



Improvement

Customer led transformation programme

Case study – Croydon

Children's health and wellbeing

Contents

About the London Borough of Croydon	1
Objective	2
Background	3
Approach	3
Ethnographic research: listening to families	5
Findings	6
Complementary research	9
Principles	11
Propositions	11
Benefits	12
Resourcing	13
Lessons learnt	14
Next steps	15
Appendix: example of a customer journey map	16
Findings	17

The Customer Led Transformation programme

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 Local Government Improvement and Development).

The fund was established specifically to support collaborative working between councils 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 342,000 people, Croydon has both the largest population of any London authority, and the largest population of children and young people aged 0 to 19, at nearly 90,000. Croydon is an area of diversity. There is a significant mixture of affluence and deprivation across its neighbourhoods, with some areas classified as within the 10 per cent most deprived in England. Deprived areas are mainly concentrated in Croydon's major social housing estates and in the north of the area while wealth is predominantly in the south. Outcomes vary enormously: there is an 11 year gap in life expectancy.

Children in Croydon

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

- **Birthrates:** 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 in Croydon are from mothers who are members of ethnic minority groups, as well as mothers who themselves 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 benefit recipients, with 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 with children under five.
- **Homelessness and temporary accommodation:** Children are overrepresented in families on the housing register who are classified as homeless. In October 2009 86 per cent of homeless households had children in them and 53 per cent of homeless individuals were children. Most of these families are living in some form of temporary accommodation which is transitory and complicates access to other services.
- **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 obese versus a national average in the low 20s.

Objective

Croydon was one of 13 areas in England that ran a "Total Place" pilot. The philosophy of Total Place is to redesign public service delivery in a place to ensure resources are targeted where they are needed most, and services are delivered for the best possible value for money. Croydon Total Place focused on improving Children's Health and Wellbeing between the ages of nine months and seven years of age.

Croydon chose to focus on "early years", based on substantial evidence that a good start in life in terms of physical and emotional and cognitive development results in better individual and social outcomes later in life. An early childhood characterised by deep attachment to parents or other primary caregivers is likely to result in less dependency

on the state, and a reduced call on the public purse later down the line. Hence, service re-designed around the needs of children and families will lead to better outcomes and more efficient use of public money.

Croydon's Total Place partners have a track-record of using customer insight tools including demographic data, feedback from customer engagement exercises and insight from customer relationship management systems. However, to ensure the measures proposed by Total Place were consistent with the needs and culture of families and young children in Croydon, the programme recognised it needed to add the voices of the people of Croydon into the programme. Ethnographic research based qualitative, in-depth interviews with real service users offers the means to do this.

The ethnographic research aimed to:

- explore the lives of families and children in Croydon
- identify the major needs and requirements of families and children in Croydon
- explore how people use and conceptualise existing services and agencies in Croydon
- explore support systems for children and families that exist in their communities
- offer an insight into the use of qualitative research to drive service transformation.

To these ends, Croydon engaged in ethnographic research with 64 families to learn about their experience and perception of services. Gathering qualitative, ethnographic insight from parents and families from across Croydon was a very powerful part of the evidence base driving and informing their Total Place programme. The issues families raised were not necessarily new, but their collective voices had an extraordinary impact, because it enabled the partners to understand the Early Years system in the context of the

complexity of customer's everyday lives and to understand the root causes of issues that are experienced later. The ethnographic work helped Croydon begin to understand better what families' needs were, and how inadequate the public services' total response currently was – despite the existence of some great individual services.

Background

Many studies from around the world have shown that a bad start in life has life-long consequences. A bad start in life can comprise poor physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive health and can result in a far higher propensity to mental ill-health, school failure, serious violence, engaging in risky behaviour and becoming a parent themselves whilst still a teenager. Despite the weight of the evidence, public expenditure is skewed away from support to families in the early years. Instead, we still spend a far greater amount seeking to address the consequences of poor early development later in young adulthood.

Approach

Overview of research

Croydon adopted a four stage approach to service re-design based on the Design Council's "Double Diamond" approach covering:

- discover
- define
- develop
- deliver.

Croydon customer insight work formed part of the "discovery" stage of their total place programme, and informed the nine principles of service development that the programme agreed.

Figure 1. Design Council Double Diamond approach to design

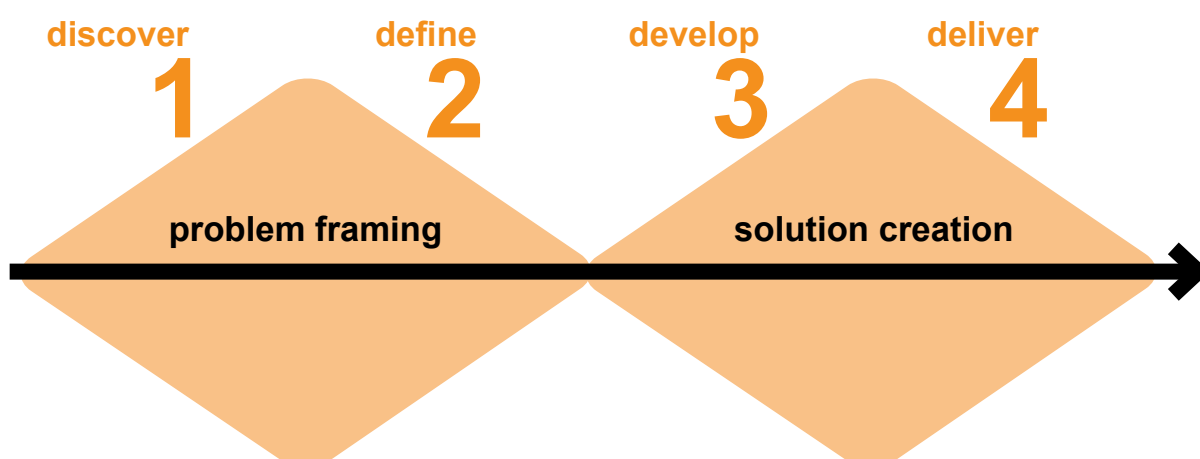
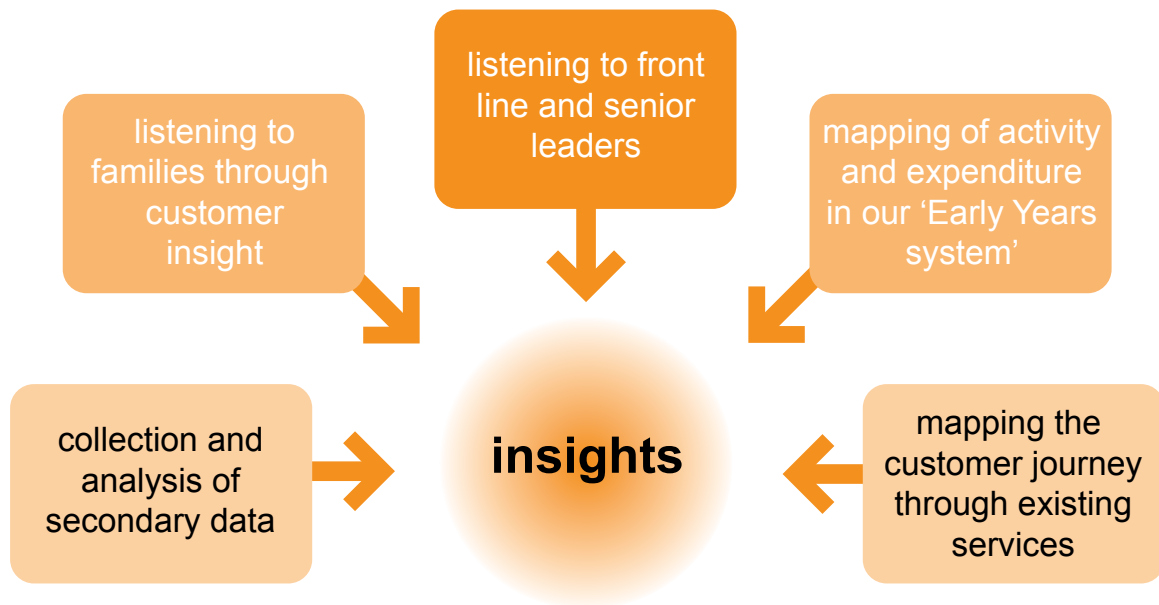


Figure 2. Creating new information and insights



Collection and analysis of secondary data

Croydon began by gathering evidence from around the world on why early intervention is important, and what works to support children and families.

Listening to families

Croydon engaged in ethnographic work to listen and learn about stories from children and families across the borough. More in-depth exposition of this work is outlined below under “Ethnographic research: listening to families”.

Engaging the frontline and managers together

To engage a wide range of colleagues in listening to service users together and to promote innovative and collaborative thinking, Croydon ran a series of workshops where staff saw video stories from families across the country.

Mapping of activity and expenditure in Croydon’s ‘Early Years system’

Croydon brought staff from NHS Croydon and the Council together on a regular basis to unpick the various funding flows related to Croydon’s cohort. Croydon mapped the ‘journey’ of the funding from central government through to local bodies, delivery agencies and finally families.

Mapping customer journeys through existing services

The partners developed a series of case studies to identify how services are actually experienced by real families. A customer journey is summarised later in the Appendix.

Aims of ethnography

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. Participants in ethnographic research are referred to as "informants".

Croydon's ethnographic research aimed to be:

Qualitative

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

In-depth

The research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the lives and cultures of informants, with a view to developing a broader contextual understanding of the issue.

Non-judgemental

The research aims to understand the reasoning and motivation behind people's decision making and choices, and to explore how their culture affects their understanding of an issue. It does not seek to offer solutions, propose reasons or explanations to the people that are interviewed or to rationally explain their behaviour.

Source: Adapted from ThinkPublic 'Qualitative Research Report for Croydon Total Place', January 2010

Ethnographic research: listening to families

This qualitative research project sought to add the voices of the people of Croydon to the Total Place programme and help to ensure the measures proposed by Total Place were consistent with the needs and culture of families and young children in Croydon.

The research aimed to:

- explore the lives of families and children in Croydon
- identify the major needs and requirements of families and children in Croydon
- explore how people use and conceptualise existing services and agencies in Croydon
- explore support systems for children and families that exist in their communities
- offer an insight into the use of qualitative research to drive service transformation.

Croydon hired specialist ethnographic research to conduct the work. The consultants conducted the research over a period of three weeks in late December 2009 and early January 2010. Using data provided by the council the consultants sought to engage a wide range of socioeconomic and ethnic groups.

Informants were approached in the street and in public spaces such as shopping centres and libraries. The research project was described briefly and informants entered into informal discussion with the researchers. One researcher would ask questions while a second took notes, immediately after the conversation the notes were written up and additional comments or observations were noted. Conversations lasted between five minutes and three hours. The average conversation lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Based on a high-level analysis of Mosaic data, the researchers identified the best times and places to meet and interview people from the target demographic. The team used the August 2009 draft of Croydon's borough profile to locate the research in places that would likely be frequented by people from all areas of the borough. The researchers were able to engage with people from 21 out of Croydon's 24 wards and engaged with 64 parents and families in total.

The researchers met each respondent two to three times, recording direct quotes from the respondents, and taking photos to give the stories and quotes a face.



Findings

The ethnographic work generated the following findings:

- 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.
- The research illustrated that it is friends and family who provide the first port of call for support. Those parents who refer to friends and families as frequent suppliers of information generally seem to be coping better, but some parents do not have these crucial informal networks of support. They are often the most isolated families: those fleeing domestic violence, or recent arrivals into Croydon - often from another country; from unstable backgrounds; are very young or do not have support of parents.
- Having a child can be a very lonely experience, even for second-time parents, and parents who are isolated and lack confidence can be excluded from potentially beneficial networks. Many parents say that antenatal classes play a very important role in connecting them with other mothers. More affluent parents buy into National Childbirth Trust (NCT) classes and feel well supported.
- After having a bad experience with a hospital during childbirth many mothers lost confidence with service providers and

say they find it hard to complain. Mothers speak emotively about the support received from midwives after birth. Many parents, including fathers, say they would like more advice at particular times. Parents attach great value to the aims and roles of midwives and health visitors, but many have had bad experiences and feel let down by unfulfilled promises of visit and support.

“We could have done with more support and we wanted to ask questions but couldn’t... they had to run off... they weren’t able to support.”

(Dad 37)

- Whereas second-time mothers may feel they need less medical, nutritional and health advice than first time mothers, they are just as likely to need emotional and psychological support.
- Parents identify the fear of giving birth and of isolation, feeling abandoned in the post-natal period, and readjusting to going back to work as moments of particular difficulty.
- Fathers find the female-centricity of services and prenatal networks off-putting and can feel excluded.
- Experience with frontline practitioners is critical in how parents feel about a service; they feel let down by broken promises or rushed appointments.

“It’s like the doctors ain’t even interested... just because I had them [my children] too soon ... it’s kind of ‘your own stupid fault’... I did not feel comfortable whatsoever.”

(Mum 27)

- Often parents want more time with the professionals they meet; and often do not feel their holistic needs have been heard or met. Some parents are nervous about engaging with statutory services.
- Parents feel keenly the discontinuities between services.

“They saw a note on the computer and it’s been referred; there are many records on the computer but nothing’s happened about it... and it’s nobody... it’s a nightmare.”

(Mum 27)

- Accommodation problems can take up a lot of energy and Croydon’s respondents frequently relate accommodation problems to difficulties bringing up their children. In short, when housing insecurity or conditions are a problem, they often become the main all-consuming problem until resolved. Housing insecurity can provide a barrier to services – such as registering with a GP.
- There does not seem to be an obvious route out of benefit dependency for some parents, which is often reinforced by the advice they receive from service providers. Some parents speak of the impact of worklessness on their mental health. Trying to come off benefits can be an unpredictable, destabilising experience; some parents feel it is easier to stay on benefits.



Complementary research

In addition to engaging families in ethnographic research, the discovery phase of the project also:

Listened to practitioners and managers

Encouragingly, when the programme engaged frontline practitioners and managers in collaborative problem-framing conversations reflecting on the Early Years system, they raised many issues highly complementary to those raised by parents and families.

Mapped customer journeys through existing services

The partners developed a series of case studies to identify how services are actually experienced by real families, and where children and their parents come into contact with the support and resources that are available.

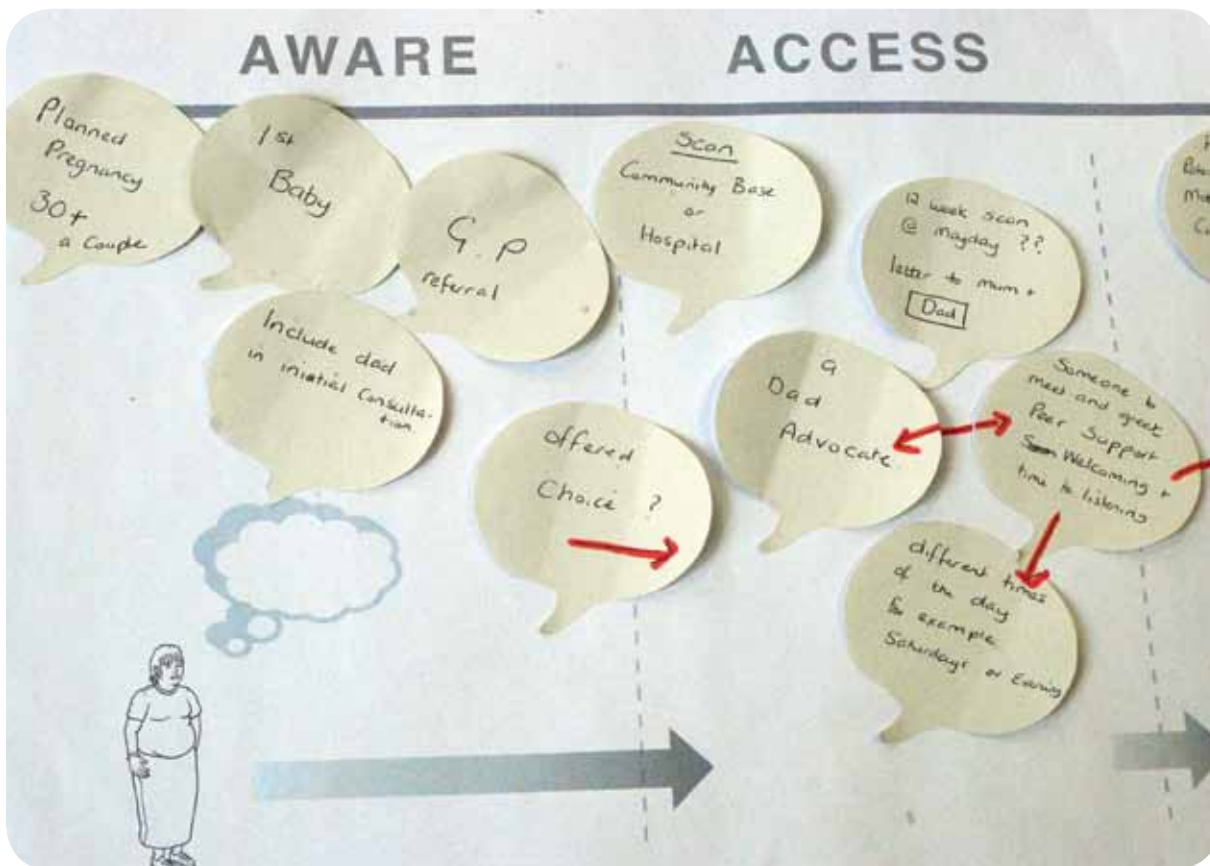
These case studies powerfully expressed the experiences of real families in Croydon, highlighting discontinuities and the sometimes serendipitous nature of Croydon's responses to some of the most difficult and complex challenges faced as children grow up. A customer journey is summarised later in the appendix.

Results of the research

The partner reviewed the results of the ethnography alongside other sources information from the "Discovery" phase (including views of service providers and frontline staff). The partner's shared analysis of this varied and deep evidence base enabled Croydon's Total Place program to reach a number of conclusions which are critical to thinking radically about how to secure improved child health and wellbeing, and shape the future of early year's provision in Croydon, delivering better outcomes at lower cost.

Based on this insight the programme drew the following conclusions (many of which also apply to other service areas).

- The insight highlights the need to design a system that creates solutions, rather than delivers services into which people must fit. The design of single services rather than solutions leads to many joins in the system, insufficiently all-round responses to need, poor 'flow' of families to better outcomes, and constantly increasing costs.
- Designing the whole system is critically important for securing a successful and coherent journey for the family. Even good services may not secure great outcomes if they do not fit well together. Getting that system design right must involve families themselves (children, mothers and fathers, wider community), and all key agents such as frontline practitioners.
- Making the system work is all about the people within it, their ability to work together, including incentives and budgets. The ethnographic research illustrated how important is that professional standards do not reinforce boundaries and barriers. Both parents and workforce need to be able to find out about what is on offer much more easily.
- Practitioners want to work together more closely, but current organisational and service arrangements make this hard. New or improved skills are needed to shift day-to-day collaborative practice on the ground.
- Children and families, and the people they turn to for support, are a significant resource within that system, which public service partners should be using. Many people can do a lot more for themselves, but the current system does not intentionally seek, encourage or support this.



- There is a significant gap in prevention and early intervention up to the age of three; this is a period when parents say they are often looking for more support.
- The most vulnerable families are often the most isolated; they lack the social networks that most parents rely on. Isolated parents will not ‘come to us’: a new comprehensive approach to ensure their needs are identified and responded to is required.
- Public service organisations are not tenacious or focused enough with those families who are chaotic, or not coping. In particular the partners acknowledge the need to provide active advocacy, not just signposting, to ensure families avail themselves of the services they need.
- Where services are of low efficacy, where they build dependency or get in the way of securing families’ resilience and capabilities, they must be decommissioned.

For a full exposition of these recommendations, see the Total Place report ‘Child: Family: Place: Radical Efficiency to Improve Outcomes for Young Children’¹.

Croydon acknowledge that the insights provided by these families are not new. The research revealed that even the best provision does not yet address families expressed needs systemically.

A central issue is that the organisations involved focus much more attention on delivering a specified service than on designing experiences which fit families’ lives. Despite the fact that families do not describe their needs in ways that match service architectures, public service organisations still plan and design things in traditional ways. In addition, despite the energies and aspirations clearly expressed by parents, Early Years services have not yet

¹ ‘Child: Family: Place: Radical efficiency to improve outcomes for young children’ www.croydon.gov.uk/contents/departments/democracy/pdf/617342/child-family-place.pdf

achieved a sufficiently radical shift towards enabling families to secure their own tailored solutions to their specific needs.

Croydon distilled the lessons learned from families into a list of key principles which are to be applied to service design initiatives going forward.

Principles

- Support access to services.
- Build trusting consistent relationships.
- Support inclusive social networks – particularly in the early stages.
- Ensure that services are welcoming to those with highest levels of need.
- Support parents for the emotional journey of parenting.
- Offer consistent care at and after birth.
- Improve flows of individuals and information between services.
- Consistently support fathers to take an active role in parenting
- Support the aspirations of those who have low expectations
- Encourage employment and associated skills development for mothers
- Integrate schools better with the community to improve access to services.

Propositions

The following paragraphs summarise the nine propositions the Croydon Total Place programme have developed in the light of their findings from the work. The partners are currently bringing together the “Find Me Early” and the “Family Partnership Teams” propositions, and implementing them through five local Children’s Trusts.

For further detail on each of the following propositions, see page 63 to 81 of Croydon’s Total Place report ‘Child: Family: Place: Radical Efficiency to Improve Outcomes for Young Children.’

Preparation for Parenthood – will focus on helping parents in the pre and post-natal period by better signposting to local social networks, children’s centres, community groups and other types of services, with a view to identifying families that might be in need of additional support.

Find Me Early – will train frontline practitioners to identify very early signs of problems with attachment, poor development of fine and gross motor skills, emotional or behavioural issues, speech and language problems, maternal mental ill-health and parental relationship conflict.

Family Partnership Teams in geographical localities – will bring together a virtual team from across agencies into Family Partnership Teams each focused on a particular geographical area. The team will include health, family and social care practitioners as well as resources that the insight work suggests are key: particularly families/communities themselves, housing, employment support and benefits.

Family Advocates – will develop the role of a long-term, trusted advocate/champion

for those families most vulnerable to on-off difficulties to secure effective transitions and, over time, manage families into independence.

Peer2Peer Support – will harness and support the resources of parents and communities themselves, through:

- promoting the growth of social networks for parents in Croydon, especially those parents likely to be most isolated – such as those recently arrived
- training parents in the community to be peer mentors
- developing networks of older parents who can act as trusted friends and mentors in the same way that the generations of extended families do.

Early Years Academy – will provide integrated training to ensure the core skills the project has identified as critical for an integrated system are developed and embedded across the workforce(s).

Family Space Croydon – will build a powerful online tool for parents and professionals which will enable easy access to all sources of information about services locally.

The Life Passport: whole-life planning for families of disabled children. This will:

- bring professionals together around the family at the earliest opportunity for collaborative assessment and support
- facilitate greater consent-driven access to relevant information on particular families, and overcome many of the existing barriers associated with sharing information between agencies through creating a “Life Passport” to hold all the facts, information, and stories about the child to be shared with any professionals or services they come into contact with.

Journeying to Work – this will deliver motivational and confidence-building support across public sector and community and voluntary agencies to parents, and secure a more focused offering which enables all parents who have young children to make progress along a return-to-work journey.

Benefits

Rather than making assumptions and jumping to conclusions about what residents think want and making decisions and designing services around those assumptions, this project highlights that if you are willing to invest the time to go and speak to people that:

- service recipients are willing to share their views and it motivates them to feel like they are listened to
- often the solution the consultation uncovers is not as expensive or as resource intensive as the authorities' current services.

Furthermore, the evidence that customer insight and chiefly ethnographic research uncovers helps project teams to challenge service professionals. Often, when pursuing change projects, professionals working in the field will be adept at explaining why a proposed change cannot happen. Customer insight work produces ‘graphic’ evidence that is ‘grounded in reality’. In Croydon’s experience, these real-life stories help the project team challenge professionals working in those services much harder.

Bringing the voice of the customer into the debate about change also helps the envisioning process, and enables the project team to secure commitment to “reimagining the consideration of service delivery across organisational boundaries”.

The work has also helped Croydon and their partners to identify inefficiencies which, when removed, will reduce administrative expenditure. Were the partnership to pursue the propositions outlined in their final report, they estimate savings on a Net Present Value basis of over £8.3m during the spending period 2011/12 – 2013/14, £25m by the end of the next spending period (ending 2016/17) and more than £62m by the time the current four year olds turn 18 in 2023/24.

These efficiencies will result from redesigning services around need, specifically by:

- moving from universal to geographically focused services and targeted spend
- resourcing prevention and early intervention work
- de-commissioning services that do not work.

For example, 'Find Me Early' will identify families with children displaying early signs of difficulty quickly, and ensure that appropriate and timely responses to parent and child need is achieved. Since, families will receive appropriate support before problems become entrenched and expensive to respond to, the partners would expect to see a reduction in behavioural issues, speech and language requirements and referrals to social care.

Similarly, the creation of 'Family Partnership Teams' in geographical localities will mean that families will experience much more coordinated provision. Commissioning will be directed tightly at meeting local need, and families will be known and supported by the network of local practitioners, whether from primary care, existing family support or voluntary sector services. The team will mobilise timely responses to need, reducing the through-put of families to more intensive local services and seeing the benefits in cost savings over time.

Resourcing

The timescales of the project were tight, and the ethnographic work was conducted by consultants over two months. Commissioning and managing the consultants required approximately five days worth of effort from each of the Total Place Project Manager and London Borough of Croydon's Customer Services Director.

The ethnographic research, comprising interviews with 64 services respondents, cost approximately £20,000. The training and coaching for co-design component following the project has cost a further £13,000.

“Our understanding has had a significant step change...

The deep dive into the journey from conception to seven years [conducted as part of our Total Place program] has generated significant breakthroughs in our shared understanding of the problems and challenges inherent in our current children and families' system.”

**Child: Family: Place:
Radical Efficiency to Improve
Outcomes for Young Children
(page 10)**

Lessons learnt

There is a tendency for organisations to regard customer insight as comprising analysis of social demographic data sets. This can obscure the opportunities offered by qualitative research. However, Croydon' focus was the qualitative research – Croydon conducted sufficient data analysis to identify the representative groups and no more. The quantitative analysis was a means to an end. The real insight arose from the meetings, conversations and perspectives with families that resulted. Organisations should determine what level of insight is required from data analysis and recognise the risks of getting carried away.

One of the major elements of the ethnographic work was the photographs of respondents that accompanied their stories and quotations. Seeing the faces of the people in question gave the work added impact. However, when it came to circulating the work more widely – such as with the wider sector – Croydon found that they could not use the images due to data protection issues. Hence, they had to replace the images with stock photos, which somewhat diminished their impact in the eyes of the project team. With the benefit of hindsight, the project team would have gained permission of contributors to use their photos at the beginning of the process.



Next steps

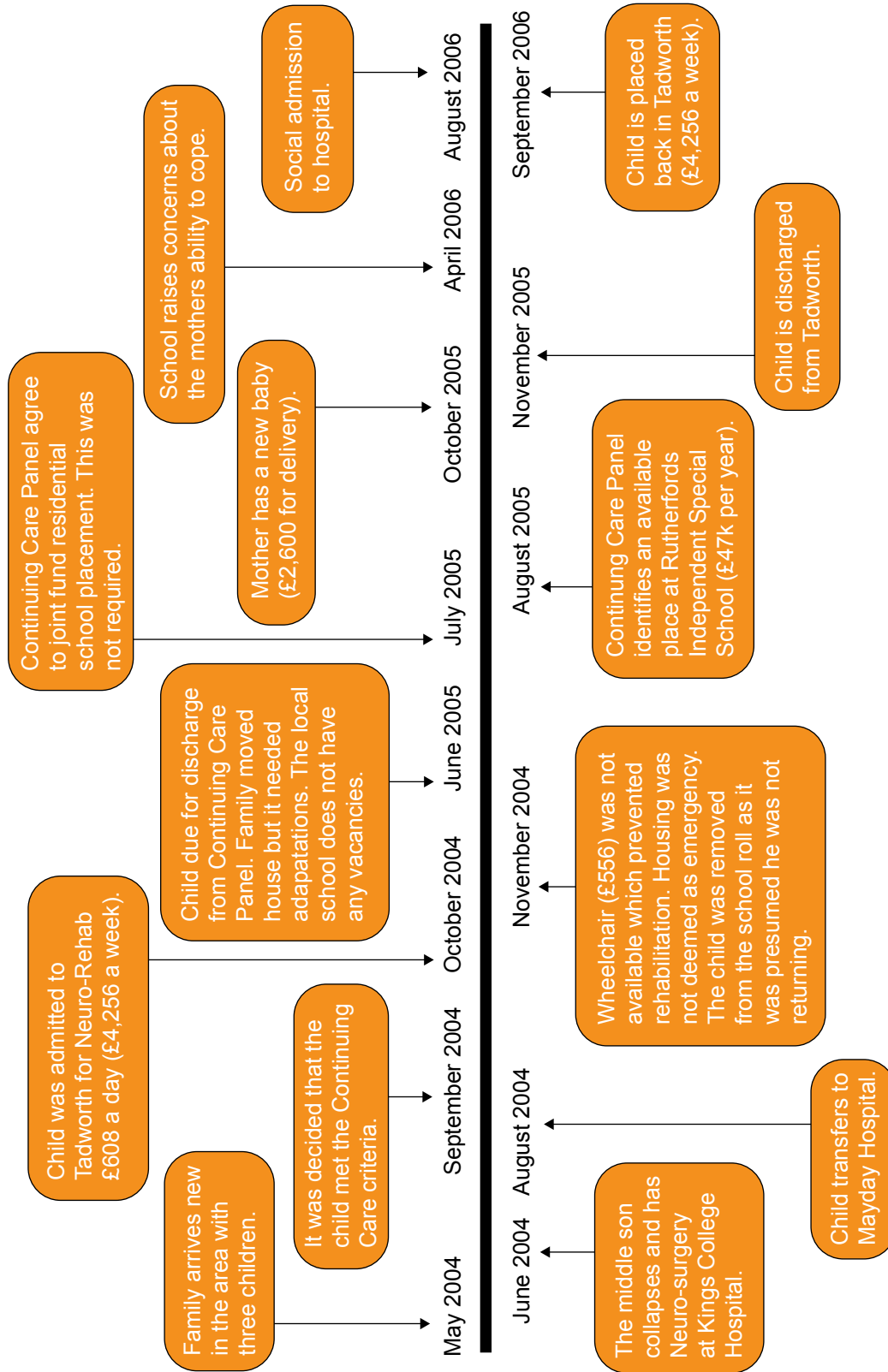
The customer insight work informed the Total Place programme, identified the areas that the programme focused on and shaped the principles behind the propositions that resulted. Croydon are currently reviewing funding streams, post-election, to see how they can progress this further.

In order to continue and embed the use of customer insight work within Croydon, the borough has funded training and coaching from the company which undertook the original ethnographic consulting. This will ensure that the organisations have the required ethnography and co-design skills available internally to implement specific projects pursuant to the Total Place programme. To date, 40 people have received training. The ambition is to make this way of working part of day-to-day business.

One specific initiative is to design a webpage for young mums in Croydon, to be hosted by the Council. The customer insight work indicated that there are hundreds of different websites for young parents (including Netmums, etc), but no single source of information and no opportunity for **local** social networking. The proposition is to develop a one-stop shop webpage that enables Croydon parents to book childcare, build up social networks and support, and ask questions relating to parenting and child care in Croydon. Croydon are working with young mums to understand what the services it should offer, and the web page's look and feel

Appendix: example of a customer journey map

Ms Li and her three sons arrived in Croydon in May 2004. Her middle child, Leo, became seriously disabled soon after arriving in Croydon and required significant support from his mother and from other services. During her time in Croydon Ms Li had a fourth child and it became clear that she was struggling to cope.



Findings related to appendix

- A lack of availability of equipment and resources (housing and wheelchair) led to very poor experience for the child and mother, exacerbated problems and led to significant cost (eg taken off school role, remained in Tadworth, etc).
- No exploration of wider family needs (eg mother caring for three and then four young children).
- A very long delay between identification of need and comprehensive response.
- No single key worker to coordinate support to the family.



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