



MUMS SUPPORTING MUMS

# Our story so far



# Contents

Section 1:  
Background  
2

Section 2:  
Design  
of Mums  
Supporting  
Mums  
8

Section 3:  
What we did  
11

Section 4:  
Impacts  
22

Section 6:  
Future plans  
36

Section 5:  
What we  
learned  
29

Section 7:  
More  
information  
39



# Section 1: Background – why Mums Supporting Mums is needed

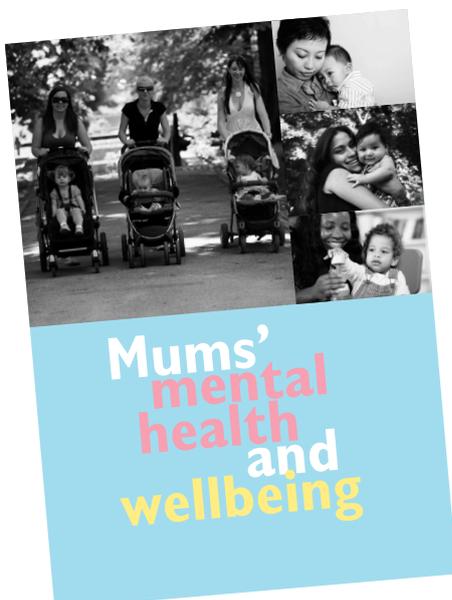
## Experience of women with young children

A few years ago staff in NHS Glasgow and Clyde approached Outside the Box. The health care team were supporting women who had more serious mental health problems around the time their baby was born or soon afterwards. The team were also getting referrals when women had less serious mental health needs. What the women often needed was a community-based source of support but there did not seem to be enough of this around. Could Outside the Box help find out what women in these situations would find helpful?

We talked to women in several parts of Scotland and asked what it was like for them, what helped and what made life more difficult. The report from that project is Mums' mental health and wellbeing.

- Women taking part came up with suggestions for mums, for their partners and families, and for health services.
- The report helped NHS staff and workers in other services think about what they could do to support the women they knew.
- It also showed what women wanted to do to help themselves and each other.

As we talked to people about the report and the points women had raised it became clear that there were additional difficulties facing mums who lived in rural areas. We received an Investing in Ideas grant from the Big Lottery Fund and that enabled us to explore the potential for a new development. We talked to organisations which were working with parents and families and found out what they were hearing and seeing from people in their areas.



*"It can be really hard to look after yourself – physically or mentally."*

*"There is just no time or space for you. There are days when I can't even get a shower, not even 5 minutes on my own."*

*"None of my friends had a baby and I didn't have people to talk to who knew what it was like. It helped a lot when I met other mums."*

*"It's like being down in the basement and you don't know how to climb out. I benefitted from practical points from others in the group."*

*“This church project is great. It’s a chance to meet other mums, have some space when the children are at the crèche. And it doesn’t cost us anything, which makes a big difference when money is tight and everything for the baby is so expensive.”*

(Quotes from Mums’ mental health and wellbeing, 2011)

## Context: What we heard from other sources

We also looked at research reports and policy documents and at the evidence they had gathered. The next section has more on the detail of the policy context, but these were the main points.

### On mums’ mental wellbeing

- Almost 1 in 3 mothers have poorer mental wellbeing in first 4 years after their baby is born and at any one time 12-16% of mums have poorer mental well-being.
- The factors that contribute are mostly social, including loneliness, not enough activities such as parent and toddler groups in that area and/or difficulties getting to services and community activities. Some people – such as mums who are lone parents – are also more likely to experience poorer mental well-being.
- A much smaller proportion of mothers have more serious mental health problems. Around 11%-13% have depression at some point in the first year after their baby is born, and 0.1% of new mothers have post-puerperal psychosis which is a very serious mental health condition.
- People who have poorer mental wellbeing are good parents to their children. When they have some support they can cope better and some of the practical aspects of being a parent with mental health problems can get easier, which has further benefits for them and for their children’s wellbeing.
- People are more likely to have better mental wellbeing when they are part of a community and have support from other people, when they feel that they have something meaningful to do, and when they feel that they are making a contribution.
- People are more likely to have poorer mental wellbeing when they are facing difficulties such as poverty, being unemployed, so it helps when people who are affected have access to good information and advice.

The research and good practice also shows what people can do to protect and improve their mental wellbeing. The Mental Health Foundation has brought together a body of research to identify 10 key steps that people can take to improve their mental wellbeing:

1. Talk about your feelings
2. Keep active
3. Eat well
4. Drink sensibly
5. Keep in touch with family and friends
6. Ask for help
7. Take a break
8. Do something you’re good at
9. Accept who you are and have good self-esteem
10. Care for others

National and local policies aim to improve people's mental wellbeing and provide services and community resources that will help people who do have mental health problems in their recovery. There are also policies aimed at raising public awareness about mental wellbeing and reducing the stigma that sometimes surrounds mental health problems, such as the See Me programme.

### **On support for children and families**

National policies in Scotland aim to promote the well-being of children and to support their families.

The National Parenting Strategy for Scotland was launched in October 2012. The focus of the strategy is:

- Valuing and supporting Scotland's parents as one of the single biggest ways of giving children the best start in life.
- Making it easier for parents to understand the positive difference they can make to their child's development.
- Helping parents to feel confident in their ability to care for their children, feel reassured that help is available if and when they need support and ultimately making parenting an even more rewarding experience.
- Supporting the range of people who take on parenting roles.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is the national policy in Scotland for children and young people.

- The focus is on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.
- There is a strong focus on wellbeing and understanding what this means for children and their families.
- It recognises the benefits of early intervention, building on strengths and promoting resilience as ways of preventing difficulties developing or increasing.
- It encourages people in different roles and services to work together.

There are local policies and networks in each Council area in Scotland to support the implementation of these policies in the context of those local communities, and to make links with other work that the Council and other bodies are doing.

### **On rural communities**

- Just under 1 in 5 people in Scotland live in a rural area, although 98% of the land mass is rural.
- Generally the population in rural areas is older. There are families with children but young people leaving to find work or study in other areas is a significant problem in most rural areas.
- There are pockets of poverty and deprivation in rural areas which can be difficult to identify.
- Levels of employment are generally higher for people living in areas that are accessible to towns but 50% of people are commuting to work elsewhere.
- There are higher rates of people taking part in voluntary work and community activity than in urban areas.
- People in rural areas are also more likely to experience isolation and loneliness: they include older people, disabled people, and people with mental health problems, lone parents and parents who are at home with young children.
- Most rural areas in Scotland have poor public transport links.
- High fuel costs hit people in rural areas especially hard.

- Rural areas have seen a significant loss of local public services, as services are centralised in towns and as high travel costs affect both staff travelling out to people and people travelling into services.
- There are some significant issues around health inequalities for people living in rural areas.
- Building strong, thriving rural communities is a major strand across Scottish Government and local policies.

*“It is easier for people to get to Glasgow and back in a day than to another village 10 miles away.”* (Mum in South Lanarkshire)

*“Just because the sun is shining right now and there are green hills around Peebles and Gala it looks idyllic - but it’s actually very, very tough.”* (Lord Smith of Kelvin, at launch of report into rural poverty and employment opportunities in rural areas, March 2012)

National and local policies aim to support rural communities and enable them to be sustainable.

Aspects of this include:

- Increasing economic opportunities for people living in rural areas - access to more local jobs and encouraging businesses.
- Tackling poverty in rural areas.
- Promoting volunteering and the work of community-led groups to support people living in that community.
- Encouraging community participation.

In each area people have looked at local needs as part of developing the LEADER programme (part of an EU-wide programme supporting rural communities) and developed a Local Strategy that was led by the community. The plans for the project in each area reflected the priorities that had been set and the experience from them contributes to plans for the coming LEADER programme over 2014 - 2020.

### **On developing effective public services**

The issues that we heard from mums and from other sources linked to several priorities within the Single Outcome Agreement that had been agreed between each local authority and their partners and the Scottish Government:

- The best possible start in life for children, and children having the best health and wellbeing.
- Preparing people for employment and building employment opportunities.
- Building the skills and capacity of people and their communities.
- Increasing the capacity of the voluntary sector and increasing the contribution of volunteers.
- Promoting and contributing to improvements in people’s health and wellbeing.
- Complementing and helping to improve the overall impact of public services, by taking pressure off health and social care services when this is more appropriate for these people.

The contribution of small scale community-based activities that were led by the mums who would benefit reflected the approach in several policies and good practice:

- Preventing and reducing the incidence of health and other problems.

- Preventing people's distress and the need to more extensive and more expensive services through early intervention.
- Tackling inequalities.
- Community-led services complementing and working alongside public services - both as a way of reducing the demand on public services and to create more services that reflect what people want and find effective.
- Promoting a range of models and ways of providing services, to give people greater choice and control in the support they get.
- Co-production by services and people in local communities.
- Encouraging a wider range of models and providers, such as micro-providers, social enterprises and voluntary organisations.
- Encouraging and supporting volunteers - both for the benefits that come to the people taking part and for the contribution that they bring.

## What we did – the Mums Supporting Mums project

Early in 2012 we began developing plans for a project based in rural areas. The aims were to pilot and try out some small-scale activities that were led by mums, to let us see if the model worked and had the potential impact we hoped for.

This is where we had got to by autumn 2012.

- There was a partner in each area: Healthy Valleys in rural South Lanarkshire, the West Wigtownshire Partnership and Building Healthy Communities in Dumfries and Galloway, and the Healthy Living Network in Scottish Borders.
- We had funding from the LEADER programme in each area. LEADER is a European Community programme which supports development of rural communities. We received grants from charitable sources and Outside the Box contributed resources.
- There were 3 slightly different projects, reflecting the different circumstances of each area and funding packages, with some shared elements. The overall project was planned to run from November 2012 to June 2013.

This is what happened for people living in the 3 pilot areas to August 2013.

- Overall, the project has worked with 16 local groups and involved 165 parents – mostly mums plus a few dads, grans and one grandpa.
- There were some delays but local activities were getting underway in all 3 areas by March.
- We ran 4 training or learning sessions and enabled people to take part in other training opportunities, and further sessions have happened since August. The topics include: how to get funding and start up groups like these, First Aid for babies and children, buggy walk training and employment matters.

The project also included elements that were planned to benefit people living in other areas as well as those in the pilot areas.

- We have also produced 7 sets of Tips and Hints to help mums in these and other areas start up activities like these or feel more confident in matters that affect their own lives.
- We have a short film showing what it is like for mums living in rural areas and what people gained from being part of the project.

## About this report

This report was put together by Anne Connor at Outside the Box but many of the people who are part of Mums Supporting Mums have contributed to it – so it is written by all of us. We hope that the report and the other materials we have produced give people ideas about what they can do in their areas. We also hope it helps explain why developing this sort of activity is so important and can contribute to achieving many other aims for families and the communities in which we live.

The following sections describe in more detail what we did and the difference the project made.

We have learned a lot from this project. The final sections describe the lessons and what we plan to do next to take forward the experience that all the people involved – the mums in the local groups, the people working on the project, the partners and Outside the Box – have gained.

## Thanks

We want to thank all the people and organisations which helped make this project possible:

- The parents who took part.
- People in the local areas who gave advice and encouragement, told parents about the project and helped with practical suggestions.
- The sessional development workers and the people who provided element such as training, writing the resources and making the film.
- The partners who provided a base for the project and helped make links with other work that they do and with other people and activities in the areas.
- The funders, including the 3 teams administering the LEADER programmes, Holywood Trust, Foundation Scotland and the Comic Relief small grants scheme, and the Big Lottery Fund.
- Other people who gave advice and encouragement on the wider policy aspects and how this project can also benefit people living in other areas.

*“Being new to the village, we both knew nobody – not even each other – and to think we were both sitting in our homes feeling the same thing and only being a few houses away.”* (Mum in South Lanarkshire)

*“Before the group there was nothing to bring mums together. It’s helped rid the feeling of isolation.”* (Mum in Scottish Borders)

*“I feel quite proud of what I have achieved as it was something I didn’t think I could do and now I can see what a difference it has made to me and my son!”* (Mum in West Wigtownshire)

# Section 2: Design of Mums Supporting Mums

## Main elements and activities

We designed the project to reflect what we had heard from women and to reflect the wider policies and good practice around the well-being of mums and their children. Our project was located in rural South Lanarkshire, Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway and so was built around local policies and priorities in each of these areas.

The Mums Supporting Mums project brings together several types of activity:

- A series of small groups or other activities which are led by mums living in that location and reflect the circumstances and preferences of people living there.
- Contact between the groups, so people can get ideas from each other and share what they are doing. This was effectively peer support between peer support groups.
- Publicity about what the groups were doing, which they can use themselves to tell other mums about the activities and to raise awareness of professionals or other people in that community of the ways mums are supporting each other or about the issues they face.
- Access to support worker and development worker time, to get advice on how to get groups going and link into resources and help in their communities. This was also to give support as needed on aspects of supporting each other, such as how to make groups welcoming to people who had some additional needs around their mental wellbeing, for example.
- Training on topics that were relevant for the women involved in the groups. This could include skills that helped individual mums and their children as well as being useful for group activities – such as learning about baby massage or first aid for babies and young children. It could also be skills that were more about keeping a group going, such as learning about fundraising and making grant applications.
- Producing Tips and Hints, to give these groups a resource they can refer to later, and to show other people how they can get started.
- Making a short film as another way to make other people more aware of the issues facing mums in rural areas and the contribution that they can make in supporting each other.

## Underlying approaches

The model for the local groups brings together several core elements.

- It is based on peer support between mums. The form of the contact reflects local circumstances and the preferences of the people there. During the pilot it has included meeting up on a regular basis, less regular or less formal meetings, some people meeting up outside the main group, phone contacts in between, and group and individual contacts through social media and email. In some places a few dads have come along and the decision to include them was made by the other people involved in that group. Some people are also part of other networks and have helped friends they have met through one group or network to get involved in other activities.

- It is community based. The plan was to use ordinary places in that community as the locations for groups meeting. They have included community centres, schools, cafes, meeting in a park, and going on walks together. We hoped that groups would build contacts with other people involved in community-based activities and use resources in their areas, and this is what has happened.
- The routes through which people come to the groups are also part of the community. The sessional development workers and the parents in the groups spread the word about the project and the activities that were getting underway through posters and leaflets in post offices, shops, garages and the like, telling people they knew and asking other people to tell mums they knew.
- The project makes use of the skills and other capacities people bring and aims to increase this. We have been explicit about recognising and using people's strengths and encouraging people to contribute what they can. There were also opportunities for people to learn through training and from each other. The aim was to increase the capacity of individuals and communities, so members of existing mums groups also took part in training, for example.
- It complements other activities and services. The aim was to extend the number and range of opportunities for mums and their families in each area and to enable any existing services – public services and community-based activities – to increase the impact of what they were already doing. In each area we had a lot of help from existing services and groups. Sometimes people get to hear of groups through Health Visitors or staff at a Family Centre and then people decide themselves whether and how to get involved. Existing mums-led groups in other villages have given encouragement and support to the newer ones.
- It is inclusive. The starting point was to include any mum in the area who wanted a bit of extra company or support from other mums. We helped groups think about what would make their activities welcoming for people who were new mums, or not feeling so confident, or who were new to the area and did not yet have friends there. The project included groups that brought together mums who shared circumstances and who wanted something focussed on that, to give people the choice of what is right for them. Some of the groups which are part of Mums Supporting Mums have been led by and for mums of twins, young mums and women from other countries.
- The way the groups work and the types of activities they do include aspects that are proven to support positive wellbeing. We brought together resources that women and professional such as Health Visitors knew were helpful in supporting people with milder mental health problems. The development workers and parents knew how to get access to additional support if any mum needed that or if people were concerned about a friend.

## Who the project can work with

In June we reviewed which people and groups we can support. The partners and funders knew that this was a pilot project and that the short timescales and level of funding (and so worker time) placed limits on the types of people and groups the project can support at this stage. But some people hoped that the project could support groups where people had more significant additional needs or could work outside the target geographic areas.

We explained that the project could support:

- Groups that are already going, where they need some advice or practical help to keep going to re-focus – such as building up members, a new committee settling in, or help with fundraising.
- A new group where the parents feel they will be able to be more independent once they get established.
- Groups where the people involved do not have high levels of support needs.

- Groups where a few of the parents need a bit of support around health and wellbeing or other matters and this is of a level and type which they and the other members feel able to manage with access to some advice and back-up if needed.
- Groups where people will be able to manage ok if they do not see the local development worker for a few weeks – such as when she is on holiday.
- Groups which are likely to become self-sustaining in the next 3-6 months.

Examples of the groups and people the project was not in a position to support were:

- Work with people and groups outside the target areas.
- Groups where most of the individual members have support needs.
- Groups where there are major difficulties in the dynamics in or around the group.
- Situations where people are looking for frequent and/or significant levels of advice.
- Groups where there is little likelihood of the group becoming self-sustaining in the next 6 months or so.

We explained we were looking at options for the partners to take on aspects of this project as part of their overall work, and/or looking for additional income to enable us to give more and longer-term support to groups and individuals and support more groups.

## Organisation of the project

When we were planning the project we built in both community development support for the groups and support for individuals and their families if anyone needed that through the partners. In practice these 2 aspects were merged. Circumstances had changed for 2 of the partners between the time of the plans and funding applications and the point when the work was starting in each area. We decided that the support for both aspects would come from workers based in the partner – Healthy Valleys – in South Lanarkshire and at Outside the Box for Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.

Some elements of the overall project worked out as we had planning. Others were delayed or happened in different ways. We arranged to extend the work in the local areas where there had been a later start. The shared elements also were delayed by 2-3 months as these had to work at a pace that enabled women in all 3 areas to take part.

In the end we covered almost everything we wanted to do. We also made arrangements for some activities to happen over the following few months.

# Section 3: What we did

## Mums Supporting Mums in Dumfries and Galloway

### The partner

In Dumfries and Galloway the Mums Supporting Mums project has concentrated on the south-west corner of the area, in West Wigtownshire.

The partner for the Mums Supporting Mums project here is the West Wigtownshire Area Partnership of Building Healthy Communities. BHC is a partnership of public, community and voluntary organisations that has been working together since 2001. The programme is designed to improve the health and wellbeing and quality of life for all individuals, particularly those who are encountering difficult circumstances and personal issues. BHC is located in the Health Improvement Department of NHS Dumfries and Galloway.

The West Wigtownshire Area Partnership identifies and works on the issues that affect people in that location.

All the work is based on an ethos of equality and equal opportunities to all individuals in the community. There is more information about what BHC does and how it works at: [www.healthycommunities.org.uk](http://www.healthycommunities.org.uk)

### Funding

The 2 main sources of funding for the work in West Wigtownshire came from LEADER and Hollywood Trust.

The Hollywood Trust grant was specifically used for work with younger women aged under 25.

The early stage of planning and developing the work was supported by the Investing in Ideas grant from the Big Lottery Fund.

Outside the Box also contributed towards the costs of the sessional workers and start-up costs for the groups, and for costs such as additional support for sessional workers, publicity for the project and costs such as insurance and office support.

### Overall activities

The workers were appointed in March and began building contacts very quickly. People involved in the Area Partnership had already started spreading word about the project to other teams and to community groups in the area.

The sessional workers met with mums or other community contacts in Drummore, Kirkcolm, Drochduile, Portpatrick, Glenluce and Leswalt. We also met mums at a base in Stranraer which included people

who came from the outlying areas. Staff based at a Family Centre, Health Visitors and teachers also suggested individual mums and groups of mums who they thought would benefit from having more contact with other mums.

- There were places where there was no local peer support for parents. Here, we have helped groups get started or are still at the stage of discussing options and finding out what people need.
- There were villages where there was already a group which welcomed help, for example in getting more resources or moving to another location.
- There were also some groups which were getting on fine, where the parents leading them were able to give advice and ideas to other people.

This is what we did in West Wigtownshire by the end of August.

- There are 3 groups which now meet regularly and 2 are beginning to get underway.
- There are 37 mums involved in the groups, with 4 dads and 1 gran coming along occasionally.
- We also met a further 9 mums to talk about possible groups or support for an existing group in their area.

People from several groups got together when we were filming for the DVD about the overall Mums Supporting Mums project. They have now decided to keep in touch, with occasional visits to the other groups.

Parents from West Wigtownshire also contributed to the development of the hints and tips which draw on experiences of groups in the 3 areas, to help parents in other places get similar activities underway in their areas. The mums here also helped with the development of a resource to give mums more information and options around employment: this was led by the project in Scottish Borders but will also be available to help people across Scotland.

## Mums-led groups

### Drummore

We met with a small group of mums who were keen to meet others in their area. Drummore is a very isolated village, with a very small school, no village hall and a cafe which is only open in the summer months. The Health Visitors told the mums about Mums Supporting Mums and introduced us.

A small group of mums from Drummore started meeting in the local café each week. They had worked with one of the project workers to create posters to put up in the local shop window and invite other mums to join them and knew that once the school term starts other mums are going to join in.

By late August the mums started looking ahead to what they could do over the winter. One of the mums had left the area and they were finding it difficult to find somewhere to meet, so they had a fresh look at what they wanted to do. They are now looking at linking into a Parent and Toddlers group in Sandhead as having more mums and children to meet with will be more enjoyable for the mums as well as for the children.

*“What we have enjoyed about coming to the group? Meeting other Mums, Getting out of the house, Sharing problems and information with the other mums.”*

## Portpatrick

Some local women had recently started a toddlers group and they had been using a room in the school. They wanted to continue over the summer holidays but the school wasn't available. We helped them to use the local village hall for their sessions. They are a small group but they were finding that they have outgrown the room in the school, so the plan became to find funding for the group to use the village hall all year round.

By August the group had started meeting each week in the village hall. They received lots of support including donations of toys and equipment and a donation from the Community Council to cover the insurance.

We held a training session on funding for community groups, to help them work out what they wanted, what sources of funding were appropriate for them and what information they would have to gather for funding applications. Since then 2 mums are taking this forward.

*"The hall gives us more space and the children can play on the sit and ride toys and use up lots of energy."*

*"We didn't know where to start. Now we know what we want, where we might get funding and how to apply."*

## Young mums group

We met with some teenage mums who were looking for things to do once they could no longer attend their current support group, which was linked to statutory services. They have been talking about what things interest them and they are looking at places where they can meet.

This group of mums helped a lot with developing the resources that will benefit many mums, including the employment resource. We arranged a session with a development worker where the group could talk about their experiences looking for work: limited job opportunities, seasonal employment, low pay, often unsocial hours in the jobs that are available, the support they got from the local job centre, issues around online forms and broadband in the area – either lack of broadband or very slow broadband – and the impact for local people with online filing of claims etc. We also had information to help people begin to explore the options available for them. This discussion was fed back into the employment resource that has been developed as part of the overall project.

*"The teenage mums were looking for something just for them because they don't always fit in with the traditional mums groups, and are looking for different things and for more support." (Professional)*

*"It's hard for teenage mums in a small town because everyone knows all about us and it can feel that people are making judgements."*

## Kirkcolm and Leswalt

We met mums who are interested in doing some sort of group, possibly buggy walk. But summer holidays got in the way and the mums asked to put things on hold. At the end of the funding period we were getting back in touch with them and beginning to work on getting groups started.

## Looking ahead

- Mums within the current groups want to look at different types of activities in their areas, such as a buggy walk.
- Several groups got in touch with the Mums Supporting Mums project in late August when the summer holidays were over.
- Some groups know that they will have to find different premises over the winter, or keep in contact through other routes, and are looking for development support to help them achieve this.
- Several people are linking up with mums from another village. For some women this is because they met through another Mums Supporting Mums activity, such as filming for the DVD. For others, it is because they now have the confidence and resources to travel to another group and invite those parents back to visit them.

# Mums Supporting Mums in South Lanarkshire

## The partner

The partner in rural South Lanarkshire is Healthy Valleys, which is a voluntary organisation which aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in rural South Lanarkshire. Healthy Valleys began in 2003 from a partnership between statutory and community groups.

There is more information at [www.healthyvalleys.org.uk](http://www.healthyvalleys.org.uk)

The people who work with the local groups to help them get going are based at Healthy Valleys. The Mums Supporting Mums project complements the activities of the Grassroots project, which is targeted towards vulnerable pregnant women and families with children under 5 years old who live in rural areas of South Lanarkshire. It provides support to mums who face additional difficulties and their children. The Mums Supporting Mums groups in rural South Lanarkshire and in the other areas benefitted from the experience of the Grassroots project and the contacts it had already made.

*“Through Mums Supporting Mums we have added to our physical activity and capacity building programmes and increased our number of volunteers.”* (HV worker)

*“It has enabled women from different villages to come together who would not normally do so, establish friendships and support networks.”* (HV worker)

## Funding

The main funding for the work here came through Healthy Valleys and from the South Lanarkshire LEADER programme as an inter-regional project.

The initial development stage was supported by the Investing in Ideas grant from the Big Lottery Fund and Outside the Box provided money towards publicity for the project and the elements that are shared with the other 2 areas.

## Overall activities

The work with the local groups started in January 2013 and progressed pretty much as we had planned (and hoped). The workers were in touch with parents in 10 communities, including villages and people living in more remote areas where the houses and farms are widely dispersed: Douglas, Blackwood, Kirkmuirhill, Carstairs Village and Carstairs Junction, Leadhills, Crawford, Abington, Crawfordjohn and Coalburn.

This is what happened in rural South Lanarkshire by the end of August:

- There were 7 groups.
- 62 mums and 1 dad were taking part.
- We had held 7 training sessions and enabled mums to take part in other training.

## Mums-led groups

### Pushy Mummies in Douglas

This is a buggy walking group established by a group of mums. The development worker met some mums at the local toddler group in Douglas. They wanted to do something else and a buggy walking group appealed to them: there are many good routes for walks in Douglas and the mums wanted some physical exercise.

Some of the women went on walk leader training and some of them participated in first aid training. They set up their buggy walking group, set up a facebook page and communicate through that.

A few months later the group is thriving. There is a core group who go most times and there are a few mums who come along on the walks occasionally.

The mums also keep in touch outside the walks and they do other things, including taking part in a 5K fundraising walk in a local park.

*“As a group we feel we can visit other community events such as Bookbug on a Monday, go swimming and may even give the toddlers group another try – at least we will know each other.”*

*“I enjoy getting out of the house – especially in the good weather.”*

### BK Buggy Walks

Women from Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill heard about the Pushy Mummies buggy walking group and decided they wanted to set one up. There were a couple of key women who were central to getting this small group started. There are now 5 mums taking part.

There has been a lot of change in the membership of this group, in ways that are typical of many mums groups. Two mums have left the group as they no longer want to go buggy walks. They have been replaced by two other new mums with babies. Two other mums are going back to work soon: the group are going to change the day that they meet so that these women can come on their day off.

The mums are currently looking for an indoor venue to which they can go if the weather is too poor for walking, especially if we have another hard winter this year.

*“We want to continue to meet over the winter months as we enjoy each other’s company.”*

*“It’s just great. We feel like we’ve known each other for ages.”*

## **Carstairs**

In June we started meeting a small group of women in Carstairs. They were keen to find out about baby massage, so we organised an initial baby massage session to let people learn about it and decide if they wanted to follow this up. These women also attended a first aid course in their centre.

These mums have older children at school and the families were busy with other activities, so they decided not to meet over the summer months and keep in touch with each other through text messages instead. Now the children have gone back to school the mums are getting back together again.

## **Crawfordjohn, Crawford and Abington**

There were some existing Parent and Toddler groups which wanted some advice on ways to keep going, such as fundraising and finding or keeping premises that worked for them. There were also some mums in this area who lived in very remote locations and wanted to find out how just 2 or 3 mums can support each other as a group.

We helped them find resources to get new equipment and held training sessions for them on fundraising with time for people to get together over coffee. We also helped one group complete a Big Lottery Fund application for a grant to keep going and develop what they are doing.

## **Looking ahead**

The groups plan to continue to develop what they are doing, such as publicising their group to reach more mums, getting additional funds to expand, and raising the profile of the ideas of mums supporting each other.

- Some groups are reviewing the day or time they meet, so it stays accessible to new people.
- The groups are also thinking about how they will meet and stay in contact with each other over the winter.
- Some groups are looking at how they organise themselves to make sure it is sustainable as some people leave and new people join.

In September we heard that we had received an Awards for All grant which will enable the Mums Supporting Mums project to continue well into next year.

- Healthy Valleys will continue to provide a base for sessional workers.
- They will continue the support to the existing groups and to more groups which are just getting started.

# Mums Supporting Mums in Scottish Borders

## The partner

The partner here is Borders Healthy Living Network which is a team within the Joint Health Improvement Team of NHS Borders and Scottish Borders Council. The Healthy Living Network works across 5 key geographic areas of deprivation in partnership with a wide range of voluntary organisations, businesses and the community.

You can get more information at: <http://www.nhsborders.org.uk/health-services/children-and-young-peoples-health/health-improvement-team>

## Funding

The funding for the work in Scottish Borders came from NHS Borders, Scottish Borders LEADER as part of an inter-regional project, and the Comic Relief small grants scheme which is administered through Foundation Scotland.

The initial development stage was supported by an Investing in Ideas grant. Outside the Box provided additional resources for direct costs, staff time for support for the sessional workers, publicity costs, insurance and office support.

All the work on the employment resources was funded from Scottish Borders and the work was based here, including advice and help from Scottish Borders Council, Welfare Rights services, Citizens Advice Bureau and other services based in Scottish Borders. However women from all the groups – including those in the other areas – contributed to it and learned from this part of the overall project.

## Overall activities

We met with people in 10 places: Heriot, Walkerburn, Peebles, Broughton, Cardrona and Eddleston and have had initial conversations with workers in Duns, Eyemouth, Langlee area of Galashiels and Hawick.

This is what had happened by August:

- 6 groups were meeting regularly.
- 48 mums, 9 dads, 2 grans and 1 granddad were involved.
- We had met a further 36 people and had initial conversations about groups in their areas.

The local sessional workers set up a Mums Supporting Mums Facebook page for the Borders area and the local groups. This has helped to promote the project in the Borders.

## Mums-led groups

### Walkerburn

This was the first group to get going in Scottish Borders. It began when 3 mums from Walkerburn approached the sessional worker as there was currently no support for mums in the local area. People knew that there had been a parents and toddlers group in the village before. But over the past few years there have been fewer babies born here: the group had stopped when the numbers coming had

dropped. Starting to meet in a cafe was an easy first step, to let people find out if this was what they wanted to do and have a location which involved very little co-ordination.

They agreed to meet weekly in the local café as it was accessible, child friendly and didn't take much organising. The numbers have been steadily increasing since the group began in April

*"We went and talked to the manager in the local café. They had a back room so we use that. They make us feel really welcome and they've got to know us all. We have it for an hour but some mums stay on a bit longer. We asked if we could bring some toys and store them, save us bringing them each week. The owner thought about it and realised that if he bought the toys then anyone who came into the café could use them. He said that being seen as a child and family friendly café make good business sense."*

When the Health Visitor told them that there are more pregnant mums in the village the group decided that they'd got to know each other well enough to start thinking about setting up a parent and toddlers group. They are looking into how to do this. They are going to keep the café group going as it is a great meeting point for mums with babies in particular and for mums who just want to drop in at any time.

### **Heriot**

A mum with 3 children from Heriot approached a sessional worker to discuss possible options for developing Mums Supporting Mums work in this rural community. It was realised after the initial meeting that the current arrangement for mums in this area is working well: they meet weekly in the local playgroup from 10-11 and chat with other mums while the children play. However they were also looking for other options and together we came up with the idea of the library bus.

During the school holidays some of the mums (and children) went along to the library bus to talk about having local Bookbug sessions in Heriot. Their plan was to have monthly Bookbug sessions outside the school and at the end of the sessions the mums can go straight to pick up their school age children

The library bus now attends the school every 3 weeks and holds a Bookbug session for parents and toddlers. This has been a great resource for the parents as they don't have to travel to the library and they can take part in the national reading programme.

The mums are currently discussing the options for buggy walks in the local area and this will be developed further over the coming months. The priority for them was getting a buggy walk group established. They went for walks in the local parks during the summer holidays as it was difficult to find safe places to walk in Heriot. The local walk leader co-ordinator has offered to help the group find suitable places to walk.

*"We're beside the A7 – quite remote but with lorries thundering past!"*

### **Mums around the world**

A small group of mums have been meeting in a café in Peebles and providing mutual support for each other. The women have come to the Scottish Borders because of work and are more isolated because their own families and close relatives are elsewhere (European countries and further afield). They have decided to keep meeting in the café but also buddy each other to local toddler groups.

This group are meeting to share experiences and receive support from other mums who understand living in a new country, being part of a different culture and living without immediate family close by. They are forming friendships and as a result are going together to get involved with other community groups and events. They are also meeting socially outwith the group and keeping in touch through email.

The local ESOL (English as a Second Language) group have been signposting mums to this group and the ESOL worker visits regularly to maintain links and offer any other support.

This group has led on to us talking with some mums in other parts of Scottish Borders who are interested in Mums Around the World in their own area.

*"I now have friends, if I need something I can ask. Because I have no family close by this has made me feel so much better."*

### **Young mums**

A group of young mums want to set up a group for themselves and their babies and young children in Peebles.

After hearing about the work of Mums Supporting Mums a young mum got in touch with the sessional worker and asked if something could be set up to offer support to young mums in the area. She was concerned that there was nothing in the area for teenage mums, unlike some other areas of the Borders, and believed many young mums needed this support.

The local soft play café was suggested as a suitable venue and the sessional worker was able to negotiate a 'free' play session for children who attended. This has worked well for the mums and the children.

It transpired very quickly that there was a need for a group aimed at young mums as they were not accessing any other support groups due to fear of being judged by other mums. 15 mums attended the group over the first few weeks and soon word spread to local professionals who were also trying to engage with this group.

Within 4 weeks we had visits from health visitors and the Citizens Advice Bureau staff who were willing to give advice and support to the mums, as requested from the mums.

As a result of this group the local family support worker has set up a bump to babies group in Peebles to offer more intense support and group work to these mums. Also the mums are now buddying each other to other mums groups and parents and toddler groups in the area.

### **Eddleston**

The local playgroup in Eddleston had to close as there weren't enough parents to sustain it. But the small number of mums who do live there knew they needed something for them and their young children. We met with mums to hear what they wanted and what they felt was realistic for them to take on.

Mums with babies and toddlers have now started meeting in a local café each week in Eddleston.

## **Mums with twins**

The Peeblesshire Twins Group was an established group and already a registered charity. They approached the sessional worker when they were at risk of losing their current venue. She was able to secure access to the local community centre and form links between the Community Development worker and the twins club.

The other issue the parents running the twins club had was how to entertain all the children as well as receive some support for themselves as mums. The sessional worker was able to approach the local secondary school. There are now 6 sixth formers attending twins club from 10 am -1 pm every Thursday to interact and play with the children. This gives the mums much needed respite and the volunteers are receiving experience to use on their CV.

## **Galashiels**

A mum approached the sessional worker after she heard about the Walkerburn group and was keen to start something in Galashiels. The worker approached the local soft play centre and has secured a weekly slot for mums to meet and children to play (free).

This group is in the early stages and have only met a few times so far. 3 mums attended the first session and now word is spreading through health visitors, flyers, Facebook and word of mouth. A few weeks later there are 5 mums and they feel ready for this group to grow and develop.

## **Looking ahead**

NHS Borders has made a further grant to the project to enable it to continue after the pilot grant funding ended in September. We are currently looking for additional funding which will enable the project to continue until the end of 2014.

Ideas which we are following up include:

- A group of mums from Poland having somewhere they can meet on a regular basis.
- Links with a Housing Association who are keen to help identify migrant worker families and women who could benefit from some peer support or links with other mums.
- Links with a family centre when women are interested in developing their own groups.
- Groups for mums living in Berwickshire, with the ideas and approach benefitting families living in the east part of Scottish Borders.

We are talking to the Borders Healthy Living Network about ways in which they can draw on the experience and learning from the Mums Supporting Mums project as part of their work. During the next year or so parents from the groups and the sessional workers will be part of discussions about ways to take the project forward.

# Shared activities

## Making the DVD

The mums from all 3 areas were part of planning for the DVD to show other people what the project was doing and why support like this was important for women living in rural areas.

- There were discussions in the groups about what we should cover and the points we wanted to highlight. This contributed to the tender that was issued.
- We used the points the women had raised as part of the assessment process.
- People from each area were part of interviewing the short-listed companies and making the decision about awarding the contract. They asked questions on points which the women had said were especially important to them.
- The location of the filming was discussed with the groups. It was decided to use the Portpatrick group as the location in West Wigtownshire and to include mums from the other groups in the filming. We followed the same process in the other areas and used a cafe group in Scottish Borders and the two buggy walks groups in South Lanarkshire.
- Once the draft of the completed film was available the mums were able to see it and clear both their own participation and make suggestion for the overall edit. This included women who had decided not to be filmed.
- They also signed off on the revised version which included everyone's changes (edit 5).

The women who were part of filming for the DVD about the overall Mums Supporting Mums project have now decided to keep in touch. This has led to occasional visits to the other groups, so all the mums are benefitting.

The parents who decided not to be filmed for the DVD have said they also feel part of the process and are keen to continue to be involved in the next stage of disseminating the DVD.

## Resources to help other people to set up groups

Parents from West Wigtownshire also contributed to the development of the hints and tips which draw on experiences of groups in the 3 areas, to help parents in other ways get similar activities underway in their areas.

There are now 7 sets of Hints and Tips, which is more than we had planned.

- Setting up parents and toddler groups.
- Setting up buggy walking groups.
- Setting up informal groups in cafes.
- Using social media.
- Getting organised – how to spread the work and how to become a constituted group if/when people want to do this.
- Planning for the group, including ways of keeping everyone safe and well.
- Finding the funds: tips to help groups be independent and sustainable.

*“Planning and making the DVD was great fun.”*

*“It makes you feel that you have something to say that’s worthwhile, that you matter.”*

# Section 4: Impacts

## How we gathered the information

Mums in each location talked about what the groups meant to them and the difference it was making for them and their children. People also described the differences they were seeing in each other. We also had evaluations of groups and of training sessions, such as the routine evaluations which Healthy Valleys do as an integral part of all their work. We used this feedback throughout the project to plan what was needed for each group, in each larger area (West Wigtownshire, Scottish Borders and rural South Lanarkshire), and for the project overall.

Towards the end of the pilot project the development workers went back to the groups and asked them about what they thought had changed since their first contact with the project.

We have also had feedback from Health Visitors and other people who are in touch with parents or have worked alongside the project.

The Health Improvement Team in NHS Borders helped by giving advice on the evaluation of the project and the information that people in the NHS would look for. They identified someone to give an external perspective. The external evaluation will be completed over the next few months. We drew on their suggestions about questions to ask the mums about the changes for them, so the feedback is feeding into both this report and the later overview.

## Changes for the women and their families

The main changes people described for themselves and each other related to:

- Confidence.
- Improved mental and physical wellbeing.
- Making friends.
- Feeling more confident and having more skills around looking after their children.

*“The feedback from our buggy walk group is that all the mums feel better for doing the walks (fitness levels improved). Our self esteem and confidence has had a big boost.”*

*“The group gives me a reason to leave the house. It’s nice to now have friends.”*

*“The first aid training was for me very useful, a gold star – a notch on my belt.”* (Mums in South Lanarkshire)

*“I feel more confident as a mum as I now know that I’m doing the best job I can do.”*

*“It is easier now to walk into a room with new people. I’ve a lot more confidence in myself.”*

*“Best thing I did was go to the group even though I was very nervous.”*

*“Feel more confident about now bringing up little one.”*

*“Things are still hard sometimes but least I know my friends are there.”*

*“Before the group there was nothing to bring mums together. It’s helped rid the feeling of isolation.”* (Mums in Scottish Borders)

*“I think we have all benefited from meeting with other parents in the local area rather than having to travel. A few of the mums in our group do not drive so they appreciate local support.”*

*“I have more get up and go.”*

*“I was nervous going to meet the mums the first time but they made me so welcome. It gave me such a boost I really enjoyed it.”* (Mums in West Wigtownshire)

One of the main aims of the project was to increase opportunities for mums to have peer support which could contribute to improving women’s mental wellbeing. The feedback from the mums who took part and from people such as Health Visitors showed that this aspect of the groups was working.

*“The groups give each other reassurance when someone is not so well but also encouragement to come back to us.”*

*“If someone is having mental health difficulties the others in the group can reassure her that there is light at the end of the tunnel.”* (Health Visitor, Scottish Borders)

*“You get emotional support from the other mums as well.”*

*“We’ve all been there, struggling a bit and needing a wee hand.”* (Mums in Scottish Borders)

## Benefits for children

The mums were very positive about the benefits for their children. The main aspects they mentioned were:

- Having other children to play with or just watch.
- Other adults to interact with, which helps babies and young children develop early social skills and learn how to relate to other adults.
- Stimulation from other children and adults.
- Mums share ideas on things to do with their babies and young children. They go home with ideas to keep them going.
- Mums are more relaxed knowing that what they are doing is ok. It can be scary having a baby

and not sure if you are doing the right things.

*“Our children are now mixing together so it won’t be as daunting for them when they start nursery because they will already have friends.”*

*“My wee boy loves Tuesdays. We get up and out the house early to attend the group and usually stay out all day, go for walks and meet others for coffee. He always sleeps well on a Tuesday night.”*

*“It’s amazing to see our children interact and share toys and make friends.”* (Mums in Scottish Borders)

*“I could ask the other Mums about how they did things with their babies. I was comfortable asking because they are the same as me and have some very good ideas and answers.”*

*“My wee boy just loves it. He loves meeting all the other babies and children. There are no other children around us at home so this is perfect for him.”* (Mums in West Wigtownshire)

*“My wee girl just loves getting out on the walks and seeing the wildlife.”* (Mum in South Lanarkshire)

## Contact with other services

The women also described the ways in which they were now making more use of local services and facilities in their community.

*“We have people to meet up with to try other activities and groups.”*

*“I have a better idea about what’s available now.”*

*“Having the Health Visitor visit the group means I don’t have to struggle to get to the surgery on the bus, as she is happy to meet me there and check the wee one’s weight and progress.”*

*“We’re using services like the library bus and toddler groups I didn’t know about before, which I heard about through the group.”* (Mums in Scottish Borders)

*“Yes - I’m getting out more - using the leisure facilities and other community groups. Before I just sat at home thinking there is nothing for me and my baby and it’s all too expensive and complicated.”* (Mum in West Wigtownshire)

*“The group encourages people to use other activities such as Bookbug and Fitness classes.”* (Mum in South Lanarkshire)

## Skills around starting and sustaining groups or other activities

One of the aims of the project was to enable the mums-led activities to be sustainable beyond the time of the development project. We wanted to encourage women to have the skills and confidence to run the groups themselves. This was for new groups which began through the project and for existing groups which wanted to develop what they were doing, by thinking ahead for the longer-term or reaching more parents who could benefit.

*“We feel more confident now in our abilities as a group to continue with our parent and toddlers.”*

*“We didn’t know about VASLAN until you told us. They are now helping us with our annual accounts. We can go back to them for any other help that we might need for our committee in the future. And they’ve offered to promote our group on their website and newsletter.”* (Mums in South Lanarkshire)

*“We will keep on encouraging each other and new people to attend. We will keep our ideas fresh and carry on regardless.”*

*“I’m enjoying getting involved with group organisation and committee roles.”* (Mums in Scottish Borders)

*“We have become more aware of the support available to us as a group. We have benefited from being able to meet other mums in our own area who are further on and have already got their group going.”*

*“Biggest help to us has been increasing our awareness of funding that is available. Before we had the support from the mums project we didn’t really know where to look for help & were floundering a bit.”* (Mums in West Wigtownshire)

One of the ways we supported this aspect of the project was through the funding workshops. The feedback from those taking part in all 3 areas was positive.

*“Everyone said it was really difficult to apply for funding. The workshop broke it down into bits, it made it easy for us to see how to use our ideas and answer the questions. You made it simple and straightforward. It is much easier than I thought it was – the workshop really did help us.”*

*“Feel much more confident now that we know what they are looking for in the funding application forms.”*

The mums involved in all the local projects also contributed to the development of ‘how to’ guides. These were to help any group of mums – these groups and any new ones that develop in these areas or any other place – have the skills and confidence to set up their own activities.

*“It’s a good feeling that our experience is going to help mums in*

*other places.”*

*“The tips are there for us too, something to refer to if we ever feel stuck.”*

*“I enjoyed the session when we all listed our ideas for ways a wee group like ours can get some funds. We were quite impressed with how creative and resourceful we are!”*

## Opportunities around employment

An issue that faces many women after they become a mother is going back to paid employment. Do you want to do it? Or change your hours or the type of work you do? What are the options for you?

We helped women learn more about the options in several ways.

- The project in Scottish Borders included the development of a resource to give women more information about employment.
- We used the discussions around this as a learning session.
- People could also talk about it more often in the groups if they wanted to do this.

*“I have gone back to work and feel supported by my friends to do this.”*

*“I see others balance work and kids and now realise I can do the same.”*

*“Having increased my confidence I’m now working self-employed.”*

*“Since attending the group my confidence has increased and with the encouragement from other mums I have now started my own business. I would have never thought this possible before.”* (Mums in Scottish Borders)

## Making connections with others in community, making a contribution, being recognised

*“I came here and knew nobody. Now I know more mums and even more people in the community – they notice when we are out walking and greet us as we walk by. I feel that I am better able to talk to people in the community.”* (Mum in South Lanarkshire)

*“Great awareness in the community about us and our group.”*

*“I understand this community better since coming to the Mums group.”*

*“There’s a sense of belonging.”*

*“I know more people living around me now.”*

*“I feel more part of the community. This is a great place to live!”*  
(Mums in Scottish Borders)

*“We have become more aware of the support available to us as a group. We have benefited from being able to meet other mums in our own area.”* (Mums in West Wigtownshire)

## Impacts for other people

Both the parents and other people such as Health Visitors and people in other community groups described the ways in which they saw impacts for other people from the activities of the groups which were part of the Mums Supporting Mums project.

Examples were:

- The ways in which the mums-led groups complemented other services.
- The groups contributing to sustainable communities through their use of local facilities, increasing income for community facilities and local businesses, and making links with other community groups.
- Growing awareness among other people of the potential of this sort of approach.
- Other people - public services and local businesses - seeing how to become more family-friendly.

*“The local cafe is now seen as very family friendly. People stay on longer after the group finishes. They go back at other times during the week. Other people have heard about the cafe through our promotion of the project.”*

*“Health Visitors have been in touch because some of the mums in their areas are interested in setting up a buggy walk and the Health Visitors hope that they would be welcome to join the walk occasionally and meet the mums.”*

*“Staff at a local Housing Association are keen to link in with the project and signpost some of their tenants to the project. There might be future opportunities for joint working in supporting local groups develop.”* (Mums in Scottish Borders)

*“Our local community hall has been refurbished and the toddler group has now moved from the school to it. The Council have now put baby changing facilities in for the toddlers to use and for any other people who use it.”* (Mum in West Wigtownshire)

## Overall impact for the mums

As part of the feedback the women described how they felt before getting involved in the mums groups and how they felt now.

### How things have changed for the mums across the 3 areas

#### Mums' descriptions of how they felt

Before	After
Lonely (12)	Supported (20)
Anxious (10)	Confident (14)
Fed Up (10)	Encouraged (12)
Tired (8)	Listened to (12)
Scared (6)	Friendly (10)
Pressurised (4)	Happy (10)
Happy (4)	Cheerful (9)
Ok (4)	Fun (7)
Dull (3)	Lucky (7)
Lucky (3)	Liked (4)
Angry (3)	Good about myself (4)
Put down (3)	Relaxed (4)
Bored (2)	Lively (3)
Liked (2)	Energetic (3)
Cross (2)	Fit (2)
Cheerful (2)	
Friendly (1)	
Fun (1)	

# Section 5: What we learned

This section describes what we have learned from the Mums Supporting Mums project. Many of the points listed here are well-established good practice in community development or in supporting people to have good health and wellbeing. We have included them because we believe it is useful to remind ourselves and other people about them, and to encourage other people to build in these elements if they are encouraged to take on similar developments in their areas.

## Getting the project underway in local areas

Having links with a wide range of services and networks helped us make good progress even though we started later than expected.

- The partner in each area was able to use their connections and networks to circulate information about the project.
- They also introduced the workers to local community groups and to resources that could help the project, such as suggestions of good meeting places.
- The partners' networks were one of the routes we used to advertise for sessional workers in West Wigtownshire and Scottish Borders.
- The people who took on the development worker roles in all 3 areas were able to draw on a good range of contacts through other work they were doing and from previous roles. Some workers also draw on their personal contacts such as friends and knowledge of the local community in which they lived.

There are also factors which slowed progress or made it more difficult to get started.

- In one area some people initially thought we could not, or would not, work in areas where there was an existing group, even if there were mums living nearby who found this was not the right form of support for them at that stage or if that group wanted to develop.
- In some areas we found it harder to make the links to the right people who had contact with women who were more isolated.
- Some people who worked in health care or social work roles and were less familiar with how community groups work had concerns about confidentiality and data protection. They followed their process to pass on information about the project and then pass the responses back to us. This sometimes then took longer than expected, which delayed the first meetings with the mums still further.

Like many community development activities, we found that it takes time, and sometimes longer than we'd expected.

## Getting Mums-led activities underway

Our experience has been that getting any activity underway is a good way to get more groups started.

- There are strengths in all types of activities – e.g. buggy walks, toddler groups, meeting in cafes, linking to the Library Service or Bookbug groups, and more. Our learning is that they all have benefits and limits. The important thing is to start with what is right for each person and each community in their circumstances.
- One group leads on to others in nearby locations. People see what is happening and share ideas or practical help. People linked to the partners, Health Visitors and other local staff in related roles also used the first activities to show women in other locations what the project could do and to tell their colleagues who then spread the word in their areas.
- Over time the groups which have been linked to Mums Supporting Mums have begun to take on additional activities. Examples include cafe-based groups starting parent and toddler groups or buggy walks, buggy walk groups starting to meet in a cafe on another day, and several groups making connection with libraries or other ways of encouraging parents to read to their children.

We also found that there were many advantages in both being there to help new groups get started and to work alongside existing groups which were already underway if people wanted that support.

- Some existing groups were interested in looking at how they could change or develop - for example when they knew that the day or place they met was not ideal for some mums in the area.
- People who were part of existing groups took part in the workshops about funding.
- Some existing groups were keen to be involved in the overall project and liked feeling they were part of something bigger - such as the Portpatrick group in West Wigtownshire who took a very active part in the DVD.
- Women in several established groups offered to give advice and support to women who were beginning to take on the role of organising an emerging group - peer support between groups as well as peer support between people.

## Values and approach of the project

The overall approach was to be relaxed and welcoming, and to make it as easy as possible for a group to get started. The experience from the project, including the feedback from the people taking part, was that this approach did bring benefits.

The project showed that groups can be set up very simply and informally, agreeing things as you progress. People liked the informal arrangements, where no-one was left feeling pressurised into taking on formal roles in a committee to get a group going.

*“Being able to take the time means get to know each other and feel more comfortable and confident about setting up a toddler group together.”*

*“[Worker] showed how to share tasks around so that one person isn’t doing it all.”*

One aspect of being welcoming was that groups used a wide range of ways to tell people about the groups, especially people who might be missed out or find it difficult to make the first contact.

- We started with one leaflet promoting the project across all three areas, then a leaflet that had common information and specific information for each area.
- Local publicity was created for individual groups or very local information purposes, so could be targeted for specific places or people - such as using other languages for groups of mums from other countries.
- The name Mums Supporting Mums and the logo stood out and was easily recognised. It also meant that the mums could produce material themselves which was still clearly part of the overall project.
- In most groups the mums used social media to promote the groups and increase numbers attending a group.
- Once we had a few new approaches and models, it became easier to explain and describe the project, what it could offer and what mums could get out of it.
- Workers passed the regular Updates to new groups, existing groups and others in each area and they used them to promote the project and to encourage mums to get involved. When a new Update was distributed some workers had more enquiries from local services.
- Both local groups and the workers shared what they had done with others across all 3 areas, so the learning around the publicity grew quickly.
- The feedback on the publicity was that this helped get over the positive, inclusive approach of the project from the outset.

*"It's all mums together and I like that."*

*"Everyone has been friendly and supportive."*

*"It encourages you to believe in yourself. It shows what mums can do when we get together."*

## Rural aspects

The local workers and the groups found ways to deal with circumstances that are more common in rural areas. These included fluctuating numbers, the implications for costs and income, and problems around transport.

### Access to transport

Limited public transport in rural areas was one of the factors in the gap which this project was trying to fill. The feedback has been that having very local activities does give people more options which have met the needs of many mums living in these locations. But lack of transport still causes problems for those people living outside the villages.

In some groups the mums have been able to meet at least some of this gap by some members giving lifts to mums who need this. One of the partner organisations had already arranged that workers and volunteers should be able to take parents and young children in their cars, and we are now using this approach in the other areas.

*“Having to wait for and use public transport to get to and from a group when the weather is poor or when trying to fit around babies can be too much and can result in mums not going out. If we can set up a local group and not have to use public transport then that is ideal.”*

*“I get the bus and I arrive half an hour before the group starts. At the end I have to wait an hour before I can get a bus home. There isn't anywhere else to go in the village. It makes it a long day.”*

### **Low numbers of people**

Low numbers of people can make it difficult to run the types of activities that need a larger number of active participants to work well. Fluctuating numbers have a serious impact on small local groups, for example when the share of normal rent for a room to meet each week is high for each person if numbers are very low.

We heard from parents in several villages where people had tried before to keep a parent and toddler group or playgroup going but the numbers fell and it was no longer viable. Mums had to go to other villages, relying on their own transport if they had it or public transport. For some mums this was not feasible, so they and their children had to do without these contacts. For all of the families, it meant they weren't getting to know other mums and children in their own village.

People told us how common this is in rural areas. Fluctuating numbers means that there is an even greater reliance on a few people to run groups and makes it even more difficult to find new people to take on the roles of a committee.

The approach of the project was to find the solution that worked for these people in this location at this time. Several groups began meeting in a cafe - no premises costs, no need to have a committee, and it does not matter if the numbers of people coming along each week vary. In other locations the women decided to use someone's house - a handful of mums getting together as friends. Each of these groups knew they had the option of changing if circumstances changed, such as more families with young children moving into the area or more people having babies.

### **Local facilities**

Not surprisingly, we found it was easier to get the groups going when there were local facilities which provided routes to share information and then for people to meet.

People used a wide range of ways to tell other mums about the project and then to publicise their local groups: that included putting posters and leaflets into local shops, garages, village halls and church halls, community notice boards and more.

However, in some places there were fewer of these facilities than there had been a few years ago.

It was also difficult in some places for the mums to find somewhere to meet. We heard of places where the village hall or a church hall was waiting to get refurbished or was not available for other reasons. In other places there were facilities available, but only for part of the year - examples were schools closing over the holidays, and cafes and other facilities relying on tourists closing over the winter.

*“It’s not always easy to find somewhere to meet particularly when places are closing or only opening during summer months e.g. cafe in Drummore is shutting over winter months.”*

*“Some villages don’t have a local shop anymore. It used to be the place to find out what was going on but in some villages the local shop has closed and there isn’t any other focus point. It is harder to get in touch with people. It’s not good for isolated mums as well as for other women trying to find the isolated mums.”*

*“You used to be able to put up posters and tell the shop owner what you were doing and they’d pass the information on to everyone.”*

On the positive side, the groups that were set up have contributed to the sustainability of local facilities in some places.

- The feedback around groups meeting in cafes and similar places is that mums meeting here is helping these local businesses thrive, with the benefits around employment and income to the local community.
- Groups are using village halls on a regular basis.
- Mums from some groups are now getting involved in planning for the longer-term development of community facilities as part of wider partnerships with people from other community groups.

*“It’s nice that we are here in the village hall. Our mums used to bring us here when we were children and now we are part of it too.”*

*“Places like this need to continue. They benefit everyone.”*

## Links with other services

The role of supportive Health Visitors and other NHS or local authority staff was a valuable contribution to the project.

- They helped spread information about the project, and then about the local groups, in all 3 areas.
- In West Wigtownshire and Scottish Borders they also helped with the recruitment of the workers, by disseminating information about the posts and being part of the interview panels.
- Sending the Updates from the project to colleagues and to people in other organisations in the area. The feedback from the staff in these roles was that this was also a good way to explain to mums in other villages what sorts of things the project could do and help them decide if it would be useful for them.

The project workers also developed their links with other services. One example was the project worker attending meetings of the Early Years Network in Scottish Borders: the Network is the key locality planning mechanism and brings together staff from a wide range of health, social work, education and voluntary sector settings. These contacts proved to be an effective way of sharing information about the project and what it could do.

*“The mums wellbeing project contributes to the community development element of the work that the Borders Healthy Living Network does and its aims of reducing health inequalities and increasing community capacity for health improvement.”* (Partner, Scottish Borders)

## Supporting mums’ wellbeing

This project grew from suggestions by women and recognised good practice of ways to support the mental wellbeing of mums with babies and young children.

The types of groups that began or expanded through the project included many of the factors which are proven to reduce the risks or impact of poorer mental health.

- Mums who took part were able to make more friends and keep in touch with them.
- They gave parents opportunities to talk about their feelings with each other and with the project workers, and to care for each other.
- They encouraged women to have more physical exercise. This happened through the buggy walks and from other activities that people did outside the group with friends they met through the group.
- There were more opportunities for women to do something they are good at - helping to organise the activities, making posters, supporting each other, helping with the practical aspects of the group’s activities.
- People described how the groups give them more confidence and improved their self esteem.
- People could ask for help easily. There were more frequent contacts with Health Visitors and information circulating about other sources of help and advice.

The project design was intended to have this impact, with the mums-led groups fitting into the overall framework of supports and complementing other services. The Mums Supporting Mums project had a resources page on the Outside the Box website and this brings together useful sources of information on wellbeing and postnatal depression, child development and positive activities that benefit babies and children such as the Ready Steady Baby app, and links to other resources.

The project workers were aware of the risk that mums with higher support needs would not get what they needed. The project workers responded to this by engaging with relevant professionals, including Health Visitors, family support workers, social workers and community development teams such as those working with people from migrant communities or supporting learning around English as a Second Language. It then became easier to signpost and introduce mums to other options available to them. Inviting key professionals to visit the group for an informal coffee and chat also helped remove barriers and build relationships.

The project workers knew that they could get access to advice from staff with skills in caring for women with post-natal depression and other mental health needs through the partners and other contact that we had established with specialist perinatal mental health services.

The feedback from the mums, including from women who were open about having post-natal depression, is that they did get the support they wanted from the other mums they met through the group and from the workers. They also valued the less formal contacts with the professionals who came to the groups and appreciated the information that was available on other services and resources that could benefit them and their children.

## Organisation of the project

This project brought together 3 local projects which were separate and reflecting the priorities and needs of people in that area, and which also worked together to learn from each other and develop the overall approach. The way in which the project was organised was intended to support both these aspects.

### Arrangements for the project workers

The original plan was that workers linked to Outside the Box would take on the community development aspects and take the lead on the overall elements such as the tips and hints to enable the learning from the project to also benefit other people. The partners would be the base for other project workers who would provide additional support to any participants who needed that and help with links to other activities and services in that area.

In practice, the spread of the roles worked out differently but these new arrangements worked well. Our experience suggests that it is helpful to be flexible in the way the work is organised, and to see the local development work and support to the groups and the people as part of the local workers' role no matter where they are based.

The links between the 3 areas also emerged as a stronger feature than we had initially planned.

The workers from the 3 areas came together for sharing ideas and problems. We met at Moffat every 2 months or so, which was more often than we had initially planned. We found these meetings were very useful and the personal contact made it easier for people to get in touch with workers in the other areas.

- Workers shared and discussed ways to identify isolated mums.
- We shared the different ways that each group was developing – showing that each group was evolving in different ways and that there was no one or right way. Different groups were dealing with similar issues and providing ideas for workers to try in their areas.
- Having 3 different areas to test things out in was beneficial, as it meant that we were able to say that things worked in all 3 areas with slight local variations or that sometimes things worked differently in different places. It reinforced the idea that mums could be creative and develop opportunities to suit them and their local needs and not follow one way of doing things.
- Knowing that others were experiencing the same difficulties or issues was reassuring to the mums and to workers. Sharing similar successes was encouraging too.

We also used these sessions as part of developing the shared elements.

- The Hints and Tips drew on the experience of people in all 3 areas. We planned out the work at the joint sessions and then the workers and mums in each area could discuss the topics and feed in their suggestions and examples.
- We planned the DVD in a similar way and interviewed the short-listed companies at a joint session.
- Although the work on the employment resource was based in Scottish Borders, we used one of the joint sessions to tell everyone about it. People in the other 2 areas also contributed to and benefited from that part of the overall project.

# Section 6: Future plans

## Plans for current areas

Over the past few months we have been discussing with the mums in the groups, the development workers and partners how the work which has been started can be taken on within that area. The ways in which this is being taken forward reflect local circumstances and priorities.

### Dumfries and Galloway

In Dumfries and Galloway the development workers are continuing to be based at Outside the Box at least until Spring 2014. They will continue to support groups in the West Wigtownshire area, have conversations about potential groups or other ways mums can get peer support, and be part of discussions about wider developments.

The mums-led groups have their own plans for the next year or so. These include:

- Getting constituted as independent voluntary organisations
- Getting some funding through their own fundraising efforts and small grants
- Building contacts with groups in other areas
- Moving to another location or meeting on a second day so more people can take part
- Finding ways for women who live a distance away or face additional difficulties with transport to join them
- Working with other community groups on issues that affect everyone in their village
- Expanding the young mums' group. The mums are keen to develop this into a young parents' group with teenage dads who are interested in being part of the project.

Building Healthy Communities is taking the lead in looking at ways in which the experience of Mums Supporting Mums can be used in all parts of Dumfries and Galloway in the future. This may take different forms in different parts of the region, reflecting the local circumstances and opportunities in each place.

### Scottish Borders

In Scottish Borders the development workers will also stay with Outside the Box, but for a longer period. NHS Borders has already give funding support to the next stage and we are working together to find additional funds to extend the reach of the project. The development workers will be supporting the local groups, developing new groups in other parts of the Borders, and being part of discussions about future ways to use the experience of the project as part of the ongoing work of Borders Healthy Living Network across all parts of Scottish Borders.

The mums, development workers and Health Visitors are coming up with many plans:

- Continuing the support to the current groups.
- More possible buggy walks: we have developed a good relationship with the local Walks Co-ordinator and she is giving groups lots of good advice and encouragement.
- Possible cafe groups, including one based at a community café.

- Getting the Parents and Toddlers group up and running in Walkerburn. NHS Borders has offered to help with the costs of the hall and the group are finding ways to cover the other costs such as insurance and toys.
- Groups for mums from other countries in more parts of Borders.
- Getting more groups started for mums in Berwickshire and in central Borders.
- An idea for an evening mums group where children will not attend is in the early stages of development. This will involve mums meeting monthly to hear an invited speaker or activity on topics such as first aid, weaning, relaxation techniques. This idea came from one of the mums as another way to engage with other mums.
- Another idea from mums is that by offering Dads and Toddlers groups this will in turn support the mums as it will give them respite to concentrate on other things. It will also be a good opportunity for dads to get peer support. At the moment this is an idea that may involve supporting dads' groups on a weekend morning.

The parent-led groups are getting a lot of support from other services in Scottish Borders.

- The Teenage Mums group is going to get some longer term support from Scottish Borders Council.
- The local co-ordinator for walking groups is developing bite-sized training sessions for mums setting up buggy walking groups.
- Local halls are going to provide some toys and free use of rooms for new groups starting up.
- A Housing Association is keen to encourage migrant worker families to get involved.

### **South Lanarkshire**

In rural South Lanarkshire Outside the Box and Healthy Valleys are working together on continuing to support the mums-led groups until early 2014. We have a grant from the Big Lottery Fund to cover this period.

Some of the activities that the mums are planning include:

- Continuing to develop ways to sustain the buggy walks through the winter months and encouraging new mums to join.
- Mums at Carstairs Junction want to try out some other alternative therapies and are interested in a buggy walking group.
- Some of the mums from smaller Mums and Toddlers groups, who were involved in the funding training, want to visit other groups and get new ideas for their groups.

In the longer-term Healthy Valleys will continue to give support to mums who have additional needs through the Grassroots project and encourage other groups to make links with other sources of development support which are available in that area.

## Looking ahead and further afield

From the outset we planned to share the experiences from the project with people in other places. There are now more ways of doing this than we had planned.

Some of the resources are very practical, to help the current and potential groups:

- The Hints and Tips describe 3 types of mums-led groups: parents and toddler groups, buggy walks and cafe groups.
- There are Hints and Tips on using social media.
- There is a guide on organising groups, planning ahead and fundraising: all of these are planned to help groups be independent and sustainable.
- Our Working Lives is a resource to help women work out what their options are around employment.

Other materials are aimed at people in a wider range of roles, including the groups:

- Mums Supporting Mums - Our story so far is a short film about the project and the impact it is having for the mums and their children.
- Housing Associations are also offering to help groups and to encourage people to get involved.

All the tips and hints will be on the Outside the Box website. This way, they can benefit other people living in these parts of rural South Lanarkshire, Scottish Borders and in Dumfries and Galloway which we were not able to reach during this pilot project. They can also be used by people living in other parts of Scotland and in other parts of the world.

We are working on the detailed plans for dissemination in the local areas, to show other people and organisations what has been achieved so far and to help encourage conversations about good ways to support parents and their children who live in rural communities.

Looking ahead, we have plans to develop a dedicated website, to make it easier to share all the resources and useful materials we have gathered from other places and to share the growing number of examples that are coming from the local groups.

We also plan to continue to work together to raise awareness of the issues and the examples of mums-led community supports and what they contribute with other people.

- The films and report will be used to raise awareness with people such as MSPs, MPs and Councillors who make decisions and policies that affect women and their children.
- They will also be used to raise awareness of the issues affecting families living in rural areas.
- The film and report will go to staff who work on policy and practice matters in settings such as local authorities and the NHS across Scotland.
- The practical resources and the films can be used as part of training for staff in a wide range of settings and to raise awareness with community groups.

We hope the shared website will be a way for people from many places and settings to share what they are doing and learning. We also hope other people will get in touch and be involved, for example by sending us news of what they are doing in their areas.

# Section 7: More information

## Contacts

### Outside the Box

Resources from the Mums Supporting Mums project are at: [www.otbds.org/mums](http://www.otbds.org/mums)  
There is more information about what we do at [www.otbds.org](http://www.otbds.org)

You can contact the development workers in touch with groups in West Wigtownshire and in Scottish Borders through Outside the Box.

Unit 23, 150 Brand Street, Glasgow G51 1DH  
T. 0141 419 0451  
[admin@otbds.org](mailto:admin@otbds.org)

### Borders Healthy Living Network

Health Improvement Team, Public Health, NHS Borders, Scottish Borders Council  
The Old School Building, Newtown St. Boswells TD6 0SA  
T. 01835 825970  
[HLN@borders.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:HLN@borders.scot.nhs.uk)

### Healthy Valleys

31 Stuart Terrace, Rigside, Lanark ML11 9NN  
T. 01555 880666  
[info@healthyvalleys.org.uk](mailto:info@healthyvalleys.org.uk)  
[www.healthyvalleys.org.uk](http://www.healthyvalleys.org.uk)

### West Wigtownshire Area Partnership and Building Healthy Communities

West Wigtownshire Area Partnership, Innistaigh, Dalrymple Street, Stranraer DG9 7EH

Building Healthy Communities, Ryan South, Crichton Hall, Bankend Road, Dumfries DG1 4TG  
T. 01387 272776  
[www.healthycommunities.org.uk](http://www.healthycommunities.org.uk)

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