



## **Written submission provided to the Education Committee**

### **Support for Childcare and the Early Years**

#### **Written submission made on behalf of the Small Steps Big Changes Partnership by**

Dr Nadine Otting, Amy McDonald, Jane Flewitt, Karla Capstick

We are happy to discuss further if required. Please contact Karla Capstick, Small Steps Big Changes Programme Director [karla.capstick@nhs.net](mailto:karla.capstick@nhs.net)

**Submission date: January 2023**

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC

## Executive summary

Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) is one of The National Lottery Community Fund's – 'A Better Start' Programme sites, utilising a test and learn approach to support the improvement of social and emotional development, communication and language, and nutrition outcomes amongst 0–4-year-olds in four ethnically diverse wards in Nottingham City. SSBC is a partnership programme, which includes health providers, early years, early help, community and voluntary sector providers and parents.

This written evidence principally addresses two areas:

- To what extent does the early years system adequately prepare young children for their transition into primary education, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The extent to which the reduction of Sure Start Children's Centres has affected children and families, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the role of Family Hubs.

The SSBC programme acknowledges that parents are a child's first and important teachers, and their involvement in their child's learning and development is critical for the child's overall well-being and future success. The SSBC programme has received £45m of funding over a ten-year period from The National Lottery Community Fund and is therefore well placed to provide evidence of the impact that well-resourced early years' support can have on children's outcomes. Particularly, the effect of interventions on young children's speech, language, and communication helps to adequately support all young children, including those from less advantaged backgrounds, to be school ready. This submission highlights the need:

- To recognise the value and place in the system of early intervention and prevention measures for babies and very young children, when considering the support for childcare and the early years, and the importance of parents as a child's first and important teacher.
- To recognise the need for increased funding to address the strain that the system of support for babies and younger children is under, to avoid worsening the attainment gap and to achieve the government's mission of levelling up.<sup>1</sup>



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)

**To what extent does the early years system adequately prepare young children for their transition into primary education, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds?**

1. Nottingham is ranked the 11th most deprived district in England in the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and ranked 8th in the 2015 IMD. The 2019 IMD also shows that income deprivation affects 29.8% of children in Nottingham. 56 of the 182 (30.8%) Nottingham City Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) fall amongst the 10% most deprived in England.<sup>2</sup> Small Steps Big Changes targets four wards in Nottingham: Aspley, Bulwell, Hyson Green and Arboretum, and St Ann's. These respectively account for 9, 10, 4 and 5 of these 10% most deprived LSOAs<sup>3</sup>, which means that half of the 10% most deprived LSOAs in Nottingham are within SSBC's target wards.
2. Language difficulties are more prevalent in children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. With each increase in disadvantage there is an associated increase in the number of children experiencing language difficulties.<sup>4</sup> Language gaps related to income have been shown to exist by 18 months and by the age of three these have become entrenched.<sup>5</sup> These gaps increase as children grow older.<sup>6</sup> As children's language capabilities are strongly associated with cognitive abilities alongside children's social, emotional and behavioural development, gaps in language development are highly important.
3. Data published in 2019 shows that at the end of the Early Years' Foundation Stage over 32% of children in Nottingham did not achieve a good level of development, with almost 19% not achieving at least the expected level in communication and language. This means that at age 5, many children do not have the skills needed to learn and progress in school.<sup>7</sup>
4. Early years are crucial. Evidence supports good quality childcare and a positive home learning environment as being beneficial in improving outcomes for children.<sup>8,9</sup> Sufficient, accessible, and high-quality childcare is a significant factor in promoting school readiness.
  - 4.1. The recovery of early years funded provision back to pre-pandemic levels and above remains a priority for Nottingham City Council. In Summer Term 2022, uptake of childcare places for 2-year-olds (funded and non-funded) increased by 10% compared to Autumn Term 2021 data. However, the funded element increased only by 1%. This meant that 1 in 3 eligible 2-year-olds in Nottingham were not making use of the early years' funded provision.<sup>10</sup>
  - 4.2. A survey among 100 non-English speaking families in one of Nottingham City's Primary Care Networks showed that almost 2 out of 3 eligible families did not take up the offer of funded childcare for 2-year-olds.<sup>11</sup> For many of these families, cultural norms were a significant factor. An important part of their culture and faith, identified women as being the main care giver for children until they reached school age.

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC

- 4.3. This illustrates the need for direct investment in the child's early development to be complemented by investment in parents and the home environment, as well as the importance of the early years' delivery offer to be culturally sensitive. Without adequate resources, the government's ambition around education as part of the Levelling Up agenda may not be achieved.
5. Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) is one of The National Lottery Community Fund's – 'A Better Start' Programme sites, which received a 10-year investment (2015–2025) to improve the life chances of babies and very young children. SSBC utilises a test and learn approach to support the improvement of social and emotional development, communication and language, and nutrition outcomes amongst 0–4-year-old children in four ethnically diverse wards in Nottingham City. SSBC is a partnership programme, which includes parents, health providers, early years, early help, and community and voluntary sector providers. Our aim is for all children to be ready to learn at 2, be ready for school at 5 and ready for life at 16. The SSBC programme acknowledges parents as a child's first and important teachers. Their involvement in their child's learning and development is critical for the child's overall well-being and future success.
6. Since the start of the SSBC programme, SSBC had delivered to 5098 individual children, totalling 105.663 interactions. SSBC activity has reached 81.1% of the current under four population in the SSBC wards in Nottingham. These children could have participated in any of the SSBC programme activities.
7. SSBC has established and commissioned a paid peer workforce, known as the Family Mentor Service. Family Mentors deliver an intensive home visiting programme: Small Steps at Home; designed to support children's development. They also provide a range of community groups to support improving childhood development outcomes and parent confidence. The commissioned providers of the Family Mentor service are well established community and voluntary sector organisations.
8. External evaluation evidences the positive impact of Small Steps at Home and how children are supported to be school ready.
- 8.1. Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) scores of children from SSBC wards who participated in the Small Steps at Home programme for 18 months or more, compared favourably against ASQ scores of their Nottingham peers. Although this difference was not statistically significant, children who participated in Small Steps at Home live in deprived areas in Nottingham. Therefore, participation in the Small Steps at Home programme may have narrowed the gap between these children and their peers who may live in affluent areas and households.<sup>12</sup>

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC

- 8.2. Interviews with parents and staff gave further information about the impact of the Small Steps at Home programme. Parents mentioned improvements in wellbeing and confidence in themselves and the children, children eating healthy food options, and improved sleeping routines and behaviour. Staff found that the programme had led to developments in children's confidence, language and communication, and improved English for children whose parents did not speak English as their first language. They also shared a view that participation in Small Steps at Home led to better relationships and more interactions between children and parents, and parents being more safety conscious.<sup>13</sup>
9. Family Mentors are successful in reaching and building trusting relationships with families from a range of backgrounds:
- 9.1. 17% percent of those families accessing Small Steps at Home were classed as vulnerable, based on the Health Visiting case load allocation; 14% on Universal Plus and 3% on the specialist and protection caseload.
- 9.2. Non-English-speaking families in one of Nottingham City's Primary Care Networks, rated Family Mentors as one of the services most easy to access.<sup>11</sup>
10. SSBC support the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL), an enhanced supported book gifting scheme.
- 10.1. A questionnaire study examined the impact of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) registration on parent-child reading-related behaviours and other variables known to be linked to children's later linguistic and educational outcomes. The findings showed that the longer families participated in the programme, the more parents had interactions with their children whilst reading a book, the longer reading sessions they had, and the more they read to their children daily.<sup>14</sup>
11. Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) is a home-based reading activity for dads and male caregivers to read with their child every day for 4 weeks. External evaluation<sup>15</sup> included a quantitative pre- and post- questionnaire. Data from 70 fathers indicates that reading frequency increased following participation in FRED. Moreover, 90% of fathers reported an improved relationship with their child and 74% felt more involved in their child's learning. Furthermore, Family Mentors reported in qualitative interviews that FRED had improved child and father outcomes including improved speech and language, bonds, emotions, and confidence.
12. The Triple P (Positive Parenting Programme) includes the offer of an 8-week group course to get practical advice about common parenting challenges and for parents to set goals for their family and develop their own parenting plan. External evaluation has evidenced that taking part in the Group Triple P programme has a positive impact on child and parent outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC

- 12.1. Behavioural screening questionnaires showed that parent participation in Group Triple P sessions was associated with significantly reduced children's conduct and hyperactivity problems. At the same time, parent participation in this programme was also associated with significantly improved children's prosocial scores.
- 12.2. Furthermore, parents' problems in parenting skills significantly reduced and their mental wellbeing significantly improved after they participated in the Group Triple P sessions.
13. Story and Rhyme Time, which offers songs to sing, stories to share, and learning through play, offers an opportunity for parents to learn and transfer these activities to the home environment and incorporate them into their daily routines and interactions with their children. This can help to improve children's language and communication skills. Interviews with parents and staff gives preliminary evidence<sup>16</sup> of the benefits of Story and Rhyme Time. For example, parents and staff suggested that the activities helped develop language and communication skills for children, as well as for parents who did not speak English as their first language.
14. Independent external evaluation has shown that participation in the SSBC programme in general benefits children's language abilities as measured by British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS) scores at school entry.<sup>17</sup> The evaluation compared BPVS scores of SSBC and non-SSBC children attending the same schools in Nottingham.
- 14.1. Importantly, participating in the SSBC programme is linked to significantly better vocabulary scores overall.
- 14.2. In the group of non-SSBC children, disability and speaking English as an additional language were correlated with lower vocabulary scores. These factors were not statistically significant in the group of SSBC children. Participation in the SSBC programme may thus improve language abilities for children who are multilingual or living with a disability.
- 14.3. Boys' and girls' scores were very similar in the SSBC group, whereas boys scored lower than girls in the non-SSBC group. Although this difference did not reach statistical significance, it is suggestive of the potential impact of the SSBC programme to help close gender gaps in language abilities.

**The extent to which the reduction of Sure Start Children's Centres has affected children and families, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the role of Family Hubs?**

15. Nottingham City faces a challenging funding climate to support early years' children and their families. The system for primary prevention and early intervention measures for babies and younger children is under strain.



[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC



- 15.1. Compared to national and regional averages, Nottingham has high levels of children's safeguarding issues. This is seen in the local rate of children classed as Children in Need. Data since 2013 shows that this rate is consistently at a level that is significantly higher than regional or national rates.<sup>18</sup>
- 15.2. Local authorities (LAs) have been under strain in relation to the delivery of public health functions since its transfer from the NHS. Despite a ring-fenced public health grant being provided to local authorities, the grant remit for spending expanded in the local authority context. This was coupled with a reduction in the value of the grant. This has seen a trend to prioritising statutory services over prevention.<sup>19</sup>
- 15.3. In Nottingham, the introduction of a new citywide Early Help offer saw the closure of five children centres, with four others remaining open.
16. Nottingham City is one of the 75 LAs which have been selected to receive funding through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, with confirmed allocation of funding until March 2025. Nottingham City is developing their delivery plan in partnership and utilising the learning from SSBC.
17. The National Lottery Community Fund £45 million funded SSBC programme will conclude in 2025. This will mean a significant reduction in funding into the city where high levels of need in the early years remain.
18. Without a significant increase in the value of the Public Health grant, the current pressures on local authorities, exacerbated by Covid-19, will put further pressure on already stretched services that support primary prevention and early intervention measures for babies, younger children and their parents.
19. We feel strongly that failure to address this is likely to have significant impact upon efforts to close the attainment gap during the early years and we therefore call for increased investment in prevention and early intervention measures for babies and very young children.
20. Research shows how much the public sector could feasibly save from investing more in early preventive services.
- 20.1. The Early Intervention Foundation Analysis of 2017 estimates the cost of late intervention in Nottingham in 2016 at £124 million. This means a cost of £391 per capita for the acute, statutory and essential benefits and services that are required when children and young people experience significant difficulties in life, many of which might have been prevented with early intervention.<sup>20</sup>

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC

## Conclusion

21. The SSBC programme is a clear example of the positive impact that investment in early years support has on children and their families. Particularly, the positive effect of interventions focused on young children's speech, language and communication, helps to adequately prepare all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, for transition into primary education.
22. We call on the committee when considering the support for childcare and the early years, to recognise the value and place in the system for prevention and early intervention measures for babies and very young children, and the importance of parents as their child's first and important teacher.
23. The system of support for babies and younger children is under strain. We feel strongly that failure to address this will only exacerbate the attainment gap and call for increased investment in prevention and early intervention measures for babies and very young children.



[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* [online] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>
- <sup>2</sup> Nottingham Insight (n.d.) *Indices of Deprivation (2019)* [online] <https://www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/themes/deprivation-and-poverty/indices-of-deprivation-2019/>
- <sup>3</sup> Nottingham Insight (2021) *Ward profiles and reports* [online] <https://nottinghaminsight.org.uk/f/aAXFc8>
- <sup>4</sup> Law, J., Charlton, J., Dockrell, J., Gascoigne, M., McKean, C. and Theakston, A., (2017) *Early Language Development: Needs, provision and intervention for pre-school children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds*. London Education Endowment Foundation.
- <sup>5</sup> Asmussen, K., Law, J., Charlton, J., Acquah, D., Brims, L., Pote, I. and McBride, T., (2018). Key competencies in early cognitive development: Things, people, numbers and words. *London: EIF*.
- <sup>6</sup> Eisenstadt, N. and Oppenheim, C., (2019) *Parents, Poverty and the State: 20 years of evolving family policy*. Policy Press.
- <sup>7</sup> Department of Education (2019) *Early years foundation stage profile results: 2018 to 2019* [online] <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2018-to-2019>
- <sup>8</sup> Teager, W. and McBride, T., (2018) An initial assessment of the 2-year-old free childcare entitlement: Drivers of take-up and impact on early years outcomes. *Early Intervention Foundation*, 23.
- <sup>9</sup> Melhuish, E.C. and Gardiner, J., (2018) Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): Impact study on early education use and child outcomes up to age four years-Research Brief.
- <sup>10</sup> Nottingham City Council (2022) *Childcare Sufficiency Summary Report Card*. [online] <https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/media/3375338/summer-term-2022-nottingham-city-council-childcare-sufficiency-assessment.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Khan, F., Sisters of Noor, McDonald, A. (2022) *Report on the Experiences of accessing healthcare amongst non-English speaking families in Sneinton and St Ann's: Nottingham City East Primary Care Network (PCN6)* [online] <https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/knowledge-hub/learning-hub/primary-care-network-report>
- <sup>12</sup> Tura, F., Wood, C., Lushley, C., Paechter, C., and Wood, J. (2020) *Evaluation of Small Steps Big Changes: Interim Report: January 2020*. Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University. [online] <https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/knowledge-hub/learning-hub/training-and-learning-documents>
- <sup>13</sup> Lushey et al., (2019). *Evaluation of Small Steps Big Changes First Annual Report: 2019*. Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University.
- <sup>14</sup> Ferhat Tura, Clare Wood, Rebecca Thompson & Clare Lushey (2021): Evaluating the impact of book gifting on the reading behaviours of parents and young children, *Early Years*, DOI: 10.1080/09575146.2021.1908234
- <sup>15</sup> Toft, A., Lushley, C., Tura, F., Newham, K., Slater, J., Jameel, A., Law, S., Rathore, G., Cooper, S., Fleming, J., Pandya-Wood, J. and Paechter, C. (2020). *Evaluation of Small Steps Big Changes Annual Report: 2020*.

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC

---

Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University. [online] <https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/knowledge-hub/learning-hub/training-and-learning-documents>

<sup>16</sup> Lushey C, Tura F, Toft A, Newham K, Slater J, Law S, Jameel A, Rathore G and Paechter C. (2022). *Evaluation of Small Steps Big Changes: Annual Report 2022*. Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University [online] <https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/knowledge-hub/learning-hub/training-and-learning-documents>

<sup>17</sup> Wood, C., Tura, F., Newham, K., Lushey, C. and Paechter, C., 2022. *Examining the Impact of Small Steps Big Changes Provision on Children's Receptive Vocabulary Scores on Entry to Reception Class*. Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University. [online] <https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/knowledge-hub/learning-hub/ssbc-annual-report-2022>

<sup>18</sup> Department for Education (2022) *Characteristics of children in need*. [online] <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need>

<sup>19</sup> Buck, D. (2022) *Hard times: the latest chapter in the story of local government public health spending* [online] <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2022/12/hard-times-latest-chapter-story-local-government-public-health-spending>

<sup>20</sup> Early Intervention Foundation (2019) *The cost of late intervention: EIF analysis 2016* [online] <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016>

[www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)



@SmallStepsBigChanges



@SSBC\_Nottingham



@ncitycare\_SSBC