com/ak9yen6

Croydon's Total Place research identified that while there were many services available for families in Croydon, too many parents were still struggling to find the appropriate support for their individual needs. The role of the project documented here, was to take the learning derived from the Pilot study a stage further and co-design a new service model based on a family-focused web service, named 'Family Space Croydon'. This process forms the focus of this case study.

Family Space Croydon seeks to address the needs of families by providing an online resource for families that enables them to become informed about the family activities, groups and services that best fit their needs. The co-design team included service users and service provider representatives from CS&W, Croydon Council, Croydon LSP, Croydon children's Trust, NHS Croydon, the Mayday Hospital and Croydon VCS.

Findings from Total Place

Most parents have high aspirations for their children, and many put a lot of energy and resourcefulness into parenting, often working hard to succeed despite 'the system'. Other parents - often the most in need, do not know where to turn for support. Even proactive, confident parents say that there is a need for better information and signposting. Few parents experience consistency over time from their support services; many notice the 'disconnects', including how they are not passed effectively from one service to another.

Objective

The overarching objectives of the project were to:

- use customer insight to better understand and engage with children, young people and families in Croydon

- identify barriers to accessing services for children, young people and families

- gain efficiency savings as a result of developing a better integrated approach to supporting these customers

- redesign access to services and information so that they are better targeted to these customers

- build on relationships with our customers and make significant steps towards the 'Big Society'.

The customer insight work conducted for the Croydon Total Place Pilots highlighted how difficult it was for families to navigate between different organisations in order to access the services and help they needed (see text box).

The inadequacies uncovered inevitably had an impact on families' ability to access the services they needed, and also affected the cost of providing this support. Additionally, there was no organised way for parents or children to offer direct feedback to front line professionals or to recommend services to each other.

Croydon set out to use online and social media channels as a way of improving access to both information and services, seeking to ensure they:

- provided ease of access online and via mobile phone

- provided compelling content and transactional services that helped the customer group in question

- provided a site that it was intuitive and logical to use

- linked to all services relevant to children, parents or their representatives

- linked to professionals directly and cut the need for sign-posting and the duplication of effort

- facilitated customer feedback directly to the primary service provider, as well as making this feedback available to other customers

- were up-to-date, and easy for the service to keep up to date.

The insight and co-design work described by this case study was conducted to drive the delivery of these objectives.

Approach

The following section describes the customer-led approach that LB Croydon and partners took to develop their new online service for families – Family Space Croydon. The research aimed to ensure that changes to the council's online resources were made in a way that better met the needs of families in Croydon and that resulting services were fit for purpose.

The research method applied in their initial project centred on Ethnographic Interviewing, and Croydon continued using this approach to collecting insight for the development of the site. Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews with a wide range of individuals, carried out by researchers. For an outline of Ethnographic Research see the Text Box 1.

Text box 1 – ethnographic research
Ethnography is the descriptive study of human cultures and societies based on fieldwork. Ethnographic fieldwork is distinguished from other forms of research by its use of participant observation, its exploration of subjectivity, researchers' extensive time in the field, and its emphasis on qualitative information.

The ethnographic interviewing conducted for the project aimed to be:

Qualitative: The research sought to give an understanding of how individuals or groups understand and view a particular issue or subject matter. The research does not claim to be representative of the entire community.

In-depth: The research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the lives and cultures of informants, with a view to developing a fuller insight into the issue.

Non-judgmental: The research aimed to understand the reasoning and motivation behind people's decision making and choices, and aimed to explore how their culture can affect their understanding of an issue.

The researchers conducted 28 interviews with a total of 36 respondents. Approximately two-thirds of participants were women, and just over half were either married or in a relationship. Of this original cohort, the vast majority were between the ages of 26 and 35.

Interviews with parents and grandparents were conducted mostly in parent's groups and family centres across Croydon. Some were carried out in participants own homes. Conversations were on average 40 minutes long but ranged from 20 minutes to 3 hours in duration.

The interviewers explored families' experiences of finding out about and accessing family support services in Croydon. Families were asked to identify where they got their family support and information, both by formal and informal means, and where they felt information and support were lacking. For an outline of the Interview Questions see Text Box 2.

Interviews also explored the role of the internet in family support. Participants discussed their attitudes towards the internet; how much they used it for general information-gathering, transactions and peer-to-peer exchanges, and how much they trusted it as a reliable source of information and support with regards to local family matters.

The interviewers also discussed the possibility of Croydon PCT/Council creating a new web resource for local families, and collected ideas and feedback for this service.

This initial research report explored the needs and usage requirements of Croydon families with regard to a new online service. When presented, it was identified that two further pieces of research needed to be done; the first with young parents, and the second more extensive exploration, with a range of professionals working with families in Croydon.

Figure 1 user cases

Topic-based
I want to find out about…

Need
Information around a specific area

"I want to know opening times and facilities at my local library."

Task-based
I need to…

Need
An answer to a question or to complete a transaction.

"When is my bin collected?"

Text box 2 – interviews questions
- Do you use the internet? If no, why not?
- Where do you get your family support, information and advice?
- How much do you use the internet?
- What do you use it for? Do you use the internet for anything family-related? What websites have you found useful and why?
- Have you visited Croydon Council's website?
- Do you/would you contribute to forums?
- What did you find good/bad about it? Where do you get your local information and advice?
- Is it sufficient, or is there anything lacking?

Interviews with young parents

In order to better understand the needs of young people, further interviews were conducted with parents aged between 16 and 19 years in baby clinics and shopping centres across Croydon. Conversations were on average 20 minutes long, but ranged from 10 minutes to 1 hour.

Interviews followed the same path as the previous research with families; it followed their experiences of finding out about and accessing family support services in Croydon. Parents identified where they got their family support and information from, both by formal and informal means, and where they felt information and support were lacking.

Interviews also explored the role of the internet in family support. Participants discussed their attitudes towards the internet; how much they used it for general information gathering, transactions and peer-to-peer exchanges, and how much they trusted it as a reliable source of information and support with regards to local family matters.

The researchers also asked participants how they accessed the internet, whether through a home computer, laptop, mobile phone, or public computer, and how this influenced their relationship with it.

Interviews with service providers

Interviews with service providers largely took place in their places of work. A limited number of interviews were conducted over the phone, due to participants' time-pressured schedules. Conversations were on average 40 minutes long, and ranged from 20 minutes to 2 hours.

The researchers interviewed 31 members of staff from a range of service providers from across the council and partner organisations, including:

Health service providers
- four health visitors
- one head of children's universal services
- one children's universal services manager.

Homestart (see text box)
- five employees.

Social workers
- three social workers
- one student social worker
- one social work manager.

Midwives
- four midwives, May Day Hospital.

Library
- one information services and resources manager/Croydon online manager
- one assistant librarian
- two librarians
- one customer services manager.

Healthy living hub (see text box)
two health improvement practitioners.

Children's centres
- one manager
- one family support worker/outreach
- two parenting and family support workers.

Interviews with participants followed their experiences of accessing information for families, or supporting families in accessing information for themselves. Service providers talked through their trusted networks of support and information.

These tended to be conversations with members of their team, phone calls to other services, internal databases, or online directories and websites. Participants additionally shared ideas on where they felt information and support were lacking.

The process also explored service providers' relationship with their own website, if they had one, and whether they would be willing and able to update information on a new website.

Croydon's healthy living hub (HLH)
Croydon's HLH provides an accessible and attractive space for the Council to engage current customers, and new ones, with healthy living information, advice and activities.

The HLH offers the public the opportunity to meet face-to-face the NHS stop smoking service and the Active Lifestyles team in particular, as well as partners from community groups and other services.
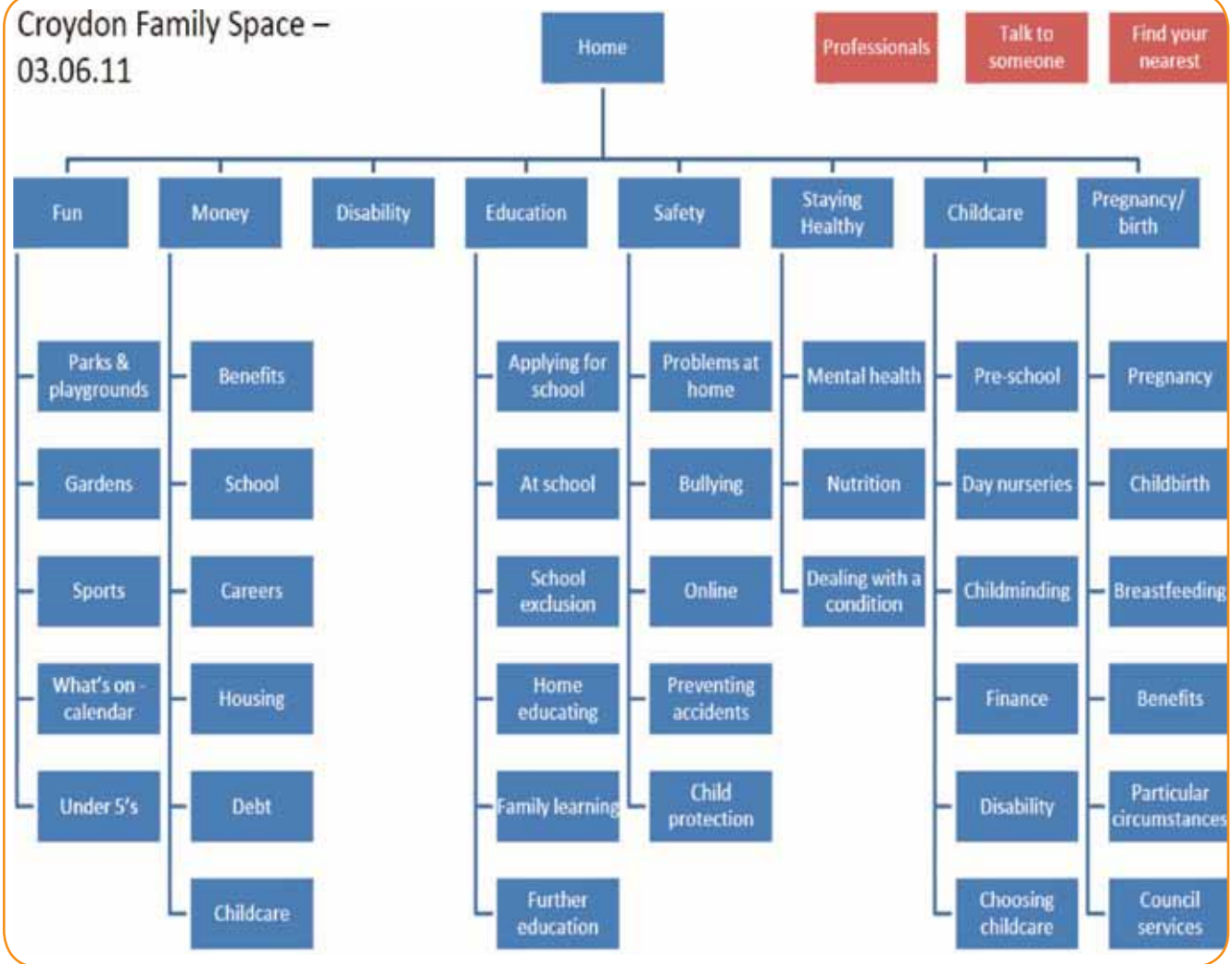
Homestart
Homestart is a charitable organisation which was established in Leicester in 1973. Homestart is a home-visiting scheme which offers support, friendship, and practical assistance to young families experiencing difficulties.

It is staffed by volunteers who work in close liaison with the related statuary services and who also receive support and guidance from a professional. All visits are by invitation of the family and on their own terms. There are no contracts and no time limits.

Vision for the web service
- Include a directory of local groups, services and activities.

- Link parents to other parents in their local area.

- Include an up-to-date calendar of local events and activities.

- Allow parents to share feedback on local services.

- Encourage feedback, reviews and ratings of services.

- Avoid providing parenting advice – stick to information provision and user-reviewed services.

- Do not duplicate, but provide links to, already well-established peer-to-peer websites.

- Market the new web service as separate to the Croydon Council website, so people do not associate it with the 'impersonal' existing website. It should, instead, be perceived as family-friendly and personal.

- Keep all information up-to-date, clear and simple in presentation.

- Encourage parents' groups and other featured services to keep their own information up-to-date.

- Encourage parents to comment on the site if they find any of the information out of date.

Croydon Family Space – 03.06.11

				Home	**Professionals**	**Talk to someone**	**Find your nearest**

Fun	Money	Disability	Education	Safety	Staying Healthy	Childcare	Pregnancy/ birth
Parks & playgrounds	Benefits		Applying for school	Problems at home	Mental health	Pre-school	Pregnancy
Gardens	School		At school	Bullying	Nutrition	Day nurseries	Childbirth
Sports	Careers		School exclusion	Online	Dealing with a condition	Childminding	Breastfeeding
What's on - calendar	Housing		Home educating	Preventing accidents		Finance	Benefits
Under 5's	Debt		Family learning	Child protection		Disability	Particular circumstances
	Childcare		Further education			Choosing childcare	Council services

Co-designing the new web service

The project carried out five co-design events. The co-design period of the project involved 57 people, comprising:

- 23 mothers
- 16 fathers
- 23 service providers.

The process comprised a number of activities to develop the layout and content of the site, including:

- branding
- designing wireframes
- journey mapping
- user testing.

Branding exercise

Participants were asked to select which brands they most identified with, and which aspects of the service they thought should be incorporated into 'Family Space'. This was to help form a vision of the 'look and feel' of the site, as well as to get inspiration for features and functionality.

Figure 2. –'current' situation

Designing the wireframes

Project designers worked with participants in order to arrive at the lay out of their ideal 'Family Space' web pages. The designer's initially sketched up wire frames as participants explained what they wanted. The wireframe depicted below illustrates the importance participants placed on the site offering:

• a clear indication of who was behind the site – ie the London Borough of Croydon and its partners – this helped users to feel that the information was accurate and trustworthy

• the facility to search the site in a simple way, but to enhance searches with postcodes if so desired

• up-to-date information on local listings, news and events

• the ability to translate the site into the user's native language

• the ability to review and rate each page, and to view easily other users' ratings.

Wireframes

A website wireframe, also known as a page schematic or screen blueprint, is a visual guide that represents the skeletal framework of a website.

Journey maps

The designers created four personas based on people they met through the research and co-design phases of the project. They then generated four journeys through the new service for these personas in order to show the different ways in which the service may be used. This informed the development of the site, particularly with regards to structuring and presenting the information to be 'person-centred', as opposed to 'service'-centred.
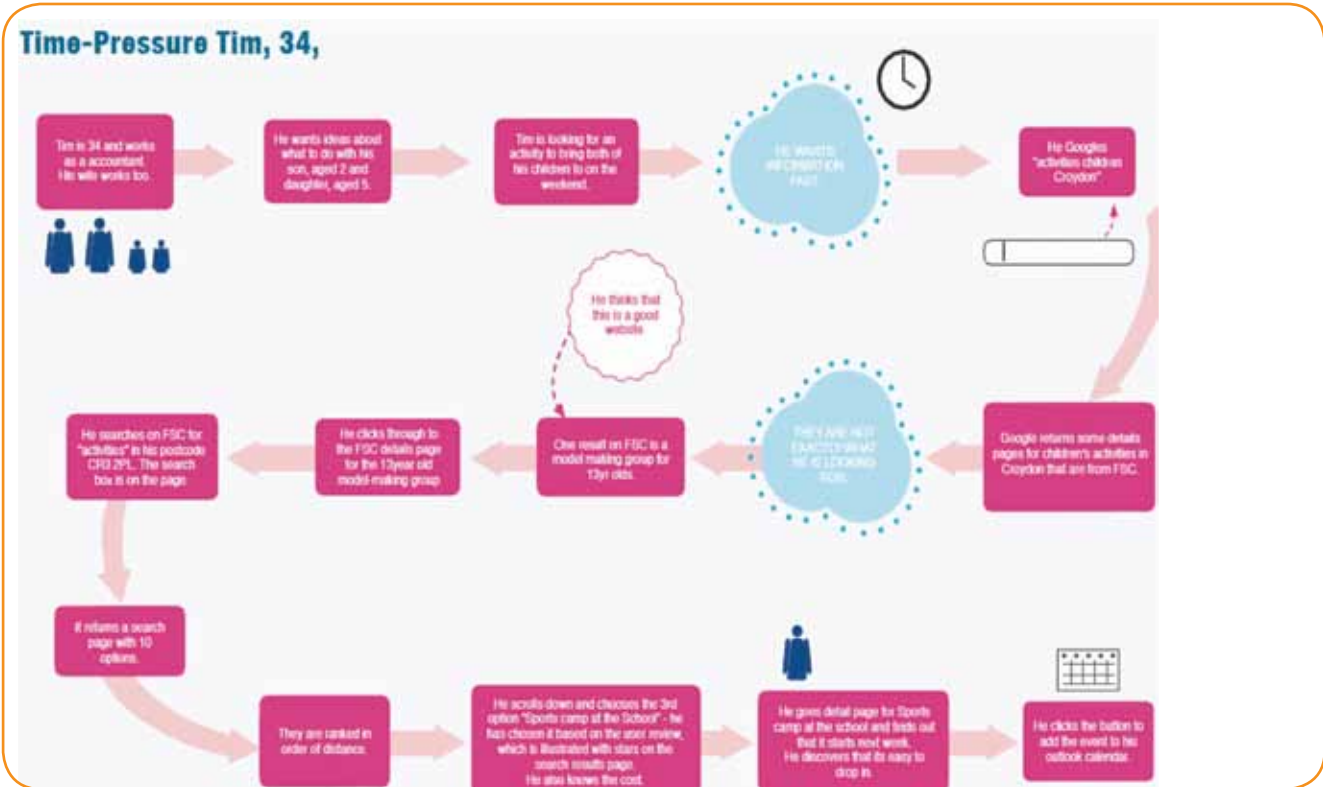
User testing

The ethnographic researchers and web developers then held a series of in-depth workshops to ensure that the findings from the research had been understood and incorporated into the development of the site appropriately.

The web developers drew on the Wireframes and the Customer Journey Scenarios to create a beta version of the website for testing with users. The User Testing sessions explored the 'look and feel', structure, taxonomies and content of the site in order to ensure that these elements worked effectively for customers.

"I would like to know more about places like this [Dad's Group]. As a dad it is really hard to know what is available."

Participant in the user testing

As a first step in user testing, participants were asked the following questions.

- What is this website for?
- What do you feel when you come to this page?
- Think of an enquiry you might like to use this website for… what would you do next?
- Excluding search, do these headings make sense?
- What info do you need that's not there?
- What info is there that you don't need?
- Would you trust this page?

Sub-pages:

- How do you feel when you come to this page?
- Is this the information you need?
- What info do you need that's not there?
- What info is there that you don't need?
- What would you do next?

General questions:

- What do you think of the style of the website?
- What's it like to navigate?
- How could it be improved?
- Did you notice the search bar at the top?
- How trustworthy is the site?

"If the Council website did have clearer information about where to go to get more help it would be a good thing. It is sometimes very difficult to understand where to go. Yesterday I rang four times and I couldn't get through and it told me to leave a message."

Participant in the user testing

For the second stage, users were asked to role-play one of the scenarios listed below.

- You're about to become a father. Can you find some information about Father's groups?
- Where can I get information about childcare packs?
- You've just found out you're a mum to be and would like some information on services available.
- You need to find out about childcare in your area. Can you find out what options are available near you?
- I've just found out my six year son is dyslexic. Where can I get further information and advice?
- You've just had a really positive experience at the family centre in Fieldway and would like to let others know. Can you do this?
- You are a working dad who wants ideas for things to do with son, 2 and daughter 5 this weekend.
- You are experiencing money troubles. Where can you find some advice?
- My daughter goes to Heavers Farm Primary School in South Norwood and I want to find out details and costs about after school clubs.

Figure 3 – 'future' situation
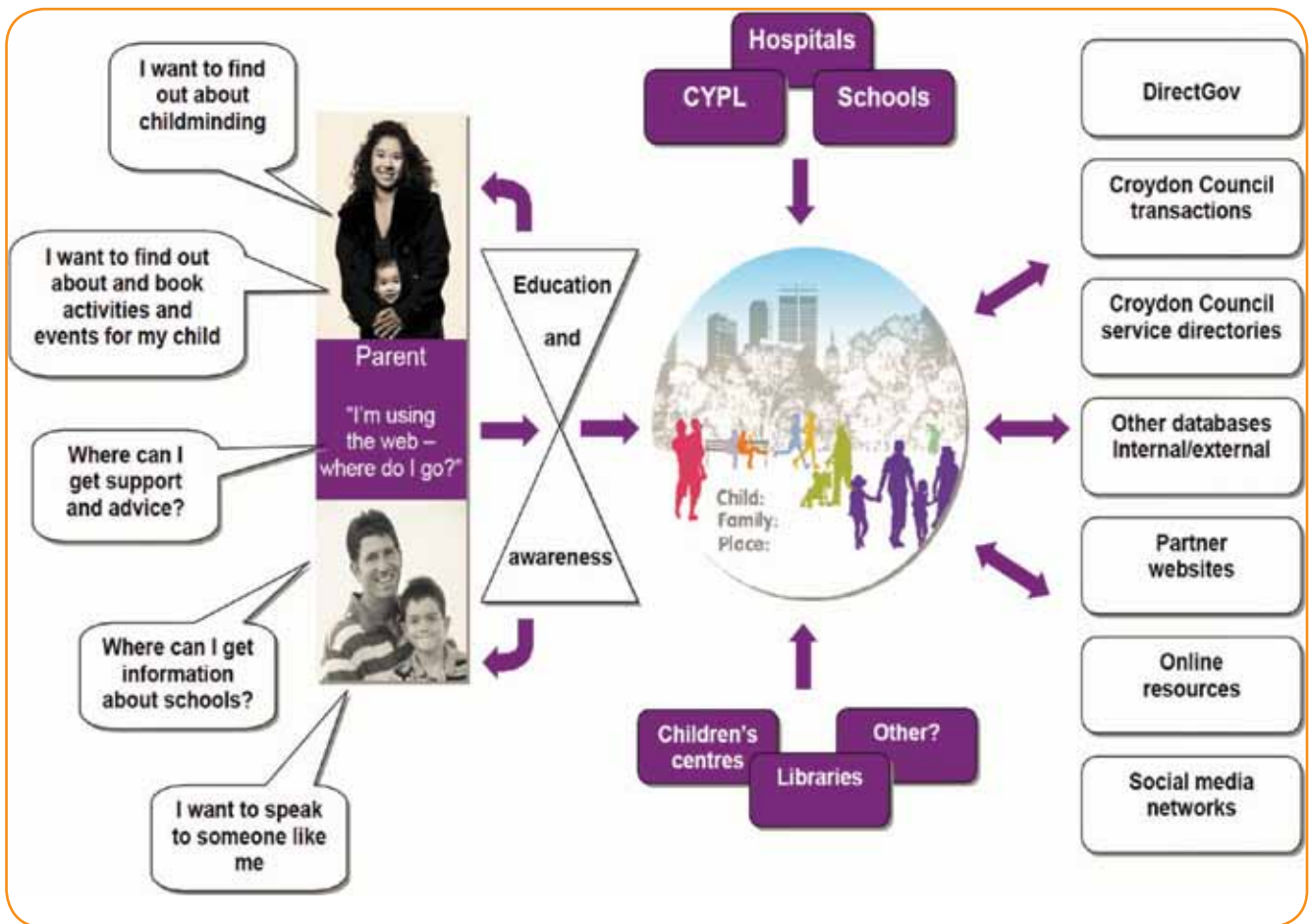
Findings

The following section summarises the information gathered from the interviews with parents and service providers in the following categories.

- usage requirements
- access requirements
- peer-to-peer interactions
- relationship with existing service
- access requirements
- relationship with other services in the area.

Parents and families
Usage requirements

Many parents talked about the lack of a resource that pulls together all the information about services for families in their area.

"Something bringing together all the information about family services and support in Croydon would be really good. I don't know of any other thing like that out there…And I couldn't find anything on the Council website about how to register the birth of my baby. All that information should be on there."

Helen, 31 years old, Selhurst

Some parents said they would be more inclined to trust the information about the services on a website if they were reviewed by other parents. This would give the information more of a 'word-of-mouth' feel; their favoured way of receiving family-related information.

> "People could rate the different services like they do on Ebay. The council might be scared of doing that but they should open up…. It would be good."
>
> **Ben, 33 years old, Selhurst**

Peer-to-peer interactions

Many parents said they preferred to receive online advice from others in similar situations, rather than from an impersonal, anonymous, 'expert' source.

> "Just recently I put a question up on the Facebook Mum's page [Circle of Mums] saying "I've got a two year old and three year old and I'm expecting another one – HELP!"… It feels good to share these things and get advice from others in similar situations."
>
> **Jess, 23 years, South Croydon**

Relationship with existing service

Many people spoke positively about the current Croydon Council website, as something which 'did the job' with regards to providing practical information about things like refuse collection and council tax. It was not, however, perceived as something parents would ever consult for more personal, family-related advice.

> "I log into my account on the council website, see my bill, and pay online. It's very user-friendly. I only use it for that, though, nothing to do with my family."
>
> **Miss Jerome, 25 years, West Croydon**

Some people criticised the Croydon Council website for not having up-to-date information. This immediately led to people not trusting the website or consulting it regularly. Some people also talked about finding themselves overwhelmed by the amount of information on the Croydon Council website.

Access requirements

Some parents did not use the internet at all, or only used it in a very limited way, for example for Facebook or shopping. The researchers explored the reasons behind this.

People in very stressful situations spoke of 'not having time' to access the internet. For example Ruma (see below), was a single mum working full-time and caring for a disabled teenager.

> "At that time I didn't use the internet. I had a full-time job to support my family, and I'm a single mum so the rest of the time I was looking after my son who has severe autism. I had no-one to help me, and no time to use the internet. Now I get more support and I find I'm on the net all the time."
>
> **Ruma, 45 years**

Some participants did not perceive the internet as being a priority source of information in their lives, finding themselves preoccupied with other daily struggles instead. Researchers also found that parents from tight-knit communities, such as Addington, did not use the internet for family-related information and they felt they got all the information they needed form their friends and family.

Some of the people the researchers spoke to recognised that the internet would be useful to them and their families, but had never been taught how to use it, or else were unable to use it due to literacy issues.

Relationship with other services in this area

Families shared with researchers where they got their family-related information from, and the pros and cons of these various different sources. The project explored with the families how Family Space Croydon could link with these other services and information-providers.

Parents groups came up as a very powerful resource for information and support for many of the parents. For those who didn't use the net, this was often the primary location for receiving information.

"With the Dad's Group we've only got 21 members who actually use the internet, so we have to get all the information out on text or phone, or word-of-mouth, otherwise most people won't hear about it. If you made a new website you'd have to use lots of different media to let people know about it, or let people know about it at these groups, face-to-face."

Scott, from Broad Green, a regular attendee at the Broad Green 'Dad's Time' Group

Health professionals also emerged as a powerful source of family-related information and advice, especially for more isolated individuals

"I also go to the midwife to get info. The thing is, they just give you loads of leaflets, and the problem with leaflets is that you don't have time to read everything. They literally pile you up with leaflets."

Andrea, 31 years, Addington. At the time of the research Andrea was 15 weeks pregnant with her first child

Other areas of support and advice that were mentioned were schools and churches. Again, the idea is for Family Space to connect with these existing structures as a point of entry for relevant families, and as a resource for teachers and religious leaders.

Service providers
Usage requirements

The idea of an online, up-to-date and easy to use directory of local groups and services was popular amongst service providers, who consistently recounted how difficult it was to keep on top of all the good groups and services available for their clients.

Although providers usually build up their own databases, these rapidly go out of date and are not shared between teams. The providers surveyed mostly welcomed the idea of encouraging families to use the directory themselves, therefore taking more responsibility for their own needs.

> "You gather all your contacts through experience, but things are changing all the time; new services develop and others disappear. Within teams it's easy enough to keep on top of it, but wider than that it becomes trickier... Having it all online would be a change for us... but if it was all there it would be wonderful!"
>
> **Director of Universal Children's Services**

Ease of use was highlighted as the key feature with regards to the functionality of the site. Service providers often highlighted how both they and their clients didn't have time to waste on trying to navigate around complicated websites. Service providers were also keen for the site to be open to all and did not want people excluded because of language barriers, an inappropriate tone, or financial restrictions.

> "We work under a lot of pressure so you need to find the right information quick – you don't want to waste your time doing anything."
>
> **Director of Children's Universal Services**

Service providers often suggested that less confident parents needed more than just information to attend groups and services. These people would need some 'hand-holding' in both using the new web services, and accessing the support available.

Access requirements

The researchers explored with service providers their attitude towards both supporting parents to access the internet in general, and the prospective features of the new web service.

Family Information Service Officers, Children's Centre and Library staff all saw it as part of their role to support people in using the internet, and would be happy to introduce the new web service to their clients. Health Visitors saw it as outside of their remit.

> "We sit down with families and help them use the Croydon website for things like their benefits. They find it too complicated using it on their own at first. We show them how to do it, so they can gain confidence and later use it on their own."
>
> **Family Support Worker at Children's Centre**

Peer-to-peer interactions

The researchers asked service providers about their attitude to parents and service providers being able to feedback about services on the new web service. The providers discussed what they thought the drawbacks and benefits of peer-to-peer interaction were, and what the barriers were to participation. A key take-away was that practitioners feared only negative feedback would be provided, and thought it wouldn't be appropriate for service providers to respond publicly (see Challenges & Lessons Learnt for how this was addressed).

> "We target certain families for certain classes. They need encouragement to go, you can't just give them the information and that's it, not the ones who are lacking in confidence. We ring them up to remind them about it, and we'll ring them to check if they went too. They need that support."
>
> **Children's Centre Managers**

Relationship with other services in this area

The researchers asked service providers how they currently find the information and support to respond to families' needs. The Family Information Service was frequently mentioned as the main port of call for service providers when they were approached with a query they couldn't immediately answer.

"If I'm asked something I don't know the answer to the Family Information Service is really useful – but their website isn't up to much. I normally pop across there, give them a ring, or tell the customer to go over there themselves"

Library information services and resources manager

Service providers mentioned different websites they referred to when looking for support for families. Croydon.gov and Croydon online were both mentioned. However, all were criticised for either being un-user friendly, or out-of-date. Home-Start and Sure Start employees both also revealed that they paid little attention to their own websites, as it was such a lengthy process to update them.

Outcomes

Figure 4. Croydon's family space website

Family space website

The project has delivered a new, multi-agency website (see Figure above), with an attractive and positive look and feel, which is easy to use and navigate. Customer feedback on the website has been positive. The site was 'soft launched' in April 2012, and subsequently marketed over the summer of 2012 to coincide with summer activities. Marketing of the site included:

- printed adverts in Your Croydon
- messages on the Croydon's interactive voice response (IVR) service
- signposting from web pages relating to other relevant services.

Number of visits and visitors

Between its soft launch in April 2012 and the end of August 2012, Family Space Croydon received nearly 11,000 visits from almost 8,000 visitors. This means that so far, 3,000 of the 8,000 visitors have chosen to use the site again. On average each visitor spent 3 minutes 6 seconds per visit and viewed four pages in that time. However, this varied according to the nature of the inquiry – nearly 1,000 visitors were seeking information on 'childcare', and each of these spent over ten minutes on the site. Feedback on the site from customers has invariably been positive.

User feedback on website

"I'm an expecting Dad of twins. My partner and I are both very excited and want to plan ahead and give our children the very best start in life.

Thank you Croydon Council for putting up this new website, there's loads of useful information & all at the touch of a button. It's very informative and well presented in a layout that anyone could use.

Thanks Croydon!"

Successful searches

A huge range of different search terms – almost 4,500 – are being used to find Family Space Croydon. Most of these searches are via Google, and 79 per cent of users land directly on a 'details' page – indicating that they reach the information they were looking for directly. The remainder land on a signposting page ie one of the 12 'banners' featured on the home page – see Figure 4 above.

When users land on a signposting pages, the 'bounce' rate is low (the rate at which visitors immediately leave the site), indicating that searchers are interested in the site and continue their journey through the site to a details content.

Overall, 90 per cent of visitors who find the site via a web search arrive at a page which provides details relating to their search – implying that over half of those who do not reach a details page directly are successfully signposted. The is a great improvement on typical web performance to date – research by SOCITM (The Society of IT Management) in 2011 found that the average web visit failure was more than 20 per cent with a further 20 per cent failing to find some part of what they were looking for.

The upshot of this clickstream analysis is that people who did not previously know about the site can find what they are looking for on the site via a simple search. This demonstrates just how successful the information architecture has been in structuring the data to be accessible and user-friendly.

Customer journeys

Based on analysing the clickstreams of visits to the site and qualitative feedback from customers, Croydon have assembled the following personas to represent typical users visiting the site, together with their goals and journeys. This mirrors the persona work conducted to support the development of the site. The customer personas are:

- Sam, a single full time working mum new to the area

- John, a man with three children who has recently been made redundant

- Melissa, a young mother working part-time needing childcare.

Figure 5. Sam's journeys

Name :	Sam
Age :	29
Background:	Sam is a single full-time working mum with a three-year old son. She is new to the area.
Goal:	Sam's son is starting school soon and she needs to plan their new routine. Sam would like to get in touch with her local children's centre and also start thinking about schools

Google search: 'Norbury Manor Children's Centre

↓

Details page for Norbury Children's Centre

↓

Visits the schools website

↓

Back to Croydon Family Space

↓

Find your nearest

↓

Map of results

↓

Browses details pages for schools

Sam starts off by using a specific search in Google for her local Children's Centre

She clicks on the link that takes her to the Family Space details page about the Children's Centre in Norbury Manor.

Sam scans the page and clicks through to the school's website for details.

Sam noticed the 'find your nearest' link on Family Space so has a look round to see what other services are local to her.

She uses the 'find your nearest filters' to search for schools in her area.

There are a lot of results, Sam zooms in and uses the icons to focus on her local area.

Sam views the details of a few schools and prints the details of others to look into further later.

Figure 6. John's Journey

Name :	John
Age :	32
Background:	John has a family with three children. He has recently been made redundant. His wife works part-time. They are concerned about making ends meet.
Goal:	John is looking for advice and information about possible benefits for the family to tide them over whilst he is out of work.
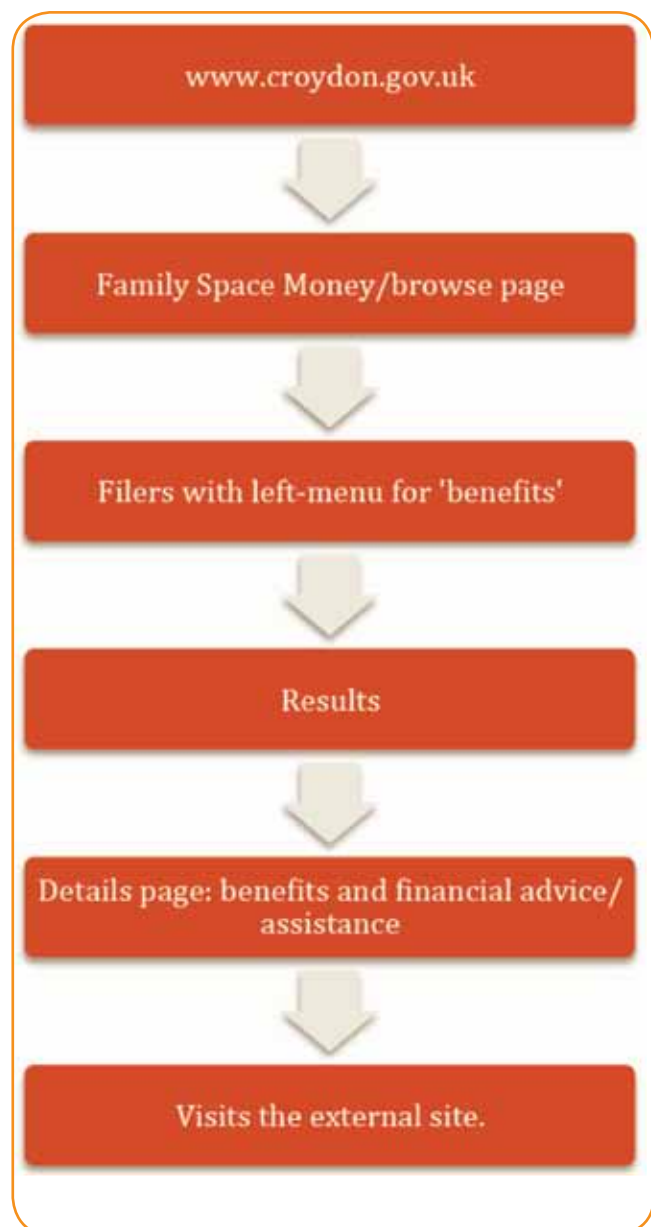
Benefits

In the long-term, by improving online access to information and networks and consequently, facilitating greater self-service for those families who are comfortable with it Croydon will free-up resources to better support those families with greater needs.

Benefits to customers

Improved access to services for local families

There are approximately 50,000 families in Croydon who can potentially benefit from having one-stop access to services, support, information and community networks. Family Space Croydon saves these families the time and cost of telephoning or visiting Council or

John has used the Croydon Council website before and starts here, looking for contacts.

Croydon Council site signposts John to Family Space, he's not heard of the site, but understands that it is a site specifically designed for families in Croydon, and as it's verified and maintained by the council he believes it to be a good bet.

He lands on the money/browse page and sees that there are 45 listings, ordered A-Z. John filters the results down to benefits and then orders them by popularity so that the most useful ones will be first.

He scans the results page and one of the headings catches his attention.

He clicks through to 'Benefits and Financial Advice/Assistance'.

John has a quick scan of the content and sees the link to more info on an external site. He clicks through and leaves Family Space.

partner services. Plus it helps them find the information and get the services they need.

The popularity of the twelve 'channels' – the buttons arranged beneath the main image on the home page in the Figure above – gives an indication of what users are seeking from the site. By far the most in-demand area is Childcare, with nearly 8,000 page views. The next is 'Fun' with 1,350, 'Education' with 1031 followed by 'Children's centres' with 824.

Channel	Pageviews	Averaged well time
Childcare	7,816	00:00:50
Fun	1,350	00:01:04
Education	1,031	00:00:45
Children's centres	824	00:01:10
Money	333	00:00:42
Keeping safe	251	00:01:23
Pregnancy and birth	234	00:00:58
Disability	225	00:01:03
Staying healthy	201	00:01:02

Feedback from parent:
"Just wanted to let you know that the upcoming events section of Family Space Croydon is a really useful tool which enabled me to organise activities for my children over the summer holidays. The range of activities listed was varied and this made me aware of organisations I did not know existed in Croydon.

I will definitely be telling my friends of this website, we've always complained of not having enough information on activities in Croydon!"

Furthermore, the research conducted for this project confirmed the key role that family and friends play in sharing information about services, and how those in greatest need can be cut off from these support networks due to a lack of access, time or confidence.

Other research has indicated that community and social networking are crucial in supporting parent's emotional health and wellbeing.

The Family Space Croydon site's interactivity and groups' page will help to cultivate local community networks – and hence promote greater resilience and independence. By the end of August 2012, the groups' pages had attracted nearly 3,000 page views.

Reducing contact costs

Managing contact with parents and families can be costly for Council's and their partners. The visitor statistics and online customer journey mapping indicates that Family Space Croydon helps to meet demand for a range of types of contact – from customers seeking basic information on locations and opening times, to more detailed-and in-depth information requirements which would otherwise need to be met over the telephone or in person.

Figure 7. The escalating costs of intervention

The Escalating costs of intervention
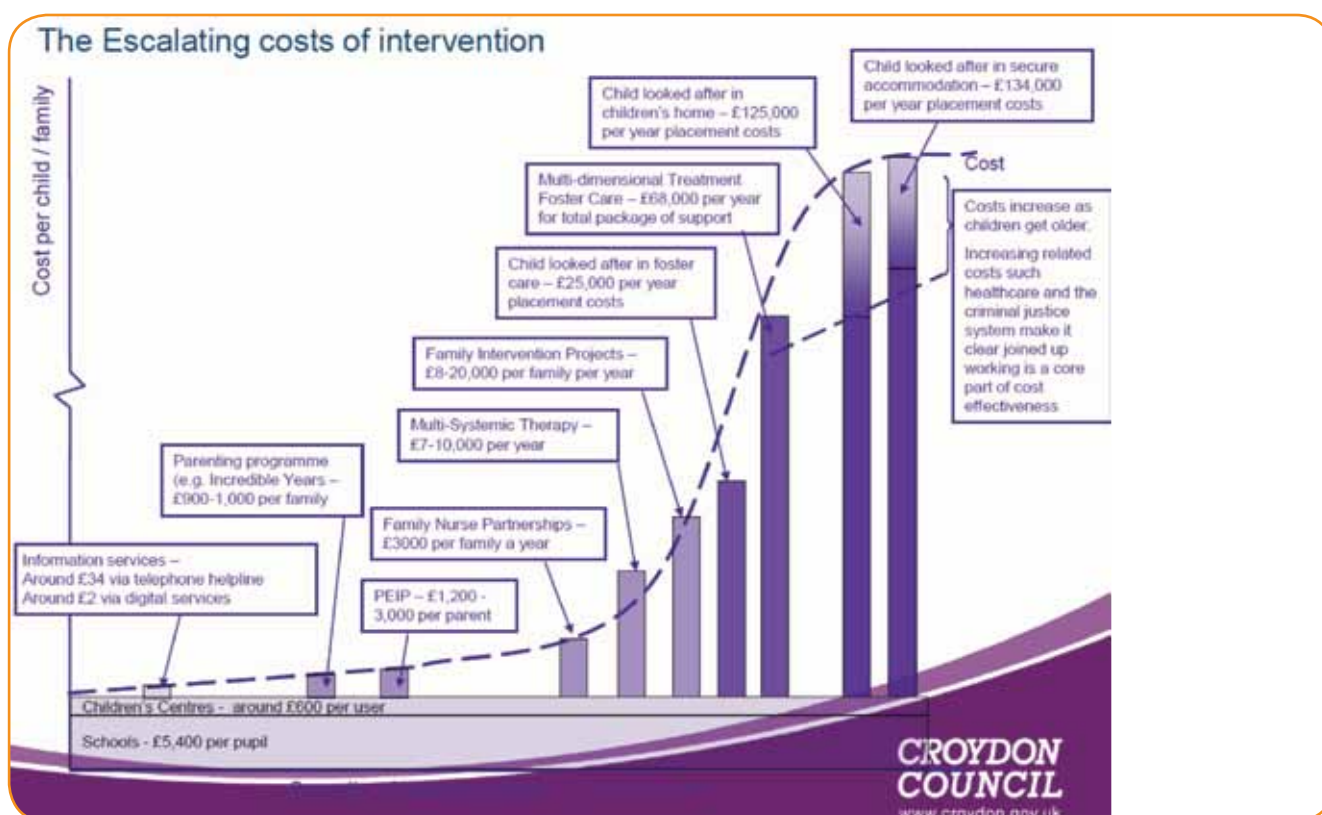
Source: Prevention and Early Intervention – A Croydon Perspective. Presentation by Jon Rouse, Chief Executive of Croydon Council, July 2012

The graph above illustrates the escalating costs of intervention. For example, by the London Borough of Croydon's own estimate, the cost saving of an inquiry resolved over the web versus via a call to Croydon's Family Information Services is £32. The Society of IT Management (SOCITM), estimate that face-to-face contact can cost £6 more than a telephone contact.

As well as being a more cost effective channel than telephone or face-to-face, Family Space Croydon is also relatively efficient at resolving inquiries at first visit. Whereas for 40 per cent of web site visits, the visitor does not find what they are seeking (and consequently either gives up seeking the information, or resorts to the telephone or an in person visit)[1], in the case of Family Space Croydon, this figure is less than 10 per cent. This signifies that residents are successfully finding the content they are looking for 'first time around' on Family Space Croydon, making their interaction a positive experience.

The lower costs of FamilySpaceCroydon, combined with its effectiveness in resolving contacts, helps Croydon Council and its customers avoid unnecessary costs. The site does this by providing:

• detailed information on specific services, such as those offered by a particular Children's Centre, thereby removing the need to contact the Family Information Service and other services through other channels

• information from a range of service providers, removing the need for customers to contact these providers in order to obtain information

• sufficient information to ensure customers are in a better position to contact the appropriate service and progress their inquiry more readily and speedily.

The content was co-designed with parents and families with young children and as a result goes a long way towards meeting their needs. It is therefore an effective and efficient channel for them to use. The work done to achieve this cannot be under estimated and for the site to continue to be useful, it will need to be sustained in an on going basis.

_____

1 Based on research by the Society of IT Management

Figure 8. Growth in visits to FamilySpaceCroydon
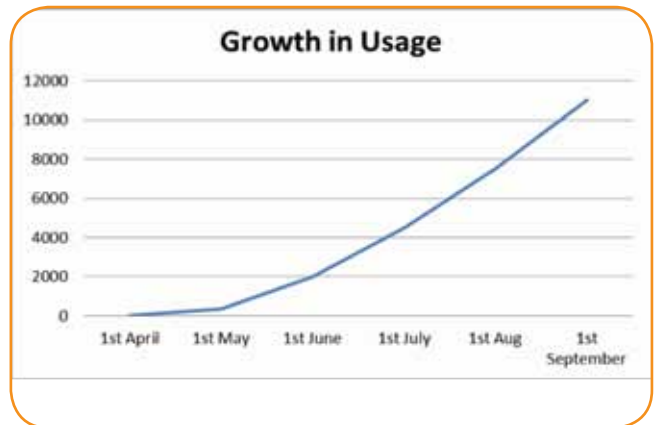
Based on the usage statistics and the customer journeys, we can make some estimates regarding the potential contribution Family Space Croydon is making. We can estimate that:

• 15 per cent of online visits to Family Space Croydon help to avoid a call to the Family Information Service, and

• eight per cent of visits reduce the time required to resolve telephone inquiries to the Family Information Service by half

• five per cent of online visits make a face-to-face visit to the Family Information Service unnecessary

• five per cent of visits removed the need for calls to three different services

• 10 per cent of visits removed the need for calls to two different services

• 15 per cent of visits removed the need for an information enquiry by phone

• 20 per cent of visits lessened the time required to resolve a telephone enquiry by half

• 22 per cent of visits still result in a call or face-to-face inquiry.

The table below assigns costs to each of these contact types, and the volume of online visits to date, to illustrate the savings the site is generating for the Council.

Based on these figures, in the first seven months of operation, Family Space Croydon has helped Croydon and partners reduce contact costs by over £136,000.

Table 1. Estimated cost savings from contact avoidance and channel migration

Contact migration & avoidance	Estimated volumes	Costs	Estimated savings
15 per cent of online visits to Family Space Croydon help to avoid a call to Family Information Service, and	2,100.00	£32	£67,200
Eight per cent of visits reduced the time required to resolve telephone inquiries to the Family Information Service by half	1,050.00	£15	£15,750
Five per cent of online visits make a face-to-face visit to the Family Information Service unnecessary	700.00	£40	£28,000
Five per cent of visits removed the need for calls to three different services	700.00	£9	£6,300
10 per cent of visits removed the need for calls to two different services	1,400.00	£6	£8,400
15 per cent of visits removed the need for an information enquiry by phone	2,100.00	£3	£6,300
20 per cent of visits lessened the time required to resolve a telephone inquiry by half	2,800.00	£1.50	£4,200
TOTAL			£136,150

Reducing duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy

The deep dive mapping exercise of Croydon's services conducted as part of the Total Place Pilot disclosed the complexity of service provision and the inefficient use of resources. The research illustrated that professionals and families spend significant amounts of time chasing 'leads' to find what they were looking for and the information is often found subject to 'luck' or 'chance'.

The indirect routes into public services that families have to take has a negative impact on their situation and results in unnecessary costs for service providers.

By giving customers a single resource, and providers a single reference point (which is based on information that has been structured based on user needs) Family Space Croydon is helping to reduce unnecessary signposting and application internally (see 'Customer Journeys' under 'Outcomes).

Feedback from a family worker

"I am pleased to see there is now a website providing us with a directory of services our families can access for information and support. I have used the website a number of times now to signpost families to services with varied needs. I am also confident to refer families directly to the website as it is user friendly. I would find it even more useful if the service list could be split into national and local services as sometimes I will know immediately that a national service is not appropriate or accessible and would prefer to save time and focus my search on just local services. I also think that whilst there is a lot of useful information on the website, I'm not entirely sure that all services are listed and that these could be added to considerably."

Governance

Croydon's governance was provided by the Croydon Children's Trust which is a partnership of agencies that work with children and young people in the Borough. The Trust includes representatives from the Council, NHS Croydon, schools & colleges, the Police and the VCS.

The Project Programme Board was accountable to the Croydon Children's Trust. It is co-chaired by the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learners and the NHS Croydon Deputy CEO & Director of Strategic Commissioning. The Board meets monthly. The Programme Director reported to the NHS Croydon Deputy CEO & Strategic Commissioning Director and Croydon Council's Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learners.

The LSP Chief Officer's Group had a sponsorship role, and Croydon Council CEO and NHS Croydon CEO maintain a watching brief.

Resourcing

The CLTP provided £143,000 funding for the development of Family Space Croydon, which was invested according to the table below.

Activity	
Ethnographic research	£20,000
Interviews with young parents	£20,000
Interviews with service providers	£20,000
Co-design	£20,000
Development of the site	£40,000
Project management	£23,000
Total	£143,000

Challenges and lessons learnt

Information architecture
One of the challenges the project encountered was the sheer volume and range of content which needed to be migrated to Family Space Croydon. The challenge was to develop an information architecture that structured uncategorised content in a way that was the best fit for the user. In the end the site was structured around high-level topics and where overlaps existed the content was tagged and cross-referenced.

Establishing a consensus amongst stakeholders for the categories and the structure was a challenge. The ethnographic research proved to be a vital element in driving that consensus as it provided an external and independent perspective.

Inputting information
It is essential for the sustainability of the site that it requires no additional effort from services to keep information up-to-date. Hence, the initial approach was to gather information from existing sites. Family Space Croydon would simply pull the information that is already available and re-purpose it.

However, once under way the project discovered that a significant portion of the information required for the website was being held in a database. This included information on childcare in Croydon, childcare centres, and much information related to the Family Information Service (FIS).

To overcome this challenge, the project has had to develop methods for accessing the FIS database and presenting this information on the web. This work was not anticipated at the commencement of the project, and impacted timescales.

Going forward, Croydon are seeking to recruit an officer to support the continuing development of the site, and part of this role will be to ensure information is keep up-to-date.

Anchoring design decisions to user needs
User feedback also helped to steer the project group away from personal preference during the design phase and focus participants on what was right for users.

An example of this was the concerns that arose internally regarding allowing users to comment and rate the site. Interaction with the site was a key requirement for users throughout the research.

This was a new communication tool for Croydon and potentially a tricky one to manage.

Users are required to include their name and e-mail address with their comments, and can tick a box allowing other users to comment on their comments. The figure below shows an image of FamilySpaceCroydon's comments page:

Figure 9. FamilySpaceCroydon's feedback form

Feedback

Last updated: 17/02/2012   Print

Family Space Croydon is our plan to provide one searchable online space for parents, professionals and volunteers, pulling together information about children and families services in Croydon.

This is a new service and we hope to see it grow and thrive with more information and services. Please let us know your comments so we can make this a better service for you.

0 comments

Add a comment

Name   Email

Let me know when others comment on this page.

Submit

Linking data and maps

Family Space Croydon seeks to present information to users in a way that is 'person centred' or 'user centred' ie in a way that is relevant to their lifestyles and behaviours.

When the website developers presented a 'work in progress' to the stakeholders, the Family Information Service emphasised the need to link and represent service related data geographically based on proximity. This will allow parents to search for childcare providers based on their distance from the school.

The development work was well underway by the time the project understood this requirement clearly. Eliciting requirements from stakeholders is always a challenge on technical projects, and every effort should be made to get technology and service staff together to help them articulate and verbalise their requirements.

Adding geographical identifiers to the information architecture and business rules required considerable additional data entry, and this further impacted the timescales of the project.

This issue happened to arise during the month of August, and the holiday season further impeded efforts toward resolution. However, Family Space Croydon can now present service related data geographically.

User feedback

Many new web services are first released in 'beta' version, a state that indicates to users the service is in the latter stages of being developed and feedback from early adopters will be used to identify and fix any issues.

A number of Croydon service providers expressed reservations about releasing a beta version, preferring instead to keep the site private and used only internally until it was a 'finished' product.

However, in keeping with the user centred development ethos, Family Space Croydon was also initially released in beta version and early users were encouraged to provide feedback – much of which was positive and complementary of the site.

"I am a first time Mum of a two year old and am trying to choose appropriate childcare to commence in January. Coming across your website I was relieved to find all the information I needed to help me make a choice in one place.

At last a place that explained the difference between nurseries and pre-schools and I also found the search of nearest pre-schools etc particularly useful – it saved me hours of going through all the different places across Croydon.

The only thing that was a tad frustrating was I had to re-enter my search details every time I had gone and come out of a particular nursery/pre-school."

Parent, user of Family Space Croydon

Next steps

Following its soft launch in April 2012, Croydon are planning to formally launch the FamilySpaceCroydon site in late 2012.

In preparation for this 'hard' launch, Croydon are currently seeking to recruit an additional officer in the Family Information Service to support the site. The role will comprise:

• managing the formal launch of the site

• reviewing and responding to user comments logged on the site

• implementing revisions to the site arising from user feedback

• updating and maintaining the site's service information.

Croydon are also planning to include FamilySpaceCroydon in their programme of usability testing starting later in 2012. This is expected to generate further feedback from users and trigger revisions to the site.

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