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ACCESS TO CULTURE AND LEISURE
HELPING CHILDREN REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL

SINT-NIKLAAS TWINNING CONFERENCE – DECEMBER 2010

ABINGDON, UK PRESENTATION – BY A FEAR, A LAWRENCE, M MILBURN

- **Bold type** indicates bullet point in the related presentation

INTRODUCTION

Oxfordshire, The Vale of the White Horse, and Abingdon are fairly affluent areas in the UK, but there are **pockets of deprivation**. A deprived upbringing can seriously affect the ability to thrive and to do well. So the question we seek to answer is what is being done to improve access to culture and leisure opportunities for children affected by poverty in Abingdon, and to **help children realise their potential**.

At first glance Oxford, 10 kilometres from Abingdon, appears to be an ideal English City. Tourists who visit see the beautiful buildings. But some would argue that beauty comes at the expense of settling some of the more deprived sections of the community in large estates such as Berinsfield a few miles out of Oxford, and Blackbird Leys and Barton on the outskirts of Oxford.

Abingdon also has a similar pattern. During the slum clearances of the 1940s, estates were created in the south of the town and they continue to be the most deprived area in the Vale and Abingdon. In Abingdon there are 440 families with children under 18 who are inadequately housed and on the council's waiting list.

We have looked at access to a number of areas of culture and leisure. The areas we looked at are...

Culture ... Children's Centres, Library, Music Centres, Museum, Theatre / Cinema

Leisure ... Youth Groups / Clubs, Town Centre events, Sports Centres, Sports Clubs, Playgrounds

CULTURE

CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Children's centres are places where children under five years old and their families can receive information support and training. The government ensured that every community has a Sure Start Children's Centre to try to ensure that every child gets the best start in life.

The Government's vision, set out most recently in the Children's Plan, is that every child and young person should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. The **Sure Start programme** is at the forefront of transforming the way services are delivered for young children and their families.

All Children's Centres are funded by Sure Start and bring together early education, childcare, health and family support.

The primary objectives of the Children's Centres are to support families using the centres to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make positive contributions and achieve economic wellbeing.

Each Children's Centre assesses the needs of the local community and provides services to meet those needs.

Funding is based on the Government's **indices of deprivation** which identify areas of multiple deprivation at the small area level.

Each index is based on the concept that distinct dimensions of deprivation such as income, employment, education, health can be identified and measured separately. These dimensions are then aggregated to provide an overall measure of multiple deprivation and each individual area is allocated a deprivation rank and score. (Appendix 1 has more)

The indices are used to help target policies and funding, and reinforce a common goal to improve the quality of life in disadvantaged communities.

Abingdon has **three Children's Centres**, the first serving South Abingdon (opened in 2004), the second North Abingdon (opened in 2008) and the third North-East Abingdon (Wootton) (opened in this year). Although they are funded by Sure Start, South Abingdon is delivered by the charity PACT (Parents and Children Together); North and North-East Abingdon's Children's Centres are delivered by a local primary school, Dunmore School.

The area covered by the South Abingdon Children's Centre is considered to be in the bottom 20% area of deprivation nationally. However within those figures adult skills and child education in this area was within the lowest 2% nationally (in 2004). This area also ranks as deprived for child poverty - within the most deprived 15% nationally. North Abingdon is between 30-50% and North-East Abingdon between 50-70%.

All three Children's Centres work closely together and offer help to local families with under- fives by providing information, advice and services, help with returning to work, finding childcare, family support, family health, and much more.

As well as the activities and services available within the centres they also offer an Outreach Support service to families in the local area that find it difficult to access the centres.

All services are free of charge and only donations are requested.

The range of **activities and services** available at Abingdon's Children's Centres include:

- **Parenting support**
- Weekly visits by community Health Visitors who offer help with healthy eating and nutrition, health information and much more.
- Weaning workshops are held for parents who need help with their children making the transition to solids.
- Sensory play sessions for babies
- Baby massage – learning to massage your baby has a host of physical benefits, but also helps to strengthen the life-long bond between parent and child.
- A support group for families with children who have speech and language **difficulties** run by children centre staff and professionals.
- Advice on **challenging behaviour**
- **Social activities** such as Baby café - a drop-in session offering breastfeeding help, information and support for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.
- Young parents' group - this group welcomes young parents, offering a safe and supporting environment where you can come make friends and meet other parents while your children have fun.
- **Children's Groups** such as Movement and storytelling

- Weekly drop-in music sessions
- Fitness classes for parents and their children
- **Access to Resources** such as the Toy Library & Mobile Toy Library – Families can borrow a toy (from a range of toys selected for entertainment and educational value) for a small fee of 20p per toy. To ensure that this service is widely accessible, a Mobile Toy Library has now been introduced.
- Mobile Library visits
- There are often extra activities to include older children during the holidays and trips out.
- **Parents Education** such as Computer courses for parents
- Advice for parents on employment, education and training, and help with tenancies and budgeting advice.
- Parent's courses to update/gain skills to help with children's homework
- Cooking courses to learn about healthy eating, nutrition and cooking food.

LIBRARY

Abingdon Library and its activities are funded by Oxfordshire County Council. The service is currently under review to cut costs and it is likely that some smaller libraries will close. The future of Abingdon Library is secure although it too will need to become more efficient.

As well as providing a free **book borrowing** service available to the whole community, Abingdon Library runs a programme of regular free **activities** for local children to encourage and support their enjoyment of reading:

These activities include a weekly 'Rhymetime' for under- 5s. As this activity is so popular, they have introduced two morning sessions. The children can enjoy singing and, nursery rhymes.

During the school holidays there are **holiday activities** such as free themed 'Storytime' sessions for 4-9 year-olds.

All reading events include a craft activity to support and link in with the theme.

Abingdon Library also holds days covering topics such as health & wellbeing, exercise, talks on healthy eating. These are also free of charge.

To encourage young readers to read during the summer holidays, Abingdon Library runs the 'Reading Challenge' where children are rewarded for reading and reviewing a number of books during the holidays. If they are successful, they receive small prizes and a medal from the Mayor of Abingdon at a medal ceremony!

Mobile libraries

Mobile libraries bring a wide range of books and information for adults and children in local communities. All mobile libraries are free to library members and easy to access.

There are three mobile libraries serving Abingdon and the surrounding villages:

1. **The Public Mobile Library** (children's and adults' books) which makes fortnightly visits to the local villages and Abingdon.

2. There is a **special Children's Mobile Library** which serves schools in rural and deprived areas, over a mile away from their local library. This service supports recreational reading and was voted Best Small Mobile 2009 – in the country!

This facility offers an opportunity to children who may not necessarily be taken to the library by their parents to borrow books from this mobile library.

This facility has proved extremely popular with an average of 64-117 pupils using the mobile library in one of Abingdon's most deprived areas during one visit (2hrs).

Numbers from other schools using the mobile library have reached as high as 248 pupils during one session.

3. **The Children's Centre Mobile** is a project between Children's Centres and Oxfordshire libraries. Two Children's Centre staff have been appointed to this facility and the focus of their work with parents, carers and children is on language and literacy. It is an opportunity to develop a new and innovative way of working with families in more deprived areas and includes giving one-to-one support and advice, organising activities and issuing library books. The mobile has state of the art technology and provides picture and board books for under-fives, with some popular adult reading, parenting books and quick reads. Health visitors and other professionals offer advice and the mobile links with local Children's Centres, as well as the Family Information Service. The mobile is currently visiting Traveller sites and 17 small rural communities identified by a number of indicators including indices of multiple deprivation.

On one of its first visits someone got on and asked if they could use the PN laptops to apply for a job – they had no computer at home, then another asked whether they could request a book on parenting that their Health Visitor had recommended!

This is the only one of its type in the country and was introduced in April of this year. It has already won an award: Best Mobile- State of the Art 2010- in the country.

MUSIC CENTRES

Oxfordshire Music Service offers musical instrument lessons in most of Abingdon's primary schools. The Music Service has been running the "**Vocal and Instrumental Programme - VIP**" since 2007. This programme was introduced and funded by the Government who believed that all children should have the opportunity to play a musical instrument for at least one year during Key Stage 2 (age 7-11). The programme offers free tuition and free instrument loan for one year to the pupils. Each school decides whether they want to take up the programme with the Music Service and may then include the programme as their Music Curriculum provision usually for one year group (between ages 7-11) in each school.

Only six of the 26 Primary Schools in the Abingdon Partnership have taken on this programme this year. Unfortunately, the future for VIP funding is uncertain at the time of writing. At present, in order to keep up with a fund which was not inflation-proofed at the outset, schools will need to contribute to the scheme. As the programme is curriculum-based, the schools cannot charge parents for this programme.

Following on from the VIP programme, pupils are given the opportunity to join the **'Play On' programme** which offers tuition and instrument hire for currently £35 per term (the cost of this is usually £85 per term). Play On runs for a further year and currently around 30% of students on the VIP programme continue to learn an instrument on the Play On programme. In some areas schools have purchased the programme.

For families who cannot afford the fees, the County Music Service offers **free tuition** (eligibility is measured by whether a child qualifies for free school meals which is determined by low income) and from January 2011 free instrument hire will also be included.

The Music Service has a number of external charitable sources it can help parents to apply to for financial assistance. If parents are paying for standard instrument tuition for their children and their financial situation changes, they can appeal for assistance with fees. Other sources may assist with the purchase of a new instrument, or indeed assist with payment so a child can experience an orchestra residential course or tour. Some sources deliberately target gifted and talented children from poor backgrounds and may support them for several years so long as progress is good.

There are a number of **Partnership programmes** in operation where the Music Service acts as a conduit. The Christchurch Project offers the opportunity for singing workshops to take place in schools where Christchurch choristers, leaders from the Christchurch Cathedral School and tutors from the Oxfordshire Music Service come alongside children from poorer backgrounds. Children on both sides benefit from this work. Three schools in Abingdon are currently taking place in this partnership project and children from these schools will be performing a joint concert with the choristers in Oxford shortly.

Abingdon and Vale Music School (Oxfordshire County Council) also offers orchestral and ensemble membership for those students already receiving tuition through the County Music Service. The orchestra runs for 2.5 hours on Saturday mornings.

Until this year this service was free, but the County Music Service has now introduced a fee of £45 per term. However, the orchestra is still free of charge for all children who receive free school meals, children on the current VIP programme and all children in their first academic year of learning an instrument.

Abingdon Music Centre

Abingdon Music Centre is a charity located in the town centre and offers a variety of classes to young people

- Baby and Preschool Music Classes

These classes require five full-paying children in each class to be financially viable. If there are a minimum of five children in a class, then the Music Centre can allow children to attend at a reduced rate in cases of financial hardship.

The Music Centre also runs classes each week at the North Abingdon Children's Centre. These classes are subsidised by the Children's Centre and allow families who would not otherwise have the chance the opportunity to take part in a music class.

The Music Centre's aim is to enable anyone, whatever their age, ability or financial status, to make music to the best of their ability.

Frances Kitching Music School (FKMS).

This school offers children aged between 7-12 years the opportunity to have vocal coaching and learn to play the violin, cello, trumpet or trombone. It is open to children who attend a state school in the Abingdon Partnership, or to local home-educated children. Children receive 1 hour/week of vocal coaching/singing/musicianship activities, and 1 hour per week of instrumental tuition (1/2 hour technique lesson, 1/2 hour ensemble).

Children attending both sessions pay £6 an hour, and are given their instrument to take home and practice, without a hire charge.

Children in receipt of free school meals may attend for free. Families in receipt of income support can pay half fees.

MUSEUM

For the past three years Abingdon Museum has run an **educational programme** linked in to the school history curriculum. The programme offers schools the opportunity to bring children of junior age (7-11) to the museum with their class to learn about key periods in history: Tudor, Roman, Egyptian and Greek. This service is offered on a weekly basis.

The programme involves cooking, crafts, dancing, history and even mummification!

There is no charge for this service and it is open to all children attending Abingdon schools.

Abingdon Museum has also been running free children's activities (craftmaking) as part of a **school holidays programme**. This service is open to children of all ages.

At present, the museum is closed for refurbishment to make the building more accessible and an **audience development** officer is looking at how this service can be extended when the museum re-opens in 2012.

THEATRE / CINEMA

Local societies put on drama and musical productions at the Amey Theatre in Abingdon School, the **smaller Unicorn Theatre**, and other venues.

Abingdon Drama Club has a group for juniors which teaches all aspects of theatre craft for a standard charge. They are very reasonably priced and would help out if need be, but don't advertise the fact at they need to balance the books.

Stagecoach also holds drama classes in South Abingdon. These are fairly expensive but there are discretionary scholarships where the need arises.

Abingdon Dance Studio provides dance tuition to children at very reasonable rates.

Some people say that although there are a lot of activities for younger families that there is a lack of **teenage facilities** for entertainment such as cinemas or ten bowling. These are available in Oxford – 10 kilometers from Abingdon.

LEISURE...

YOUTH GROUPS / CLUBS

There are several **volunteer led youth clubs** in Abingdon and the surrounding villages, giving young people the opportunity to meet up, to learn something new, develop self-confidence, ethics, leadership skills and citizenship skills that influence their adult lives – all this for a very small charge.

Most of these clubs are very accessible as there are so many available in Abingdon and the surrounding villages. They include:

- Scouts and Cubs
- Guides and Brownies
- Sea Cadets
- Air Training Corps
- Church youth groups
- South Abingdon and North Abingdon Youth Clubs – run with help of local police

NET YOUTH CENTRE

Abingdon's largest youth centre is 'The Net', which offers leisure and cultural facilities to young people aged between 10-19 for a very small fee of 50p per session. This is for age 11-15.

There is a wide range of facilities on offer, including art equipment, pool tables, badminton court, basketball court and football facilities, cooking classes (including cooking on a budget!) , a band rehearsal room, two music studios and a small library (called a Trust Library where books can be borrowed for free).

A variety of trips and visits at greatly reduced prices are organised by The Net. These have included kayaking, animation workshops, ice-skating and theme parks. The trips are subsidised (often by 50%) from the fees collected from members.

The Net is funded by Oxfordshire County Council, and although a lot of County youth services in smaller places are under threat, the NET looks secure.

TOWN CENTRE EVENTS

For the past three years Abingdon Town Council has organised a programme of town centre events, showcasing the talents of the local community, including dance, live music, talent contests. These events are free of charge, open to the whole community and are very well attended by families.

SPORTS CENTRES

Abingdon has three council run sports facilities:

The White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre which has tennis courts (indoor and outdoor), swimming pools, badminton courts, gym facilities and numerous workout classes.

Tilsley Park Sports Centre which is a hockey, football and athletics centre.

Abbey Meadows Open-Air Swimming Pool which is open from May to September.

Both the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre and Tilsley Park Sports Centre do offer **subsidies** for children and the council also offers an Access to Leisure pass for people receiving certain benefits and living in the Vale. The pass is free and offers all eligible residents approximately 30% off prices during off-peak time.

However, it appears that there have only been 15 requests for these passes in Abingdon over the past year. Moreover, only the individual receiving the benefit is eligible; the scheme is not extended to the individual's children.

None of these facilities are easy to **access** from South Abingdon and a bus service (costing the Vale Council £5000 per year), served both Tilsley Park and the Leisure and Tennis Centre, but after two years of service was withdrawn three years ago as the service was so underused. The previous leisure centre was in the centre of town and so accessible by foot from South Abingdon.

As of this year, Abbey Meadows Pool has introduced free swimming to under-8s and also has reduced prices for under-16s.

Very good cycle paths serve all facilities.

SPORTS CLUBS

There are **many**, accessible sports **clubs** throughout Abingdon offering training and competitive sport to children for a very small fee. They are generally **run by volunteers** either free of charge or for a **small charge**. They include:

- Football
- Rugby
- Gymnastics
- Athletics
- Netball
- Boxing
- Canoeing
- Sailing

Many sports clubs are also available to students as **after-school** clubs, either free of charge or for a small charge to cover costs.

Many schools also offer free club coaching during school time; coaches run courses at schools making the sports accessible to all students.

PLAYGROUNDS

There are 16 playgrounds in Abingdon with play equipment such as: climbing frames, swings, roundabouts – half are run and funded by the town council and half by the district council. There are also 5 **recreation grounds** where football can be played, two skate parks and two baseball courts. It is also noted that Abingdon has a lot of **green space** where children can roam free and play, including rivers for fishing. All are free for access and not supervised, and well distributed round the town. It is part of the planning process that larger housing developments need to provide access to green space.

CONCLUSION

Efforts are made to improve access to culture and leisure opportunities for children affected by poverty in Abingdon. It is seen as an important issue. There are a great number and variety of such opportunities in Abingdon. However apart from the Children's Centres which can demonstrate the **effects** of their services to their users, it is difficult to judge who benefits from other services. Often better off parents are more able to take advantage of such facilities.

APPENDIX 1- CHILDREN CENTRE STATISTICS

The catchment area for South Abingdon Children's Centre covers South Abingdon, Sutton Courtenay, Drayton, Steventon, Milton Heights, Culham and Clifton Hampden

The current building was built in 2004 although a Family Centre has supported families in the area for many years prior to that.

Here at Abingdon the staff team consists of a manager, full time Children's Centre Early Years Teacher, full time Service Co-ordinator, 2 part time Early Years Coordinators, 2 part time Family Support Workers, 2 Saturday workers, a part time administrator and funded by the PCT for 2 days a week a Children's Centre Health Visitor.

483 families are currently registered with the centre

Abingdon Caldecott 92 (in the top 20% areas of deprivation) there are currently 110 under 5s and the Centre is reaching 20%

130 lone parents within the catchment area - 14.6% reached by Centre

Feb 09 - 260 Job Seekers Allowance claimants: 70 between 16-24 yrs and 140 between 25-49 yrs.
 410 Income Support Claimants: 50 aged 16-24 and 275 aged 25-49 within the area

North Abingdon Children's Centre opened in June 2008 and North East Abingdon Children's Centre in July 2010.

Both centres are managed by Dunmore Primary School with a staff team working across both centres. This team consists of a Manager and Deputy Manager (both fulltime), an Administrator (part time) and six Children's Centre Workers (five full time and one 17 hours per week). We have several casual crèche workers and three volunteers.

North Abingdon CC has 996 children under five years of age living in its catchment area.

The Dalton Army Barracks is split between both of these centres and is an area of high need.

The area is 97.2% White British. There are 330 lone parents, 140 JSA claimants and 135 IS claimants living in NE Abingdon CC area and 415 lone parents, 245 JSA claimants and 340 IS claimants in the North Abingdon CC area.

SOA name	Overall index	Child poverty index	Income deprivation affecting older people	Education Skills & Training domain	Income domain
Abingdon Caldecott 92	27.9%	15.0%	22.0%	2.1%	15.6%
Abingdon Northcourt 00	51.1%	28.9%	39.8%	27.8%	31.0%
Abingdon Fitzharris 97	57.0%	37.3%	54.1%	26.1%	41.4%
Abingdon Caldecott 90	59.8%	39.6%	68.9%	26.4%	47.7%
Abingdon Ock Meadow 03	60.0%	28.1%	46.8%	55.3%	40.0%

ODPM Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004

% = how each area ranks against all areas in England

Deprivation Index – For example Abingdon Caldecott 92 is in the most deprived 15% of the country when it comes to Child Poverty

	Pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, 2004 Count	Pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, 2004 Rate	Pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, Rate Change 2003-2004
England	306656	52.0%	1.3%
South East	49858	55.2%	0.0%
Oxfordshire	3181	51.1%	0.1%
Vale of White Horse	679	55.8%	1.6%
Abingdon Abbey and Barton	20	46.5%	7.0%
Abingdon Caldecott	17	26.2%	-1.5%
Abingdon Dunmore	31	58.5%	-4.8%
Abingdon Fitzharris	23	50.0%	3.8%
Abingdon Northcourt	25	41.7%	-0.2%
Abingdon Ock Meadow	27	56.3%	4.3%
Abingdon Peachcroft	31	50.8%	-8.6%

DFES PLASC (Pupil Level Schools Census) data gives educational achievement of state school pupils referenced back to home address

Tables shows educational achievement compared with the national average