Understanding the lives of families with young children living in deprived areas in Wigan and Oldham: Ethnographic Research Findings
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Context

In a climate of great financial pressure it is increasingly important to act preventatively, in order to move citizens from dependence to self-reliance. This is particularly important in relation to supporting families in deprived areas. This approach was outlined in The Greater Manchester Strategy (Association of Greater Manchester Authorities, 2009) and is being taken forward through the City Region spatial pilots and the Community Budget Pilot. These pilots will build on the findings of the Total Place report of 2010 (Association of Greater Manchester Authorities and Warrington Borough Council), and focus on developing ‘whole area’ approaches to supporting families.

Wigan and Oldham Councils recognise that in order to adopt a preventative, ‘whole area’ approach to supporting families in deprived areas they need to understand their lives and experiences more deeply. This research is designed to support this preventative agenda; by better understanding and involving the families with the greatest need, we can begin to develop a strategy to implement real and sustainable change in their lives.

Aims

To develop a clear understanding of the lives and support needs of families with young children living in deprived areas in Oldham and Wigan.

Objectives

- To inform service re-design through the City Region and Community Budget Pilots, equipping Wigan and Oldham Councils with a deeper understanding of families with complex needs.
- To understand how to better support these families from heavy service dependence to independence.
- To understand, from the families’ perspectives, what kind of support would have the greatest impact on their futures and that of their children.
- To identify barriers in the families’ lives to making positive changes.
- To identify the point at which interventions could be most effective.
- To explore support systems for children and families that exist in the community, and how Wigan and Oldham Councils might be able to better work with them.

The report includes a set of high level recommendations for how Wigan and Oldham Councils can better support these families.
Approach

Wigan and Oldham Councils commissioned thinkpublic to help them understand how to improve the life chances of families with young children living in deprived areas of Wigan and Oldham. To do this we developed a programme of research. This consisted of:

Training

thinkpublic researchers trained members of staff from Wigan and Oldham Councils to interview families with young children. Members of staff were trained in the principles of ethnographic research and how to accurately capture the comments and observed behaviours of families.
Research

thinkpublic worked collaboratively with Wigan and Oldham Councils to produce a research framework to define the focus of the research. In response to the directions given by the project sponsors, Wigan and Oldham Councils, Wigan and Oldham Ethnographers focused in particular on the experiences and needs of parents with children under five. To do this, they arranged interviews with parents in a range of settings: ‘community-based services’\(^2\), ‘out and about’\(^3\), and ‘at-home’\(^4\).

Over a period of seven days in each area, Wigan and Oldham Ethnographers applied the skills they had learned to researching the experiences and needs of families with young children living in deprived areas. thinkpublic supervised council researchers to ensure the quality of the research.

The length and depth of interviews varied depending on the setting and willingness of participants, from 20 minutes to three hours. Interviews were conducted in pairs: one interviewer and one note-taker. Each pair was encouraged to record the information given to them as directly and as immediately as possible. At the end of each interview the pairs would type up their notes together, capturing quotes, alongside their reflections on how they felt during the interview, the factors that might have influenced the information they were given, and other observations about learning or experiences over the day. At the end of each day the team would meet and share their findings.

1. Ethnography is the term given to the descriptive study of human cultures and societies based on extensive fieldwork. Ethnographic research seeks to understand issues from the subject's point of view by observing how they behave in a given setting and probing them to find out why they behave as they do.

2. Locations included Sure Start Centres, ‘Tumble Tots’ sessions at Leisure Centres, and Baby Clinics at Community Centres.

3. These took place at shopping centres, local cafes and on streets; targeting families that may not be engaging with services.

4. Interviews took place in the homes of families that had been identified by service providers as being particularly relevant to the project.
The method of gathering information in each area varied. More of the interviews in Oldham took place at participant’s homes, organised through services, than was the case in Wigan. These variations find reflection in the information captured in this report.

Interviews were conducted using an “open questioning” technique, allowing interviewees to direct the conversation. As a result, not all topics were covered in every interview, but topics discussed can be assumed to be of importance to the interviewee and their family.

To provide further context and depth to the information presented in this report, it is advised that it is considered alongside information gathered through complementary research techniques, including quantitative research.
kinship [mass noun]

1 blood relationship.
2 [count noun] a sharing of characteristics or origins.

Source: Oxford University Press
Of the 48 participants in Wigan, 45 were White British, one was Polish, one was Ghanaian and one was Turkish. A large number of participants were either unemployed and reliant on state benefits (19), or working in manual labour or factory jobs. Participants from Wigan often described very close connections, both social and familial, to others in their area. Many participants had been born in the area and had connections that went back at least a generation, while others described moving in and easily forming social ties. Participants often lived near to their parents and siblings, and had many friends in the area. Bringing up children was rarely seen as a responsibility that fell solely on the shoulders of the parents, but was shared with family members and friends in the area.

One mother that lived with her son and partner in a rented home in Leigh described how they lived on the same estate as some family members and friends, and that her parents and her partner’s parents also both lived locally. She described how her friends and family were involved in bringing up her son: “Our friends and family help out... they always give advice...sometimes they tell you to do things that you know already!”. Family involvement can also stretch to financial support; she described how her in-laws had helped pay for her and her son to go on a trip to Southport: “[We] would have struggled if they [partner’s sister and family members] weren’t there”. This close familial support appeared to contribute to her feeling that she did not need the support of local Children’s Centres: “I’m a Sure Start member but I don’t really use them...I don’t need them...We’ve got family, my parents help”.

Familial support was also evident in the following mother’s story. This participant was originally from Warrington, but had moved to Wigan five years ago to join her partner. She told us how her partner’s mother had supported them at first: “I moved in with his mum to start with. So that we could save up for a house”. The participant had Spina Bifida so also needed regular support with her children, but said: “His [my partner’s] mum has been really good. Also my friends have helped taking him [eldest child] to school”. She related this to quickly feeling settled in the area: “Living in the area is good, as we all get on well”.

Another participant who had moved to the area from Kent had a similar experience, saying: “I love Wigan. I came here for a week to visit and I said, ‘I’m not going back, I want to live here’”. Despite having no family connections in the area, she described how she was quickly made to feel at home: “I grew up on army barracks and we all knew each other, no one locked their doors. I think Wigan’s a bit like that. It’s really friendly... We made friends with everyone. It’s like that here, people have been really friendly and welcoming”.

Many of the participants from Wigan came from families where relationships were unstable. Many spoke of having children from different partners - the first often in teenage years, and the second in their 30s. A number also spoke of looking after their own children as well as those of their partner, some of which no longer had contact with the other parent. Some participants spoke of how these complex family arrangements created stress and anxiety. One mother who had suffered from depression for 14 years said: “I’ve got two children from a former relationship, two children from a current relationship, three children from my partner’s previous relationship who stay every Friday, he [my partner] wonders why I have ‘Schitz’ attacks. I throw him out and he goes to live with his Mum, usually he moves out for a week. This happens once a year at least”. Despite having lots of family members around, she did not feel supported: “My family is not really supportive, we are all there for each other but it’s not like it used to be... [but] I don’t really want any friends around here, but I wouldn’t move anywhere else because of my children’s’ schools. I was moved so many times when I was little I would never move my kids”.

For many participants from Wigan, especially those who had children in their teens, grandparents were described as a central part of the family, often playing an important role in the upbringing of children. Mothers were often mentioned as the first port-of-call for advice on child rearing. There were also two cases in which grandparents that had taken over the role of primary carer due to the mother not being able to cope, or falling into drugs. One grandmother, who looked after her grandchildren two days a week...
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while the parents worked, told us how on the school run there were "more grandparents picking children up than parents".

One participant who had her first child at 18 described her close relationship with her mother: "I stay at my mum's or his dad's all the time, I chop and change. I've got loads of support around me. My family on my side, and on his dad's side too. His dad's from around here too...I go to my mum's every morning. We just go and talk crap together!... Mum lives around the corner. She helps me a lot. I don't know what I'd do without her". For this mother, close familial ties seemed to be linked to her feeling that she didn't need support from services: "I don't access any services, I don't know why, I just don't bother. I do my own thing. I go to my mum's, go to my friends...They told me I could have a Health Visitor but I said I didn't want one. If I need any help I go to my family first". She appeared to be proud of her independence and ability to cope without 'outsider' support. This is also reflected in her comment about how she dealt with having a miscarriage: "I just dealt with it, I didn't go to get help or anything. I just turned to my family. I'm one of those persons, me, I just get on with it".

"They told me I could have a Health Visitor but I said I didn't want one. If I need any help I go to my family first"

Some participants described the importance of providing the first grandchild for their parents. The previous participant described her mother's reaction to her having her first child at 18: "My mum's got five kids and I give her her first grandchild. And you know what they're like- she was dead happy, so she spoils him rotten". A 17-year-old couple also described how they had provided both their parents with their first grandchild, and hence had not had to buy anything for their child apart from the pram because they had received so many gifts. However, this family support did not prevent the mother from craving more support and reassurance than she had got from her Health Visitor: "Of course I need her [support]; I'm only 17". When asked what support she wanted, she described wanting reassurance; "is his head right?"
The following information reflects the issues raised by a participant interviewed in the West Leigh Children's Centre, by a Wigan Council employee. The interview was recorded by a note-taker also from Wigan Council. As far as possible the notes below represent comments directly made by the participant in response to questions and prompts from the interviewer.

**Interviewee:** Mother, 20 years old  
**Relationship Status:** Married  
**Children:** Two children; four years and 19 months.  
**Ethnicity:** White. Originally from Kent.  
**Time in Wigan:** Around four years.  
**Employment status:** Full time mother. Partner works as a tattooist.  
**Extended family:** She has a large family who live in the South coast. Her husband’s family live around Preston.
“I love Wigan. I came here for a week to visit and I said, ‘I’m not going back, I want to live here’. It’s much cleaner here and I think the people are friendly.

“My husband is training to be a tattooist. I’ve got eight and he’s got nineteen tattoos.

“B started school here. They’ve been brilliant. Last week he came home with a book and he read it all the way through. I couldn’t believe it, I’ve never heard him read. He’s only five!

“Social Services were involved with us for a while. I had really bad postnatal depression after having S and with B as well. They gave me a Link Worker. She would phone me up in the morning and get me out. She’d even drag me out if she had to. That was what really helped. They were brilliant. K, the Link Worker signed me off as a case a year ago but she’s always there for me. If I ever want anything, I can ask her anything.

“The doctors at Sherwood Drive are alright. Well most of them are alright. I don’t like Dr S, she’s a right cow. Every time I went in with the children they would just tell me that they are OK. Dr O was brilliant. I only go to see him now. The thing is, if you ring in the morning for a Doctor they have to give you an appointment that day but you don’t get a named Doctor.

“I had postnatal depression for over eighteen months. When we moved here it was really hard cos we moved away from all our friends and family. Then I was all on my own. We had a problem with our next door neighbours. I just said to them both, ‘you don’t need to tell me what to do. I can make up my own mind, thank you’. When I was really depressed the woman next door had a really aggressive staffy dog. She let it out and it nearly attacked S. I phoned the police and they had it put down. So she decided to phone Social Services and told them that my children were always covered in bruises. B is an accident prone child. When we first moved in he lifted up a paving stone and broke his foot and he was always falling over. He’s had loads of accidents. I’m trying to get him tested for ADHD at school. He’s got serious behavioural issues. If he gets angry he bangs his head on the floor. The school have argued it with me. They say that he’s different with them. It was the same with my brother. My mum had to argue it with his school. One day he had a fit and ended up climbing over the fence. They saw what he was like then and knew what my mum was saying.

“When Social Services came round I just collapsed. I couldn’t cope. They told me that the children looked fine and I was doing everything okay but they asked me if I was alright. I told them that I wasn’t doing well with my depression. They sent someone to see us. It was really good. We all sat down together and made some house rules. We said that there would be no punches or kicks. He would go mad and take it out on me when his dad wasn’t there. We made up rules and had stickers. So he would have to get three out of five stickers every day. It was awesome. Our Link Worker was amazing.

“I didn’t get depression with T [second child]. It was really bad when I had B [first child]. I was 16 and I was breastfeeding. The doctor gave me anti-depressants and said that I had to stop breastfeeding. I was well chuffed I didn’t get it with T.

“I go down and see my mum loads in Southampton. Every couple of weeks my step-dad drives up and gets us. He comes up, has some food, has a fag and then drives us back.

“I sit out with my neighbours. If it’s nice weather we just all go out the front together until 11 at night. I grew up on army barracks and we all knew each other, no one locked their doors. I think Wigan’s a bit like that. It’s really friendly. When I was 11 we moved to a council flat into the top floor of a maisonette. We made friends with everyone. It’s like that here, people have been really friendly and welcoming.

“The area is alright. There were a family on the street who were always drunk and causing problems like fighting. We all got together and got rid of them. One night my husband went out when I was pregnant with S. We had our two staffies in the kitchen. Usually they are silent but they were going mad. The two lads from across the street were trying to kick in the door. I called the police and when they arrived they were still in the back so they arrested them both. That’s when we got the Neighbourhood Watch together. We had to do diaries and stuff and they got evicted. There are four families who all know each other. We would always back each other with the police. It went to court and they got restraining orders. They haven’t been back since. I would always phone the police if I had a problem.

“If there was anything which could improve in the area I think the council should get a welcome pack for families who move to the area. When you first come, you don’t know anything. It would be really helpful, especially stuff with Children’s Services”
Kinship patterns amongst participants from Oldham varied greatly due to the wide range of different ethnicities in the borough. Of the 41 participants, 19 were white British, ten were of Bangladeshi origin, six were of African origin, one was Chinese, two were of Pakistani origin, and three were not recorded.

Most participants, excluding those from the Bangladeshi community, identified themselves as having small family and social networks in the immediate area. They expressed a general distrust of people in their neighbourhoods. People often spoke of having strong family ties with people outside the immediate area, with ties extending to other boroughs, cities, or in some cases, countries.

Amongst white British participants, seven were married, four were with a partner but not living together, and eight were single parents. Participants in general did not easily open up about the details of their relationships. A number of participants had children from more than one relationship. Extended families rarely lived in the immediate area. Instead, they often lived in surrounding areas such as Rochdale, or further away in places such as Manchester and Blackpool. A number of participants spoke about moving to the area to join a partner, but feeling more connected to the area their family was from. One white British father who had moved to Oldham to be with his girlfriend said “I don’t really like the area. I prefer Middleton where I’m from. I had a lot more mates there... it’s boring, there’s not really anything to do in St. Mary’s... I tend to keep myself to myself”. His partner added that they did not get on with their neighbours: ”People who live in the flats are not nice people”.

Another White British couple spoke of their shrinking social network in the area: ”We used to have family around, [but now] my grandma has moved to Blackpool...Other family members have moved away, or gone to prison”. This loss of social ties was coupled with a perception on their part that, as white people, they were becoming the “minority” in the area: “When we first moved there was lots of white families, now they are filling it up with Asian families... they won’t talk to us, we’ve tried. They want to make it like Westwood... We used to have street parties where everybody joins in, but now nobody joins in”.

One White British single mother with five children living on the St Mary’s Estate, described her local social network as her Aunty, her brother who lived with her, and “a friend around the corner... The rest of my family are in Rochdale”. She described her neighbours as being “friendly when you get to know them”, but that her social circle was limited by a feeling of unease in the neighbourhood: “It’s full of troublemakers...if they weren’t there it would be great”.

Another White British single mother told of how she lived alone in St Mary’s with her son while the rest of her family lived in Chadderton: “I don’t really know what made me choose it [Oldham, to live in]... I live on my own you see, it’s hard [without my family] close by. I want to move to Chadderton, I want my family around so they can help me pick him up from school when I go back to work...He sleeps at my parents once a week”. She described getting some comfort from mutual support with her immediate neighbours: “I speak to all my neighbours, I got stuff from the shops for them when it snowed and they give him [her son] birthday cards”. However, she also said that “everyone else on my street is a pensioner” and that beyond her street she didn’t feel much of a connection to the area where she lived.

Some White British participants who were heavily dependent on state services for support expressed feelings of being isolated in their...
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neighbours and having few familial or social ties nearby. One such participant was a single mother who grew up in care and had moved to the area to get away from a violent ex-partner. She said: “I would like to move in the future because I don’t like the area, there’s some awful people here and nothing to do. I want to move to Chadderton because that is where my Nan lives and it’s where I grew up, it’s a nice little quiet street, and lots of the people we knew as kids are still there, it feels like home. Here all the people here are fighting, or alcoholics or pot heads...there are only two people [neighbours] I like”. The only person she described as giving her reliable support over the years was her Sure Start health worker. She said she was now struggling as this support had been withdrawn: “there is no one I can trust and talk to now and I had a close relationship with her. Now I don’t tell nobody my problems”.

Other participants described themselves as having a limited social network, despite having a large extended family nearby. For example, a White British couple that researchers met at a Tumble Tot session said “our neighbours are all immigrants, Chechnya, Polish, African, – I don’t mind it, they’re quiet and they do go out to work – there used to be more drugs and fighting – I’d rather have them [immigrants] than piss-heads, alcies and druggies”. However, they did still want to move out of the area: “I’d like to live in Royton – because that’s near to my work”.

Bangladeshi participants often had close networks of family and friends of the same ethnic group within the local area, as well as a network that extended across the country and around the world. All ten of the Bangladeshi participants were married and many spoke of having extended family nearby.

One first generation Bangladeshi father of five told us: “I have lots of relatives in this area. My brother lives two streets away; my sister lives five streets away with her three sons and one daughter. We visit each other’s houses all the time but live separately... My sister-in-law helps with childcare. The oldest son also helps with nappies and feeding them as well. My next door neighbour sometimes helps out as well, or did when the children were younger. She’s been living next door for years, so we’ve got to know her”. His wife had been in the country for a shorter period of time than he had. She couldn’t speak much English and described feeling less supported: “I want to leave Oldham and go to another town, to a better area, but I can’t ‘cos all my husband’s family are here. I want to go to Oxford or Cambridge [the participant had family in Oxford]. The atmosphere there is so different. I want them to go there and have a better quality of life, better education and facilities”.

One Pakistani female participant from Glodwick spoke of not feeling settled in the area, even though her husband’s family lived in the area. She said this was partly due to her own family being ‘back home’ and partly due to tensions in the neighbourhood. She lived with her husband and his extended family in a ten-bedroom house in Glodwick. “I moved here six years ago as I got married. My husband is from here. I don’t find people here very friendly. I came from the Midlands, just before we got married there were the big riots in Oldham, I feel like there is more racism here than anywhere else, it’s the people around here and the atmosphere...I want to feel safe in my area, I want people to be friendly and if they can’t be good to you, then leave you alone...My husband’s family are all in Oldham but mine are not here at all. It’s a ten-bed house but we want our own space, the kids don’t always get on. Although I live with them [her in-laws] I don’t see them that much”.

Some Bangladeshi mothers we spoke to who described having longer term connections to the area seemed to feel a lot more supported and settled in Oldham. They often positively identified...
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having their own family around them, as well as that of their husband, as a positive feature of their lives.

For some Bangladeshi participants, child rearing was a shared task with wider family members, especially grandmothers, being closely involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren. One participant, who had moved to Oldham with her family as a baby was now living in the same house as her mother, husband, young daughter, and brother. She described how her mother “helps me with everything”, from changing nappies, and making milk to contributing financially to household costs.

Another second generation Bangladeshi participant spoke of constantly being surrounded by her family and friends. She lived with her in-laws and extended family members in “two houses joined together as one”. Her mother lived nearby in Coldhurst. She also had friends in the area who had children of the same age and often attended the local children’s centre. She seemed very settled and didn’t speak of having any desires to move away. Instead, she spoke of her ambitions to return to working as a teaching assistant.

Some Bangladeshi and Pakistani participants described the mosque as a key place for socialising and seeking support and activities for their children. A Pakistani mother who had moved to the UK with her husband and first child at the age of 20 told us how she did not have many friends or family in the area but did attend her local mosque where she has slowly made friends with people from the Bangladeshi community. Through these connections she has been able to access informal support for childcare.

The mosque was mentioned by some participants principally in relation to their children’s lives and routines rather than their own. One Bangladeshi mother told us “The kids go to mosque six days a week, and do Bangla and Arabic classes there in their spare time”. Another Bangladeshi mother had been in the UK for 11 years, told us that she didn’t attend the mosque herself, but her children attended every day after school.

Some participants had moved to Oldham from different countries for work or study purposes. These participants often had few family or social ties in the area and referred to Oldham as a temporary place of residence to serve a particular purpose. Again, they often referred to their main family and social ties belonging elsewhere. One Nigerian mother spoke of having moved to Oldham for her husband’s work, but now his work had come to an end so they were planning to move to London. She described her family as consisting of herself, her husband, her children, an uncle and sister in London and her mother back in Nigeria. She said she regularly speaks to them on the phone but only regularly sees her husband. She described herself as having no friends in area: “all the other mothers I meet I don’t become friends with. We just say “Hi- hi” to each other and that’s it. It’s hard to make friends in this country. People don’t have time to ask you to their houses. The best thing is to keep it at a level of “Hi!”. They are all from different countries. But it’s OK, I speak to my friends on the phone, and I have my husband”.

A participant from Guinea described how his only connections in the area were with his wife and three children and that he had “few friends”. He moved to the UK because of “the situation” in his country. He was working full-time as a security guard and studying accountancy at Manchester College. He spoke of how he missed the “sense of community” back in his home country, saying that in Oldham nobody cares: “nobody’s talking to each other. People judge each other”. As a result he distances himself from the community: “We live as a different family”. He spoke of the UK as a place to come and “better yourself” through education and employment, rather than somewhere he felt connected to through familial and social ties. He suggested that in order to improve relationships in the area “They need to create spaces so that people can be involved with families’ problems. It’s hard to meet people here. Everybody keeps themselves to themselves. It’s a misunderstanding. I don’t blame them. They don’t know me. They probably think the same about me”.

“Nobody’s talking to each other. People judge each other”
One Chinese mother described her social connections in Oldham as her husband, child, and two or three friends. Her main connection to Oldham came through her husband’s work in a local takeaway and her daughter’s use of local services. She said: “I have two or three close friends. Most of them I met through my husband’s work”. She said that she would be prepared to move if her child’s needs were not being met by local services: “As long as my child has a good environment to live in and a good school to go to [I am happy staying here]...At the minute I don’t know if Oldham are providing that because she’s too young for us to start looking at schools”.

One participant, originally from Uganda, had moved to Oldham from Manchester to study Health and Community Studies at Oldham College. She described how neither herself nor her children had friends or family in the area yet. Her main social ties were with a group of friends from Uganda who all get together once a year in Manchester. She said about her children: “I don’t trust my kids with anyone, if I let my kids play with anyone [I don’t know if] they are good or bad”. It appeared that she felt her main connection to the area was through her studies and that her kinship ties lay elsewhere.

One participant was a mother who had originally moved to the UK from Sudan. She had moved to Oldham after divorcing her husband. She chose to move to Oldham because her brother lived there and she could get work that made use of her professional qualification. Since then, however, her brother had left Oldham. She had also fallen into a severe depression and, as a consequence, had given up her job. She described how she didn’t have any friends at all in the area and relied solely on support from services, mainly a social work and outreach worker from the Children’s Centre. She said the main reason for her sense of isolation was that her depression prevented her from going out and seeking company.

Two participants had moved to Oldham as asylum seekers and were placed in the town while awaiting their immigration status. A Zimbabwean father of two told researchers: “I’ve been in the country for 10 years. First we were in London, then we moved to Manchester, close to the town centre in April, then in August we moved to Oldham. Before that we were in Zimbabwe... we are seeking asylum here”. When asked about his social and familial network in the area he said: “socially, I’m used to being around more people and friends. We’re a bit isolated. It’s OK...it’s liveable...I’ve got to know some people here, but the rest of our family are in London. I see them every so often”. He was unable to work due to his legal status, and had not found any courses he could do as he was too advanced for those on offer at the library. He described how he was hoping that the church would become his main source of support and company: “I go to church down the road. I’ve made a few friends there. The church I was going to was in Warrington, but it’s a strain to go up and down- so we’ve started going to the local church. I hope to make more friends in the area at the church, but so far I haven’t got too many”.

One participant who had been awaiting a decision on immigration status for two years and three months told researchers how local services had enabled her to form a new friendship group in the local area. She described how she had made good friends through Play and Stay groups, and they now “shared children”. She said of her long-term plans: “I will probably stay here [once she gets immigration status] but I need to get to know where the nicer places are, as I have made friends here, nice good people”.

I. KINSHIP - OLDHAM FINDINGS

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The following information reflects the issues raised by participants interviewed in their home by an Oldham Council employee. The interview was organised with the local Sure Start Centre, and conducted with the assistance of a Bangladeshi translator, provided by Sure Start. The interview was recorded by a note-taker from thinkpublic. As far as possible the notes below represent comments directly made by the participants, and translated by the translator, in response to questions and prompts from the interviewer.

**Interviewee:** Father, 31 years old  
**Relationship Status:** Married.  
**Children:** Two children of four and five months and one stepson aged five years.  
**Ethnicity:** Black African. Moved to UK from Guinea in 2004; “It was the situation in my country”.  
**Time in Oldham:** three to four years.  
**Employment status:** Father works full time as a security guard. Mother works part time.
“Everything in this area is not good... I’m not talking about racial activity, it’s the crime. You see for the average person it’s okay but for my children it’s not okay, there are too many questions from them...What’s this, what’s that?”

“When I moved here the house was really dirty and there was damp. I sorted it out myself...It’s not good, it takes a long time for them [First Choice Homes] to come and help you. It takes a lot, you know”.

“When I wanted to change my childrens’ school they [the Children’s Centre] helped me and they were really good for information”.

“I’m a student as well, studying accountancy at Manchester College. I just want to go far...As soon as I have finished I want to get a job”.

“My wife wants to do English [on an ESOL course] and she wants to do ticketing in a travel agents...You have to pay for the courses...we try to manage our time so we can do things at different times”.

“It’s rough [the area]...One day I was coming home from work at five or six O’clock and I parked the car and walked to my house. I could see somebody was on the floor in the park but I went straight home and the next day someone called to tell me that the police were investigating and that the man was dead. It’s not safe. It makes me feel bad because it could have been me or it could have been my children. I want to move again”.

“The first condition of your children is the area and environment. The children need to be educated. They are listening and picking up on things all the time. I cannot tell them not to go out”.

“We live as a different family...nobody is above the law, but it’s the people, the mentality. They behave badly. The best thing is education... It’s different models of life to us, it depends... the way I do things is very different to the way you do things. Outside, you people on the street, when you see someone [a white person] on the phone you think they are happy and friendly. When you see Black people on the phone you think something else...White and Black have become good and bad”.

“People haven’t got jobs. It can make you do [bad] things. The best thing is education...It’s trying to know them... there needs to be an open dialogue”.

“They need to create spaces so that people can be involved with families’ problems. It’s hard to meet people here. Everybody keeps themselves to themselves. It’s a misunderstanding. I don’t blame them; they don’t know me. They probably think the same about me”.

“At Easter or Christmas we need activities that get people together. Maybe sports or basketball. There’s nothing here”.

“Sometimes I go to the Citizens’ Advice Bureau. I ask them about many things like the law, what’s going on, and sometimes they may make calls for you. When you go they can give you a lot more information. For example, our tax was high compared to a lot of other people. We wanted to know why and how...Then they [CAB] helped us and pointed us towards the Council and then the Job Centre”.

“We need money for toys and food. They [the children] want McDonalds every day. In the mornings I do some work and then I take them out. Sometimes we go to Piccadilly, or Oldham or Ashton. They like to go all over”.

 “[Being a dad]...it’s completely natural but it’s a big responsibility, you have to like everything. If you educate children you give them a good future. They need the right things”.

“We don’t have any stress in West Africa. Everybody knows each other; it’s one big family. Here even your neighbours don’t care about you. People are not welcoming. I thought it was because I am Black but now I accept it’s the way that they live...I just wish it was a cosmopolitan town ...We need information and communication. You need to mix people... A new Oldham, a new society”.

“No amount of new services will help people to see each other differently”.

“Everything in this area is not good... I’m not talking about racial activity, it’s the crime. You see for the average person it’s okay but for my children it’s not okay, there are too many questions from them...What’s this, what’s that?”

“When I moved here the house was really dirty and there was damp. I sorted it out myself...It’s not good, it takes a long time for them [First Choice Homes] to come and help you. It takes a lot, you know”.

“When I wanted to change my childrens’ school they [the Children’s Centre] helped me and they were really good for information”.

“I’m a student as well, studying accountancy at Manchester College. I just want to go far...As soon as I have finished I want to get a job”.

“My wife wants to do English [on an ESOL course] and she wants to do ticketing in a travel agents...You have to pay for the courses...we try to manage our time so we can do things at different times”.

“It’s rough [the area]...One day I was coming home from work at five or six O’clock and I parked the car and walked to my house. I could see somebody was on the floor in the park but I went straight home and the next day someone called to tell me that the police were investigating and that the man was dead. It’s not safe. It makes me feel bad because it could have been me or it could have been my children. I want to move again”.

“The first condition of your children is the area and environment. The children need to be educated. They are listening and picking up on things all the time. I cannot tell them not to go out”.

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“People haven’t got jobs. It can make you do [bad] things. The best thing is education...It’s trying to know them... there needs to be an open dialogue”.

“They need to create spaces so that people can be involved with families’ problems. It’s hard to meet people here. Everybody keeps themselves to themselves. It’s a misunderstanding. I don’t blame them; they don’t know me. They probably think the same about me”.

“At Easter or Christmas we need activities that get people together. Maybe sports or basketball. There’s nothing here”.

“Sometimes I go to the Citizens’ Advice Bureau. I ask them about many things like the law, what’s going on, and sometimes they may make calls for you. When you go they can give you a lot more information. For example, our tax was high compared to a lot of other people. We wanted to know why and how...Then they [CAB] helped us and pointed us towards the Council and then the Job Centre”.

“We need money for toys and food. They [the children] want McDonalds every day. In the mornings I do some work and then I take them out. Sometimes we go to Piccadilly, or Oldham or Ashton. They like to go all over”.

 “[Being a dad]...it’s completely natural but it’s a big responsibility, you have to like everything. If you educate children you give them a good future. They need the right things”.

“We don’t have any stress in West Africa. Everybody knows each other; it’s one big family. Here even your neighbours don’t care about you. People are not welcoming. I thought it was because I am Black but now I accept it’s the way that they live...I just wish it was a cosmopolitan town ...We need information and communication. You need to mix people... A new Oldham, a new society”.

“No amount of new services will help people to see each other differently”.
PARENTHOOD

parent
[mass noun]

the state of being a parent and the responsibilities involved.

Source: Oxford University Press
Amongst participants in Wigan, parenthood was perceived to be a normal part of everyday life that began in their late teens. One participant told us her first child had been planned at 16, and her second child was on the way two years later. Another participant who was originally from Glasgow, but had happily settled in Wigan as a young teenager told us: “I was 17 when I got pregnant first, and all my friends had babies already by then, but I lost it. So after that I was good, I waited…” She became pregnant again at 18.

For many, the realities of parenthood came as a shock. One participant told us “I didn’t think it [being a mum] would be hard as it is... It’s really hard when you have a baby. You have to change everything. Like when I had ‘M’ I really liked going out, I can’t do any of that now. I felt really young when I had her. I was 21 and lots of my friends had children when they were 17 so it’s not young, I think it’s just the age you feel... I don’t want any more children”. Another single mother who suffered from anxiety after fleeing an abusive ex-partner and debt on her old house told us of her two year old “I can’t leave her with anybody... she smashes all the ornaments... I wouldn’t have had another one if I knew she was going to be like this”.

“One parent complained to us about other parents in the community not changing their lifestyle to become positive role models for their children: “I don’t drink around the kids. We have kids parties with no drink... with some families [when their children have birthday parties] it’s about how many crates of beer they can get hold of. They start drinking at 11am [to celebrate the child’s birthday]”. She thought that this sort of behaviour resulted in the children having problems themselves.

Seven of the 48 participants described suffering from postnatal depression. Most discussed it freely. It was not seen as a taboo subject or something to be ashamed of. The issues they associated with it were wide ranging, the common theme being some degree of isolation or a lack of family support.

Some of the participants spoke about their children having behavioural problems. In these cases parents often appreciated extra support from schools, link workers, or Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). Those parents whose children were not receiving this extra support felt angry and let down by the council. One single mother who suffered from anxiety also told us “we’ve got a lot of help from the school [for my son’s ADHD]... school give me all the help I could have... He’d done 5 hours CS with the YOT... I’ve given them permission to go into the school to see him... He’s been good, he’s been alright, he’s just easily led by others”.

The most extreme case of behavioural issues had resulted in one mother having her child taken away from her by Social Services. She attributed this to her failure to lay down boundaries as a mother, as a result of having an abusive ex-partner, and a very difficult relationship with her parents. Through parenting courses she was taking she had “realised I hadn’t been a parent to him... I slipped up... I treated him as a friend, not a parent”.

Several women had their first child with one partner as a teenager, and then went on to have more with a different partner ten or more years later. Two of these parents spoke of being more confident the second time round. One 30 year old mother who had a 14 year old and 13 year old from her first partner, and now a two year old from her second partner said: “I’m a lot more relaxed than I was last time. If my girls had a nose bleed I’d panic and take them to hospital, but I wouldn’t do that now”. Another mother told us that as an older mum she was now more open to accepting support from services: “I didn’t really attend groups with my first. I was too cool when I was younger”. She now volunteers at the Rainbow group, and is no longer dependent on her mother’s support.

Some mothers we spoke to felt that fathers had more removed relationships with their children. Fathers’ involvement ranged from focusing on supporting the family financially with full-time work, to not being involved at all with childcare or financial support. Some mothers spoke proudly of keeping good relationships with their ex-partners “for the sake of the girls”, whilst others said they did not have anything to do with them any more. One mother we spoke to, despite still being with the father of her children, complained openly about his lack of contribution to the family.
"A typical day for me would be: get the kids up, breakfast, get the kids to school... back from school, clean up, well I say clean up but the house is a shit-hole at the minute because I’m so tired, take the dog for a walk, kids home from school, tea, kids go to bed and partner doesn’t help at all... once I’ve saved up enough money he’s gone and he isn’t coming back... His typical day: 11pm he drinks, then he goes on the computer, he goes to bed at some point, usually wakes up at 1 pm and goes to his Mum’s to see if she needs anything doing and that’s pretty much it”.

"If I hadn’t had my daughter I think I’d be doing a couple of years [in prison] now”.

Researchers did also meet fathers who took pride in their parental responsibilities and were more directly involved in bringing up their children, despite often complex family situations. One father told us “He’s not mine officially. But he calls me ‘dad’, I’m with him five days a week. His other dad demands to see him but he won’t put up any money”. Another young father told us about his excitement about having a child, even though he wasn’t with the mother any more, showing off the tattoo of his daughter’s name on his arm to prove it: “If I hadn’t had my daughter I think I’d be doing a couple of years [in prison] now”.

One father, who had given up work to help his partner fight a court case to get custody of her daughter, told us that the services weren’t there to support him: “The sessions are in the day so they don’t cater for working families. They need to have things out of core hours. When I was working I couldn’t go... I like being a father but it feels as though everything is catered for women. If they did run sessions for men they’d have to be at a different time, ‘cos I couldn’t come. Like there’s only places for women to change children. There should be somewhere for me. I’ve been asked to leave somewhere ‘cos I was feeding him”.

2. Parenthood: Wigan findings
Of the 42 participants, 24 were married, nine were single parents, five were living with a partner, two were with a partner but were not living together, and two had relationship statuses that were not recorded. Nineteen were White British, ten Bengali, six African, one Chinese, two Pakistani, and two were not recorded.

Experiences of parenthood in Oldham varied greatly but there were also areas of common ground. When asked about parenthood, most participants responded that they got a lot of enjoyment out of watching their children grow up. Parents also shared a great deal of anxiety for their children. Participants spoke of wanting to protect their children from bad influences in their area and of being concerned that there was not enough for them in Oldham. Parents were keen for their children to grow up with more options available to them. Many mothers spoke of the difficulties of giving up work, and the isolation of parenthood.

The case of a couple, interviewed in the Tumble Tots session at Oldham Sport’s Centre, illustrates the combination of enjoyment and anxiety over parenthood that many parents described. They were at the centre with their three year old daughter who had hearing problems and another family member who was also there with her child. It was the one day of the week that both parents got to spend time with each other and their daughter; the mother works in a care home doing evening shifts, and the father works in a foundry full-time, but has Fridays off. When asked about parenthood their initial response was “the best thing about being a parent is that it’s fun... but it is scary at the same time”. They spoke about wanting to protect their daughter from the “bad influences” in the area: “because of all the drugs and that – it’s terrible”. They complained about problems in the area being caused by a lack of “things to do” for teenagers: “there’s no youth centre for teenagers, they’ve shut all that down – there’s nothing for them to do...”. They also described a lack of activities available for them as a family: “there’s nothing much for kids apart from this place”. There described further struggles caused by having to juggle work and childcare. Despite having a “large family around” they said most of them “have their own kids so [we] sometimes struggle with babysitting when my mum’s not well”. Such anxieties appeared to be compounded by concerns that they would not get their daughter into a school of her choice, and the fact that they were having problems with their housing.

Another father who had moved with his wife from Guinea described a similar picture of parenthood being both a great pleasure and a source of anxiety. The couple had three children; five, four and five months old. The father works full-time as a security guard and studies accountancy in his spare time. The mother works part-time, and “wants to do English ESOL, she wants to do ticketing in a travel agents...You have to pay for the courses...we try to manage our time so we can do things at different times”. The participant’s initial response when asked about parenthood was: “It’s completely natural, but it’s a responsibility”. This father described how offering their children a better future was a key motivation of his: “If you educate children, you give them a good future. He was concerned about the kind of education they would be getting from their neighbourhood: “The first condition of your children is the area and environment. The children need to be educated. They are listening and picking up on things all the time. I cannot tell them not to go out”. He described how the children put a big pressure on their finances because “you need money for toys and food—they want McDonalds every day... to be honest it’s really difficult, you have to cook everyday. Its hard to get money and easy to spend it”.

Nine of the participants were single mothers. Of these, seven were White British, one was from Sudan, and one was an asylum seeker (researchers did not find out which country she was from). A number of these mothers spoke of the difficulties caused by a lack of childcare support; for some this prevented them going back to work, for others this meant they struggled with keeping on top of daily routines. Many
2. Parenthood: Oldham Findings

described local services as essential for ensuring they received necessary support and socialising.

One White British single mother, when asked about parenthood replied: “It’s good, I like it, it’s nice to have someone to look after. We spend loads of time doing homework and stuff. I was never allowed paints when I was younger. I want him to have everything I never had”. However, she also described many difficulties and sacrifices she had to make to make it work: “I live on my own you see, it’s hard [without my family] close by. I want to move to Chadderton, I want my family around so they can help me pick him up from school when I go back to work”. Work and childcare as a single parent was raised as a concern: “I went back to work when he was 4 months but the childcare fees have gone up so much it wasn’t worth working... I didn’t want to quit work, I love work but it left me with about £40 a month”. As a result, she was out of work and described herself as being confined to her own home: “I’m sitting at home doing nothing, it’s boring”.

A single mother described how being unable to return to work had contributed to her ongoing depression. She was a qualified doctor, but had to give up her job as she was unable to find childcare arrangements to fit around the changeable hours: “I’m willing to go into full time work, but it’s hard to know how to solve it... I can’t find nine to five work as a doctor. During the day childcare is fine, but during the night it’s more difficult... I just don’t want my experience to go to waste”. She described having low-feelings of self-worth partly as a result of this situation, and this was compounded by her isolation in the area; her husband had left her and her brother had also moved away.

She described how depression was preventing her from making friends in the area, hence she relied on services for support: “I haven’t got a lot of friends around, but I get some help from services. I get support from Beever Centre, I’ve got a Health Visitor for my son, and a Psychiatrist Social Worker from Peaches- that’s adult mental health”. This mother described the anxieties she had about not being able to provide what her son needed. She felt that being unable to communicate with her son during her low periods had resulted in him having a speech delay: “I just want him to grow up normal”. She felt these worries contributed further to her depression.

Another White British single mother of six said of parenthood: “watching them grow and learn, its dead rewarding. Everything they do is down to you. They are the only thing I have done that is right. I’ve made these perfect kids”. This mother grew up in care herself, and described a difficult history that involved having to flee her previous home to get away from a violent ex-partner. She spoke of becoming a parent for the first time as a positive changing point in her life: “I have grown up in a totally different way than I thought I would. I used to be into robbing, but then at 18 I got a job, I got a house. Then I had a baby... I wanted my kids to be totally different, I wanted to put things right for my kids, so I worked hard to sort myself out”.

She also described the struggles of trying to juggle everything to take care of six children on her own: “Being a parent is hard, stressful, especially when you don’t have support. It’s hard keeping on top of things and their routine, getting kids to different places”. Her worries about parenthood seemed to be compounded by her perception of the area, as well as financial worries: “there’s nothing for the kids to do. I do what I can, put a paddling pool in the back, but they get bored. I do try to take them out but it costs money. I manage with money but there is not enough to do what I would like to do...All the kids around here are fighting and causing you bother. It gets me down. Maybe if they built a park or something, stuff for them to do, taking them places”. This participant suffered from postnatal depression, which she said was making her concerned about her ability to provide for her children: “I was diagnosed with postnatal depression yesterday. I just feel awful, I don’t feel able to be fun for my kids and they need to be able to have fun”. 
As described in the Kinship section, for many of the Bangladeshi participants parenthood was a task shared with many local family members. For most, the father was working whilst the mother was a full-time mum, with help from wider family members.

Having a disabled child was described as isolating parents further. Some mothers of disabled children spoke of struggling to find services to accommodate their children and give them respite and support. One Bangladeshi mother whose daughter had an undiagnosed disability told us about how she could not attend play groups with her daughter as she was constantly having to take her to different appointments: “it would have been good if she could have carried on going to something like Play and Stay at St Hilda’s. Most of the time I couldn’t take her because she's been ill- but I think she really could have benefitted from interacting more with other kids”.

2. Parenthood: Oldham Findings
service

1 [mass noun] the action of helping or doing work for someone: millions are involved in voluntary service.

Source: Oxford University Press
3. Relationship with Services: Wigan Findings

Children’s Centres

Nineteen of the participants recounted positive experiences of Children’s Centres. Some reported building up social networks through the Centres: “I use the Sure Start Centre most days and have made some lovely friends who look out for each other. All the mums know each other... There’s lots of new sessions and groups and the staff are always open to ideas... The staff offer a great network of support”. Another unemployed participant said “I use the Sure Start centre every day. I come for a chat and a cup of tea. It’s really good. I’ve got no job so I can do it J [her son] loves it here”.

The support on offer from staff and other parents was mentioned a number of times. “People at the children’s centre are always there for you. They’ll even check you are alright.” One mother, who accessed the centre more with her second child, said “The Health Visitor for my second child gave me leaflets and I got involved with Sure Start and we organised day trips, like to Gullivers World. They were really good. The centre gave me loads of information”. Another parent commented on where she gets support: “If I need advice, I go to J [friend]. Or I go to the centre staff here. They’ve been really good”.

Other participants felt that the children’s centre had really helped them at difficult times such as struggling with postnatal depression: “I go along to Westfield Children’s Centre. I felt isolated before, I had postnatal depression. It’s good for him to mix with other children...”. The same parent felt that Children’s Centres did a good job of reaching out to parents: “The good thing with Sure Start is that they go door to door inviting new mums - you can’t force people to go, but it’s good they do that as a start”.

Some participants told us they initially found it difficult to attend but that it had ultimately done them a “world of good... It was a place to get things off your chest”. Another young single mother who had suffered postnatal depression had “turned her life around” by plucking up the courage to visit a play group: “When I first came to the group I had butterflies. It’s only now three years on I feel better. The group was really welcoming and other mums were nice...I’m glad I came to these groups because it’s helped my son’s development, and I’ve met new friends. Once you start going to one activity you found out more information about what’s going on... before I knew about all the activities I just went to the park and to the shops [on my own]”.

Another participant had a similar experience: “I’ve never felt ostracised but it’s only since my daughter started pre-school that I’ve gone to the children’s centre. I had post natal depression and found it really difficult to go when I had A. When I walked in I felt like all the girls knew each other like they were a clique. My husband said ‘why don’t you give it another go’. So I plucked up the courage, but it does put you off. When I went back it was all new staff they’re all really good. If they don’t know the answer to a question they’ll find out for you”.

Where participants said they did not access groups or services for parents, besides schools and health services, there were a number of reasons given. Some felt they did not need such services. They felt they had enough support from friends and family as it was. One mother who had a large family said “I’ve never felt ostracised”.

Some of these parents expressed feelings of anxiety about accessing services and concern they would be excluded by the other members of groups, and had heard that certain groups were “cliquey” or “snobby”. One 25 year old mother of four said: “I’ve just joined Sure Start... but I don’t go... I don’t feel welcome there. They’re just stuck up and not welcoming. They just sing with the kids”.

Comments from some participants suggested services were not communicating what they had on offer in a way that was appealing to them. One young mother who was interviewed outside the Worsely Hall shops with a friend of hers told us: “I get the odd leaflet through the door [about activities at the Meadows] but it...
doesn’t explain what they are and I’m not going if they’re not telling me what its about...It’s just not appealing to me”. Her perception was that the services in the local area would not cater for her son, who required high-energy outdoor activities: “My son is all outdoors, he’d like football, karate, kick boxing things like that. He does football training but there’s no teams around here... there’s nothing for him”. She felt that his behaviour had “gone downhill” as a result: “He’s being assessed for ADHD every 6 months – it’s a 12 month course. He won’t sit down and he’s got no concentration. I put it down to being bored... he needs something to put his energy into. Community centres concentrate on teenagers or young ones but nothing in-between”.

Perceptions of the Meadows Community Centre were particularly negative. A number of participants described it as being exclusively for “naughty teenagers” and so they would not consider going there with their young child: “The Meadow is for 11 – 19 year olds ... I wouldn’t send my kids to there anyway because of the type of kids that go there... My son’s got morals and I want him to grow up properly. They get rewarded for bad behaviour; they get presents and days out. I think that’s wrong”. However, researchers found that there was a well-attended group for mothers and babies at the centre which many local parents didn’t appear to know about.

It appeared that the Meadow Centre itself was not communicating the services it offered. When researchers initially attended the centre they found a locked door and signs saying: “Don’t knock on the door” and “Don’t drop litter”. There was no information about services at the centre. A support worker at the Meadows Centre told researchers that perceptions of services in the community were very hard to influence, and despite many efforts to reach out to people who weren’t engaging in services “no matter what we do, they won’t come in... it’s that old fashioned fear of Social Services”. She described how for many parents in the area, Children’s Centres were viewed with the same negativity as Social Services, and that accepting help from any of these “council” services was looked upon as an admission of failure as a parent. However, it must be noted that these views were not generally borne out by the views of parents spoken to. One mother warned us that not all services were for everyone: “I used to go to Newton West Park in West Leigh- but I wasn’t happy. You need to find your place. In the old place all the mums were on Facebook on their phones all the time- they were all one big group and I wasn’t happy... This playgroup do more with the children than the other one. When I first came here I thought “Oh my god!” but I saw someone I knew and it made it easier”.

Social Services

Although most participants did not mention Social Services, the perceptions and experiences of Social Services amongst those that did were often negative. Mothers experiencing postnatal depression sometimes spoke of hiding their symptoms from Health Visitors as they thought social services would intervene. One mother experiencing domestic violence talked about not reporting it to the police for the same reason: “He still tries it... but I don’t call the police no more. I don’t want Social Services involved. Sometimes when he’s drunk he don’t think of the consequences, but I do”.

Another mother who had suffered serious domestic violence told researchers about her son who at a young age became very violent, knocked his younger sister’s teeth out, and tried to spike her food with paracetamol. This resulted in him being taken away from her by Social Services. Since then, she described how she was doing everything she could to turn her life around, but felt Social Services were unsympathetic: “It’s like they can dictate to me but they never do what they say they will do. They can make me go to meetings and tell me what I’ve done wrong but they never do what they say. I don’t even know who his Social Worker is. I had a Social Worker who helped me with all the children, but she’s disappeared”.

However, one mother told us how she felt that Social Services intervening had been the turning point to get her out of postnatal depression: “They gave me a link worker. She would phone me up in the morning and get me out. She’d even drag me out if she had to. That was what really helped. They were brilliant. Kerry, the Link Worker signed me off as a case a year ago but she’s always there for me. If I ever want anything, I can ask her anything... We all sat down together...”
and made some house rules... It was awesome”.

“Our Social Worker was excellent... [she] has her own life experience and she can sympathise with us.”

Another family undergoing a court case to get custody of their child said: “Our Social Worker was excellent... [she] has her own life experience and she can sympathise with us. She understands what we’re going through, she’s lived it herself”.

Postnatal Depression and Support Services

Seven participants in Wigan mentioned experiencing postnatal depression. For many, their depression seemed linked to wider social and emotional problems such as having been through a difficult birth, feeling too young to have a baby or feeling over-burdened by having too many children and an unsupportive partner. Many of these mothers described postnatal depression support services as inadequate. Doctors were said to offer medication and counselling even when mothers did not wish to take medication. Participants also identified waiting lists for counselling as a problem. Many mentioned “just needing someone to talk to” but lacking in confidence to go out and find it. A number of participants described how engaging in services like Children’s Centres had helped them recover from postnatal depression by decreasing their isolation and increasing their confidence.

One mother who was interviewed in West Field Children’s Centre described how she suffered from postnatal depression 17 years ago after having twins. She associated this with feeling isolated in her neighbourhood, and there being no services available to her. "When I had twins it was a nightmare. There were no services. It was a nightmare. I had no help. It was hard. I had postnatal depression. I didn’t tell anyone because I was scared that I might have the kids taken off my social services. I lived in Kitt Green... Everyone was out in the day working. There was no one about to talk to. I felt on my own... I would sit at home and feel so bad as though I wanted to throw the child out the house. I’d talk to the Health Visitor and she’d make
3. RELATIONSHIP WITH SERVICES: WIGNAN FINDINGS

me realise that was normal part of postnatal depression”.

This mother then got pregnant again 12 years later. By that time she had moved to a different area and felt this meant she had access to a better standard of services: “I moved to Norley Hall when I was pregnant and it was the best thing I’d ever done. I was very ill when I had my second child. My neighbours were really supportive. They would wake up in the afternoon and they’d be in and put my tea on and done my ironing, so things were ready for when the twins got home. People with the least, give the most... Now, a lot of places are more accessible. When I had the twins unless I could walk somewhere there was no way I could go there. The double buggy wouldn’t fit on the bus”.

She now volunteered at West Field. She described to researchers how she wished to use her negative experiences to benefit others: “I started as a volunteer here at West Field and now I work here. I want to help other mums, I love helping other mums. My boss tells me that sometimes I do too much but it’s because I want to help people. They are open with me because of the way I am... When I had my twins, I felt as though I lost my identity. I was just known as ‘mum’. Now that I work I’ve got my name back. People know me for being me”.

Another mother who had moved from Kent to Wigan described how her initial isolation and problems with neighbours in her area contributed to her postnatal depression: “I had postnatal depression for over eighteen months. When we moved here it was really hard ‘cos we moved away from all our friends and family. Then I was all on my own. We had a problem with our next door neighbour. When we first moved in, I went to see her and she said, ‘don’t let anyone see you talking to me or else no one will want to know you. The women on the other side is a witch.’ I went to the other neighbour and she said, ‘watch the woman next to you, she’s trouble’. I just said to them both, ‘you don’t need to tell me what to do. I can make up my own mind, thank you’. When I was really depressed the woman next door had a really aggressive staffy [dog] she led it out and it nearly attacked S... [her daughter]. I phoned the police and they had it put down. So she decided to phone Social Services and told them that my children were always covered in bruises”.

Despite the initially unwanted nature of the intervention from Social Services, the mother ultimately felt that it had helped her get over her depression: “They gave me a Link Worker. She would phone me up in the morning and get me out. She’d even drag me out if she had to. That was what really helped. They were brilliant...the link worker signed me off as a case a year ago but she’s always there for me. If I ever want anything, I can ask her anything”.

Some participants described difficulties they experienced in seeking support from services: “I have been on the waiting list for four weeks to see a counsellor for cognitive counselling... but I could be waiting anywhere up to six more months... It would be really useful to have a drop-in centre to speak to people for just five or ten minutes... that’s all it takes sometimes. At the doctor’s you need to make an appointment and then wait a week to be seen, and then when you get there they want you out. But then it’s all over. This mother said her postnatal depression had started 14 years ago, and never gone away. She had also experienced domestic violence, and was in a difficult relationship with a man. She described how she had previously received support she found very helpful, but it had now been withdrawn: “I have had a Link Worker who called in and looked after the children for an hour every day, but she is going because the funding is going, there are a lot of people going to come crashing down because the support is going. The Link Worker is great because I could just talk”.

Another mother described how postnatal depression had contributed towards her separation from her partner, and isolation from her friends. She told us: “I chose not to go to the counselling because I didn’t have the confidence to go... I thought why would they bother about me? They’d just go home at night and not give a shit... Looking back I think it could have helped but I didn’t have the confidence... I just needed someone to come and just have a chat like we’re doing now to get it all out”. She also didn’t feel well supported by her Health Visitor: ” [she] didn’t really know how I was truly feeling. She didn’t have children of her own... When she said “how are you feeling” I just said, “OK” and that was the end, nothing else was followed up...If the Health Visitor had been better then that could have been okay. She needed more information about postnatal depression- she told me all her information came from a text book”. This participant also described how she had got better on her own, and with the help of the Children’s Centre: “I thought ‘I’m going to walk up the main road and do something I don’t normally do’. I didn’t get any advice about it, I did it all myself, by starting with things I wouldn’t normally do”. She then
started going to groups at Children’s Centres, which gradually increased her confidence. She was now at the stage where she wanted to advise other people going through similar things: "I would love to get a job helping people with PND by giving them advice and listening”.

ADHD and Support Services

Four of the participants had one of their children tested for ADHD due to behavioural problems. Of those four, one confirmed as having ADHD, two were rejected, and one was awaiting the result. In all cases it was the parent themselves that lead the way with requesting the tests. One mother who had suffered domestic violence and had a child in care said “I asked him to get him assessed for ADHD at his junior school but they said he was fine. His behaviour has been bad since he was four. I couldn’t take him anywhere, he has no respect, and he was always swearing. He’s always been such hard work”. She later alluded to the fact that his behaviour might be linked to her parenting: “I’ve been going to parenting classes. I slipped up with my first child. I treated him as a friend not as a parent because of what my mum did to me”.

Wigan researchers reflected that it seemed that participants wanted the diagnosis to explain their child’s problems, and potentially alleviate their concerns about not being a ‘good parent’. Another possible reason for seeking a diagnosis of ADHD was to obtain additional support services. One mother who suffered from anxiety had her son diagnosed, and told researchers with relief “we’ve got a lot of help from the school... school give me all the help I could have”.

Of the four mothers mentioned, one had suffered postnatal depression, one was on medication for anxiety, and another one was suffering from severe domestic abuse. Wigan researchers discussed how the desire to get a child tested for ADHD could also be seen as a parents "cry for help”.

Domestic Violence and Support Services

Three of the participants spoke of experiencing domestic violence. All three alluded to domestic violence being associated with low self-esteem and troubled relationships. Only one of these mothers mentioned receiving support specifically for domestic violence, and this she described as inadequate. The other two had extensive involvement from other services including Social Services addressing wider problems of neglect and postnatal depression.

The mother who had been directly supported over domestic violence described how she had had a very complicated relationship with her father and had subsequently experienced a number of violent relationships: “After M [the father of her first child], I got into another violent relationship. I've been going to parenting classes. I slipped up with my first child. I treated him as a friend not as a parent because of what my mum did to me.”

Another mother casually referred to domestic violence in the middle of discussing her experience of postnatal depression, saying: "My previous partner strangled me”. She was now in a relationship with a man she described as “lazy”. While she did not mention receiving any support specifically for the domestic violence, she did say she was on a waiting list for treatment for depression and used to have a Link Worker that visited her at her home every day.

Health Visitors

From participants comments there seems to be a varied quality of Health Visiting provision with a number of participants being unhappy with the service received. One mother said “The Health Visitor was just rubbish. I'd rather speak to people here [Children's Centre]. I don't think they know what they're on about.” Another mother complained that advice from Health Visitors was “confusing” and a third person said they were "crap"
3. RELATIONSHIP WITH SERVICES: WIGAN FINDINGS

However, some participants were very positive, saying things such as; “I now have a fantastic Health Visitor who has given me so much information” and “Health visitors were brilliant, you can ask any questions”. Many mothers raised concerns over what they felt to be a reduction in contact with Health Visitors after the birth of a new child: “When I had A [first child] the Health Visitor came round a lot but when I had Z [second child], they didn’t come very often. I think the service has been cut down which is a shame. There are some families where they would be needed, some children might need to be checked up on. I knew that they were at the end of the phone if I needed anything. But I think it would be better if everyone could have a visit every nine months at least”.

One young mother said of the lack of Health Visitor visits, “of course I need her; I’m only 17”. She didn’t know precisely what kind of help she wanted, but as she had just started weaning she wanted reassurance to her question “is his head right?”. Another mother who had her first child ten years ago and had recently had another one commented: “The Health Visitors are different now. They visited all the time when I had my first [10 years ago] but I’ve hardly seen them now. The last time I saw her was at the two and a half year assessment”. Another mother said “They [Health Visitors] come around a few time’s for the first month... then you don’t see them”.

A number of participants mentioned having formed good relationships with their Health Visitors. Positive relationships with Health Visitors were associated with participants reporting positive relationships with other services too. One mother who had a daughter who was born with no fingers and had gone on to suffer from postnatal depression said, “The Health Visitor was really good... I moved here when I had D and I didn’t know anyone but I really like it here now”. Another mother who was interviewed in Westfield Children’s Centre described how she had felt “down and isolated” after the birth of her child, until her Health Visitor gave her information about the Children’s Centre. She ended up going “every morning and every afternoon... Whatever that was on within walking distance we went to... [there’s] something different on everyday, you can go and have a laugh”.

GP Services

The GP was often mentioned as the first service to visit with any problems, including those of an emotional nature. Participants attending for problems with postnatal depression often felt they weren’t dealt with effectively (see Postnatal Depression and Support Services). Some participants who did not access other community-based services for parents referred to the GP as the service they would access for all their familial needs. One mother who lived in Springfield spoke of not feeling the need for support outside of her family and school, but said “I just go to the doctor if I need anything”. Another young mother didn’t attend any other services with her baby, but said of her GP: “she’s the only one that listens”.

“I thought, well I’m a punch bag so I might as well be one. I felt empty and worthless.”

A number of participants complained about the length of time it can take to obtain a doctor’s appointment: “The GP at Sherwood hasn’t been very good. It takes a week to get an appointment”. Another mother also reported: “We go to a doctor on Bradshaw Street. It’s been alright, you always have your little complaints. I wish they could give you appointments sooner when you ring up. It’s usually about a week at the moment”.

Some participants reported having mixed experiences of GPs so when they found one they trusted they would stick with them. One mother said: “The doctors at Sherwood Drive are alright. Well most of them are alright. I don’t like Dr A, she’s a right cow. Every time I went in with the children they would just tell me that they are ok. Dr B was brilliant. I only go to see him now”. Similarly, another mother said: “I used to go to the doctor in Marsh Green and then they moved, so I moved with them. He knew all the kids names so I went with him. I used to use the baby clinic. I wouldn’t go anywhere else”.

Arts, Leisure and Culture

Amongst many participants in Wigan there was a perception of a lack of provision of leisure services in their areas. However, Wigan Ethnographers found that those who were proactive about seeking out activities they wanted were often successful. A negative attitude, fear of trying new things, and a desire for “everything to be on their doorstep” often led to people expressing a feeling of dissatisfaction with their area. One mother said: “There is nothing to
do- I’m stuck in the house all the time. There are baby groups but I don’t want to go there, the kids do my head in.... St. Cuthberts does a gardening club after school, my daughter goes there but I don’t know why, she never does any gardening for me. My eldest does drama and cheer leading. She doesn’t want to go because it’s not proper cheer leading, they don’t have the pom-poms and costumes like they do in America”.

Many parents in Leigh complained about there being a lack of facilities in the area, saying that everything is in Wigan. But one couple from the Trees Estate in Leigh shared an interesting insight: “Laser Quest and the bowling alley [in Leigh]... were both closed down. Everyone in Leigh whinges that Wigan have everything and Leigh has nothing but when they get it they don’t use it so it closes”. Another mother told us “If you need something for your children you have to go and find it”. Parents with the confidence and motivation talked of finding nice, free things to keep their children occupied: one mother spoke of taking the whole family cycling together down the canal: “I like the area its quiet, it’s not a Town or a Village...it’s rural...I like outdoors stuff...like cycling”.

The cost of activities and transport was a concern for many participants. One mother shared with us the pressures she felt trying to keep her daughter occupied since her husband had been made redundant: “She does horse riding, karate, acting, stage coach, she does it all. But horse riding costs £30 a go... [she] thinks we are an endless pot of money”. Swimming was a very popular activity but some felt disappointed that they now had to pay for it: “we miss the swimming ...now its 15 to 20 pound if we go as a family... it used to be great...we would go 3 or 4 nights together after school...now we can’t do that...my husband’s put weight on...now we walk to the park but swimming used to be a family activity”. Participants generally thought that the amount of green space and parks was sufficient but were concerned about the safety of them, as older kids “hang around the parks”. A mother who lived on the trees estate told researchers: “you have to get your timing right because there is always people drinking in there- you have to ask them get off the swings to put your kids on and they’ll tell you where to go”. Some parents wouldn’t take their kids to the park as a result. One mother who suffered from anxiety and had a son with ADHD and a daughter with behavioural issues said she wouldn’t take her children to her local park “‘cos of needles, glass in the sand and rubbish”.

3. RELATIONSHIP WITH SERVICES: WIGAN FINDINGS
The following information reflects the issues raised by a participant interviewed at a play group by a Wigan Council employee. The interview was recorded by a note-taker, also from Wigan Council. As far as possible the notes below represent comments directly made by the participant in response to questions and prompts from the interviewer.

**Interviewee:** Mother, 27 years old.  
**Relationship Status:** Engaged to partner, living together.  
**Children:** Three children of ten, six and two.  
**Ethnicity:** White British.  
**Time in Wigan:** Lived in Wigan since the age of 10.  
**Employment status:** Full time mother and volunteers at Rainbows. Father works full time.  
**Area of residence:** Worsley Hall
"I live in Worsley Hall but use the services in Marsh Green more because my mum is down here and the kids go to the local school."

"I volunteer with the Rainbows here in Marsh Green. One of the volunteers has a daughter in my daughter's class so I got a letter asking if anyone wanted to help."

"My daughter goes to Rainbows with her friends. I help with the fun stuff, like crafts. We're making tiaras next week."

"I've lived in the area since I was 10. I like it, it's our community."

"When I had my first child, my daughter, I was 17. I was still living with my mother. My family are close all close by and help out. I have a lot of support. My partner helps out, he has no choice."

"There was a big age gap between my children. There was a four year gap between the first two and then three years, so I'm ready for a rest now. I've been with them for 10 years."

"I didn't really attend groups with my first. I was too cool when I was younger. The Health Visitor for my second child gave me leaflets and I got involved with Sure Start and we organised day trips, like to Gullivers World. They were really good. The centre gave me loads of information."

"I used to go to the doctor in Marsh Green and then they moved, so I moved with them. He knew all the kids' names so I went with him. I used to use the baby clinic. I wouldn't go anywhere else. I went into Sherwood Clinic for baby clinic with N... [the youngest child]... It was really hard getting an appointment with the dentist but my grandma got one at Beech Hill so we went with her."

"We've had a few problems on my street. It's been a party street, there was lot of noise...I used to babysit for a couple in Marsh Green. They split up and the man moved to our street in Worsley Hall. He's always got girls coming and going, it's turned into a party house. There's always something going on! We had help setting up a neighbourhood watch and the PCSOs visit. I was thinking of moving but it's where my kids are born [in the house]."

"The three girls [daughters] are always fighting but I love them, I wouldn't change them. When they are naughty I put them on the naughty step. The older one gets embarrassed but she's setting an example for the younger ones."

"I don't do any of the activities in the area with the kids. One of them wants to do gymnastics but I haven't got round to it yet."

"The Health Visitors are different now. They visited all the time when I had my first [10 years ago] but I've hardly seen them now. The last time I saw her was at the two and a half year assessment."

"On a typical day I get up at 7am to get the girls ready for school. Then we go shopping or go to a group. When I pick them up we go home and have tea and they fight. The youngest one goes to bed at 7.30. Sometimes the second one will read her a story. I have to put them to bed at different times or else they fight. The older one goes to bed at 9 but I let her watch telly."

"My partner works at weekends but has a day off in the week. He goes out on his mountain bike cos he's working all the time. He does overtime all the time. He bought me a mountain bike."
3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH SERVICES: OLDHAM FINDINGS

Children’s Centres

Most of the interviews in Oldham were carried out at in-service locations or arranged through services. This meant we found little information about people who were not engaged with Children’s Centres or other family support services.

Amongst participants, Children’s Centres were recognised for having had a very positive impact on both their own lives, and their child’s development. Many participants described how their children gained a range of benefits from attending Children’s Centres. These benefits included: socialising with other children from an early age, being exposed to stimulating learning opportunities and learning to communicate and share with others outside of their family. Children’s Centres and playgroups were often experienced as a ‘lifeline’ by parents who otherwise felt isolated and lost for things to do with their children.

One mother who had moved to Oldham from Bangladesh as a baby described the positive effect her local Children’s Centre had had on her child: “It’s really good, children can learn, my daughter has been learning since she’s been coming, she didn’t used to share but now I’ve seen her sharing with other children”. When describing her day-to-day routine it also became apparent attending the Children’s Centre once a week was the only day she didn’t stay in the house with her child.

“We've been good for him. He’s more confident and used to seeing other children...”

Another Bangladeshi mother described her weekly routine as being full of social interactions with other friends with children and family members. However, she still described attending the Children’s Centre as having a profound effect on her son: “It's been good for him. He's more confident and used to seeing other children, or if a stranger says hello in the street, so it's better when we go out now”.

For one mother who had become pregnant shortly after moving to Oldham from China the Children’s Centre provided a link for her to find out about other services: “I like it here [the Beever Centre], When I moved here I knew nothing about the benefit system. They’ve helped explain it to me and helped me”.

Some participants identified a lack of confidence as a barrier that prevented them from accessing Children’s Centres. One White British participant with lots of family support in the area told researchers: “I was worried about going [to the playgroup] to start with, but my brother’s partner has a kid too, and we went together”.

Postnatal Depression Support Services/ Social Services

Four participants in Oldham described suffering from postnatal depression. All four had attended the GP and had been offered medication and counselling. Participants held a variety of views on the effectiveness of their treatment. One single mother of six children told us why she opted for medication rather than counselling: “They offered me someone [CBT counsellor] to talk to but I said I did not want it, I don’t want to talk to strangers, I don’t have time with the kids and nothing changes. You just walk away with the same problems so what’s the point? The Doctor was really good he actually listened”. While another mother had the opposing view: “My husband didn’t know how to cope cos I was crying all the time, he phoned my mum, and said that he didn’t know what to do. The GP was female and was very understanding and had plenty of time, I was in there 45 minutes. I got to see a counsellor about two weeks later. The GP offered anti-depressants, but I did not want them as I was scared of getting addicted to them, and wanted to try counselling first”.

Participants often described how their mental health issues had been exacerbated by issues such as poor housing, financial concerns, and the inability to find employment to fit around child care. In all cases social isolation appeared to be a key factor. Discussion of postnatal depression was associated with feelings of shame and fear, with participants expressing concerns that if they admitted their problems Social Services might take their children away.

Disability Support Services

We spoke to a number of parents of children with a disability. Impairments included hearing, ADHD and epilepsy, autism, and developmental delay. Participants identified the importance of services acting quickly to identify and treat the problem. One White British single mother with six children,
Breast feeding was hard to start with, my health visitor was excellent and supportive...

Health Visitors

From participants comments there seems to be a varied quality of Health Visiting provision with a number of participants being unhappy with the service received.

“Breast feeding was hard to start with, my health visitor was excellent and supportive...”

GP Services

Participants were largely positive about their experiences of GP Services, with few complaints expressed (See also ‘Postnatal Depression Support Services’ for positive experiences).

Access to translation and interpretation was highlighted as important to some with limited English. One Bangladeshi mother told us “The doctor’s nice, she speaks Bangla too”. Frustrations identified by participants included a lack of consistent access to the same doctor and waiting times for appointments.

Many mothers raised concerns over what they felt to be a reduction in contact with Health Visitors after the birth of a new child: “When I had ‘A’ [first child] the Health Visitor came round a lot but when I had ‘Z’ [second child], they didn’t come very often. I think the service has been cut down which is a shame. There are some families where they would be needed; some children might need to be checked up on. I knew that they were at the end of the phone if I needed anything. But I think it would be better if everyone could have a visit every nine months at least”.

One young mother said of the lack of Health Visitor visits: “of course I need her; I’m only 17”. She didn’t know precisely what kind of help she wanted, but as she had just started weaning she’d wanted reassurance to her question “is his head right?”.

3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH SERVICES: OLDHAM FINDINGS

one with epilepsy and another with developmental delay told us to get the support she needed for her son she had to “push” for it. Parents were conscious that failing to act immediately could negatively impact upon the future of their children. One White British father of a girl with a hearing impairment said: “Daughter ‘R’ has a hearing aid in each ear... she had it from birth, but only got hearing aids in January. The audiology department at the integrated health centre waited four years to see if it was a temporary problem, and her speech has been slow to develop as a consequence”. A White British mother shared: “In September I got concerned when I noticed he [4 year old son] was not talking in nursery. I contacted my Health Visitor who said leave it until the 18 month assessment which was due in December. We didn’t hear from them, so had to call about 10 times before anyone came. The Health Visitor said, “it’s not me, it’s community nursery nurse”. The CNN eventually called back and said it is between 18 and 20 months [that they would come]. She finally visited at about 19.5 months... I wrote a letter of complaint and said if he had 18 month assessment on time he might be better now”.

Parents of children with a disability frequently expressed frustration over being passed from service to service. A Bangladeshi father of a child with an undiagnosed health problem said:

“We’ve been everywhere, running around to different services- the hospital, speech and language, hearing test- running everywhere”. The mother told us she feared this had prevented her from taking part in activities that could have helped her: “To make things better for ‘K’ it would have been good if she could have carried on going to something like Play and Stay at St Hilda’s. Most of the time I couldn’t take her because she’s been ill- but I think she really could have benefitted from interacting more with other kids, she could have learnt from what they were doing”.

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“The Health Visitor was just rubbish. I’d rather speak to people here [Children’s Centre]. I don’t think they [Health Visitors] know what they’re on about.” Another mother complained that advice from Health Visitors was “confusing” and a third person said they were “crap”.

However, some participants were very positive. “I now have a fantastic Health Visitor who has given me so much information.” Another mother recounted: “ [The] Health Visitors were brilliant, you can ask any questions.”
wouldn’t go there now because you see people drinking and I don’t want my children to see that”. Alexandra Park was generally acknowledged as being a pleasant place but for many people with small children they found it “too far”, as expressed by one single mother from St Mary’s. Many parents also expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of youth centres in the area, believing it contributed to more teenagers hanging around on the streets and causing trouble.

Many participants expressed the view that other activities in the area were too expensive or not well publicised enough. One young Pakistani father who lived in Glodwick said: “The Sports Centre is £4- we can’t afford it”. A White British father told researchers: “they need to publicise what’s on more- we don’t know where to go to find out”.

Oldham Council

A number of participants expressed a general dissatisfaction over the contribution Oldham Council was felt to make to local quality of life. One Bangladeshi father told us: “I used to go to political meetings and was so surprised by how the councillors never make an issue out of anything. They never cut any grass or clean any rubbish... and then the local Councillor lives in a million pound house in Chadderton. How can he know what to do about the area when he doesn’t live here?”. Another participant, a White British mother, said, “the council has spent money on fences, flowerbeds and putting up photos of how the area used to look on concrete blocks, instead of spending money on facilities in the area”.

A White British family described feeling excluded from the local community activities due to the behaviour of one local politician: “There was a politician that came to H’s [next door neighbour’s]. Everybody [Asian community] was in there. I asked if I could go in, but they wouldn’t let me... They told me they wanted all the whites off the street”.

Arts, Leisure and Culture

Participants did not often express views on the provision of arts, leisure and culture as a whole. Instead, participants tended to focus on a perceived lack of appropriate parks and open spaces for children and teenagers to play. The few parks available to participants were often described as unsafe places for their children. One Bangladeshi father told researchers: “There’s a park near by, Boundary Park, but I wouldn’t go there now because you see people drinking and I don’t want my children to see that”.

A number of participants mentioned having formed good relationships with their Health Visitors. Positive relationships with Health Visitors were associated with participants reporting positive relationships with other services too. One mother who had a daughter who was born with no fingers and had gone on to suffer from postnatal depression said: “The Health Visitor was really good... I moved here when I had D and I didn’t know anyone but I really like it here now.” Another mother who was interviewed in Westfield Children’s Centre described how she had felt “down and isolated” after the birth of her child, until her Health Visitor gave her information about the Children’s Centre. She ended up going “every morning and every afternoon... Whatever that was on within walking distance we went to... [there’s] something different on everyday, you can go and have a laugh”.

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A White British family described feeling excluded from the local community activities due to the behaviour of one local politician: “There was a politician that came to H’s [next door neighbour’s]. Everybody [Asian community] was in there. I asked if I could go in, but they wouldn’t let me... They told me they wanted all the whites off the street”.

Arts, Leisure and Culture

Participants did not often express views on the provision of arts, leisure and culture as a whole. Instead, participants tended to focus on a perceived lack of appropriate parks and open spaces for children and teenagers to play. The few parks available to participants were often described as unsafe places for their children. One Bangladeshi father told researchers: “There’s a park near by, Boundary Park, but I wouldn’t go there now because you see people drinking and I don’t want my children to see that”. Alexandra Park was generally acknowledged as being a pleasant place but for many people with small children they found it “too far”, as expressed by one single mother from St Mary’s. Many parents also expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of youth centres in the area, believing it contributed to more teenagers hanging around on the streets and causing trouble.

Many participants expressed the view that other activities in the area were too expensive or not well publicised enough. One young Pakistani father who lived in Glodwick said: “The Sports Centre is £4- we can’t afford it”. A White British father told researchers: “they need to publicise what’s on more- we don’t know where to go to find out”. 3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH SERVICES: OLDHAM FINDINGS
Father: “I have lots of relatives in this area. My brother lives two streets away, my sister lives five streets away with her three sons and one daughter. We visit each other’s houses all the time, but live separately”.

Father: “Parenthood just comes automatically. My family are always around so I just help sometimes but not all the time. Their mum looked after them a lot when they were little, and she would ask for help sometimes, but normally I would just go out for shopping and work, cos that is what I do”.

Mother: “[My daily routine is] I wake up, pray, have breakfast, change the babies’ nappies, and get them breakfast. When it’s the holidays we wake up at seven O’clock, but in school time I wake up earlier. I get the kids to school and come back to look after the babies”.

The following information reflects the issues raised by a participant interviewed in their own home by an Oldham Council employee. The interview was organised through a Sure Start Centre, and recorded by a note-taker from thinkpublic. As far as possible the notes below represent comments directly made by the participant in response to questions and prompts from the interviewer.

**Interviewer:** Mother and father together.
**Relationship Status:** Married.
**Children:** Five children, of one, two, nine, ten and 15.
**Ethnicity:** Bangladeshi.
**Time in Oldham:** Both moved to England 17 years ago.
**Employment status:** Father works evenings in a take away. Mother takes care of the children full time.

**Further information:**
The father’s mother, sister and brother, and his eight sons all live in the area. The mother has four sisters and one brother. One is in Canada, one in France, one in Oxford, and another in London.
**Housing:** Live in an Aksa Housing Association property

Father: “I came here 17 years ago, but we’ve been in this house for ten years. We got married in Bangladesh and after eight months we got entry. We first lived ... round the corner, then we moved here...We used to see my family every few months, but now it’s just once a year because we’ve got the children now, and we’ve got such a big family”.

Mother: “I came here 17 years ago, but we’ve been in this house for ten years. We got married in Bangladesh and after eight months we got entry. We first lived ... round the corner, then we moved here...We used to see my family every few months, but now it’s just once a year because we’ve got the children now, and we’ve got such a big family”.

Mother: “[My daily routine is] I wake up, pray, have breakfast, change the babies’ nappies, and get them breakfast. When it’s the holidays we wake up at seven O’clock, but in school time I wake up earlier. I get the kids to school and come back to look after the babies”.

INTERVIEW STUDY 4: OLDHAM
Mother: "My sister-in-law helps with childcare. The oldest son also helps with nappies and feeding them as well. My next door neighbour [who is also from Bangladesh] sometimes helps out as well, or did when the children were younger. She’s been living next door for years, so we’ve got to know her. She would come over and help out. But now they’ve grown up and got married and have children of their own".

Father: “We are always talking, freely [with our neighbour], we see each other in the garden, and just pop over to each other’s houses”.

Father: "[My daily routine is] I wake up, have breakfast, do the family shopping, and sometimes business shopping too to help my boss. I sometimes have a meeting for a community activity and then I go to work. At 3.15 I collect children from school in the car... I come home late at night so I don’t get up in the morning. My sister comes over and helps with the kids".

Mother: "This morning I was at the doctor with a personal problem. It’s not a regular thing, it’s only occasional [that I go there]. The doctor’s nice, she speaks Bangla too". 

Father: “We manage, we help each other, there are lots of people around us who can help. My mum and sister are very supportive".

Mother: “Our older children are all OK, but we have concerns about K. [the two year old]. She is not talking and she often falls ill. She gets coughs and colds and she’s anaemic too... it started when she was around one year old. Between 9-12 months she was ill four times, and she eventually was crying and vomiting all day and night so we took her to the hospital. She stayed in there one night, and after that she’s never been the same again. She was talking at four months, saying “mama” and “dada” but now she doesn’t say anything. She’s in her own little world, just walking around all the time... at first I didn’t notice, but after a couple of months I started worrying because she wasn’t saying a word”.

Father: “Now with her condition no one can leave her on her own. We worry she might do something... She doesn’t know what she is doing... We’ve been everywhere, running around to different services; the hospital, Speech and Language, hearing test, running everywhere. The hospital referred to Speech and Language, but we haven’t been there yet. We’ve also got a hearing test at the ICC coming up cos she doesn’t respond to her own name... There’s been no diagnosis at the moment”.

Mother: "We had a good Health Visitor that used to come every couple of weeks, but then she stopped coming. At 16 months I phoned her up and said I was worried, but they sent a different Health Visitor, but this one isn’t so good. She came once and that was it. She said “I haven’t seen anyone with this behaviour before”, but then she didn’t come back... She sent us a letter saying she was going to come a month ago, but then she didn’t come, or didn’t even cancel the appointment. I saw her at the CAF meeting the other week, but that was it”. 

Mum: “The previous Health Visitor was good because she used to come and observe me with K...[two year old daughter], and then take notes and give them to me so I could take them to my doctor and understand what was going on. This one doesn’t come to observe, and she doesn’t give me much information. I’m concerned and she’s not supporting me. If she’d come to observe she could have helped me understand more what was going on”.

Father: “Money at the moment is a problem. Spending has gone very high in everything. Cooking oil used to be 60p per litre and now costs £1.20. Petrol costs £1.34. It does affect our daily life, but we manage. Sometimes my sister gives us money, and she works only one day a week!”. 

Father: “The house condition is OK in the summer, it’s fine".

Mother: “But when it’s cold [ weather] the two rooms upstairs get very cold, and there’s a cracked ceiling. Every year we must paint it and do the ceilings and walls to make it better”. 

Father: “The area is OK, we are just a bit concerned about the young lads who hang around, and the drugs. I come..."
home from work at 12.30 and there are young lads and girls around, drinking vodka and smoking”.

Mother: “There’s a park near by, Boundary Park, but I wouldn’t go there now because you see people drinking and I don’t want my children to see that. My older son is 16 but I won’t let him go out much because he’ll see bad things and it will influence him”.

Father: “There’s no playground nearby so we can’t let them go out on their own. I’ve spoken to the council lots of times. There’s empty space just behind our house which they could build something on, but they never do anything. Our window has been broken four times by kids playing in the street, but you can’t blame them, cos they’ve got nowhere else to play”.

Mother: “I’m scared driving out the drive, cos there’s always small children on the street and you can’t always see them”.

Father: “In Coldhurst you won’t find a single playground. I used to go to political meetings and was so surprised by how the councillors never make an issue out of anything. They never cut any grass or clean any rubbish... and then the local councillor lives in a million pound house in Chadderton. How can he know what to do about the area when he doesn’t live here?”.

Father: “I want my children to be able to do cultural activities. There are no opportunities here. I want my son to get good qualifications so then he can establish his life and get a good job. I am very upset they are missing out on a lot of activities, like sports, and other events. There’s no playground so they must stay at home during holidays, or otherwise we have to take them to other places. We take them to places like Oxford, Cambridge, and London”.

Mother: “I want to leave Oldham and go to another town, to a better area, but I can’t cos all my husband’s family are here. I want to go to Oxford or Cambridge. The atmosphere there is so different. I want them to go there and have a better quality of life, better education and facilities”.

Mother: “For myself there are education opportunities here, but my kids are a barrier. I was enrolled on an English class but I couldn’t go because K... [the two year old] was getting ill so frequently. Before she was born I was attending college and my other kids were all at school. I was doing entry level three ESOL classes. I couldn’t take the exam cos I was heavily pregnant”.

Mother: “To improve things here I would like Aksa [the Housing Association] to do refurbishments on the house and we’d like a play area for the kids. To make things better for K [the two year old] it would have been good if she could have carried on going to something like Play and Stay at St Hilda’s. Most of the time I couldn’t take her because she’s been ill, but I think she really could have benefitted from interacting more with other kids, she could have learnt from what they were doing”.

Father: “I’m a school governor at my son’s school. I go to meetings and continually speak to them. At the moment they’re getting very good results. At first they weren’t doing so well, when he [oldest son] started eight years ago it had bad results, but the school is now improving. My daughter and son both received certificates saying “good attitude” and things, and they are both in the top group in maths and other classes. Overall the education system in Oldham is OK, but lots of families aren’t supporting their children, and the school can’t do anything without their involvement. Some parents are supporting but many are not”.

Father: “To improve, the council need to provide grounds for social activities, it will improve the kids. There’s no activities at the moment, and the school is one thing, but they need support from things outside in the community and parents too. When you go places like Oxford and Cambridge it’s completely different. My sister lives there and she isn’t educated, but their children are now getting well educated. Society there is completely different, in school they all compete to get better grades. They have lots of other activities there. Most of their children are established with good grades and social activities”.

Father: “There’s not enough employment in Oldham at the moment. Most jobs are covered by illegal people, people can pay them less money. Legal people aren’t getting jobs. I’m getting minimum wage, and businesses know they can get away with paying people less...the cost of running a business has gone up, so people are trying to cut costs wherever they can, so they go illegal”.  

Father: “In Coldhurst you won’t find a single playground. I used to go to political meetings and was so surprised by how the councillors never make an issue out of anything. They never cut any grass or clean any rubbish... and then the local councillor lives in a million pound house in Chadderton.
place
noun

1 a particular position, point, or area in space; a location.

2 a portion of space designated or available for or being used by someone.

Source: Oxford University Press
4. Sense of Place: Wigan Findings

There was an interesting paradox in how many people talked about Wigan. Many participants complained about drugs and alcohol being prevalent, and spoke of their fears about negative influences on their children. However, very few expressed a desire to move away. One mother who had moved to Wigan from Glasgow when she was a teenager described how she felt about the area:

“\textit{I moved to Norley when I was pregnant, and it was the best thing I had ever done...}”

“I’ve moved around all over the place in the past, and now I’m staying where I am. I want him [her first child] to grow up here. I don’t get no bother, me, I just walk around chatting to everyone. I’m just a normal person... A dead body was found just up the road this morning, that’s what someone said cos they saw a tent up, and all the forensics and everything. They can’t tell who it is. It’s nasty. It does happen around here... in drug alley around the corner there’s been a few murders here. My friend found a dead body there, another one hung himself, another one overdosed on smack, another one hung himself—he was always taking drugs and drinking... But no! It don’t bother me, it’s just gossip to me, it don’t affect my life”. On a similar theme, another mother told us: “I’ve lived here all my life and I hate it...it’s full of smack heads... but my daughter is more than likely going to grow up around here...it’s not where you grow up it’s how you bring them up”.

For many, relationships with family and friends were described as the most valuable thing about the area where they lived. These relationships seemed to create a sense of belonging and of being able to communicate openly with people around them. Another mother who had suffered from postnatal depression described what the community meant to her:

“I moved to Norley when I was pregnant and it was the best thing I had ever done... My neighbours were really supportive. They would wake up in the afternoon and they’d been in and put my tea on and done my ironing, so things were ready for when the twins got home. People with the least, gives the most. I was literate. I could read and write, so I helped the neighbours with their forms and they would do my ironing. It was like a bartering system”.

Not all parents were so positive about the area they lived in. One mother suffering from anxiety was trying to protect her son from the bad influences in the area and so had moved away from her friends and family: “we’ve moved over to Springfield now and he doesn’t know anyone around there... he just plays with his eight year old cousin, so that’s alright...”. However, it was difficult for her to completely distance herself from the community, because her mum and sisters still lived in the Norley Hall area.

Concerns over safety and the need to avoid certain people in their area were commonly expressed by many participants. One mother who had experienced domestic violence spoke of buying a bullmastiff because “You need a big dog to feel safe around here. It’s for protection more than a pet if anyone broke in, and the pet attacked them, it would just be put down...I won’t go to the shops at night. There are too many gangs of lads outside”. On another occasion, a father told us of his fears of the needles in the alley way behind the post office: “My daughter could go around and pick one up”.

Transport links were often described by participants as inadequate. Not many participants had cars, and buses were ‘extortionate’: “It’s cheaper to get taxis than buses—now only £3.20 to Asda. If I went on the bus it would be £2, and £1 for each child once they turn 5”.

One mother with four children spoke of the difficulties she had arranging travel for her family: “We have to take our oldest son to Manchester every six months for a check up and my other son who is eight to see a nutritionist in Manchester... We don’t have a car so it’s either on the bus or taxis but they are really expensive. It’s a real pain. Its costs us £1.90 to get into Leigh on the bus so it’s too expensive for all the family”.

Immigration and racism was rarely raised as an issue for any of the participants. 45 of the 48 participants we spoke to were born in England. No immigrants to Wigan spoke of having experienced racism. The only reference to immigration came from a Wigan resident in relation to Housing. (see “Housing” section P.45).
4. Sense of Place: Oldham Findings

A lack of social cohesion was one of the most prevalent themes to emerge from interviews with participants in Oldham. The majority of interviewees raised the issue racial tensions without being prompted, and residents often brought up the 2001 race riots (perhaps linked to the publicity about the 10 year anniversary). Participants often spoke of a fear and mistrust of others and expressed a desire for a more ‘together’ community.

One White British family who lived on the St Mary’s Estate said: “Next door are alright, because we have got to know each other a bit... but a lot of them won’t even open their doors to us. My concern is why there are only Asian families [getting the local houses]. Her sister is in Failsworth and she’s desperate to get somewhere here”. He went on to say that: “J… down the road keeps an eye out for the kids... They [the Asian neighbours] don’t talk to you... I’d love it for everyone to get on. This separation is how riots start, and I don’t want my children growing up with that”.

A father who had moved to Oldham from Guinea with his wife said: “the way I do things is very different to the way you do things. Outside you people on the street when you see someone [a white person] on the phone you think they are happy and friendly. When you see black people on the phone you think something else...White and black have become good and bad. Here your neighbours don’t care about you. People are not welcoming. I thought it was because I was black, but now I accept it’s just the way that they live... I just wish it was a cosmopolitan town...don’t reject people, we need information and communication- you need to mix people”. He went on to explain: “They need to create spaces so that people can be involved with families’ problems. It’s hard to meet people here. Everybody keeps themselves to themselves. It’s a misunderstanding. I don’t blame them they don’t know me. They probably think the same about me”.

A mother from Pakistan who lived with her husband and his extended family in a ten bedroom house in Glodwick said: “I moved here six years ago as I got married, my husband is from here. I don’t find people here very friendly. I came from the Midlands, just before we got married there were the big riots in Oldham, I feel like there is more racism here than anywhere else, it’s the people around here and the atmosphere...I thought it looked like a nice house, but my husband said if riots go off again it will be the first place to go ”.

The policy of placing people awaiting a decision on their immigration status in Oldham appeared to contribute to residents lacking a sense of connection to the community they lived in. One Zimbabwean father of two who had been moved several times whilst awaiting his immigration status told researchers: “It wasn’t my choice to live here- we were just put here by the council...They don’t let you know what they are doing until they tell you if you can stay or not. It’s really unsettling- you can’t have a plan, cos you could leave at any moment...But you have to keep optimistic- you have to keep the faith”.

“[They [the Asian neighbours]] don’t talk to you… I’d love it for everyone to get on. This separation is how riots start, and I don’t want my children growing up with that.”

Participants who moved to Oldham primarily for work or educational opportunities also expressed a lack of loyalty to the area for different reasons. They often spoke of being just as happy to live somewhere else, and being likely to move away when their work or course came to an end. A Nigerian woman with no friends or family in the area told us; “We’ve been in Oldham for five years. We moved here for my husband’s work- he was working in Manchester. He’s not working anymore... We’re trying to get work but it’s not easy. There’s no jobs in Oldham. My husband found one as a support worker [in London] working with children with behavioural problems [so we are moving there]”.

For some participants, it appeared that this fear and lack of connection to the area was affecting their children’s lives. One Ugandan mother who had recently come to Oldham to study told us: “I don’t trust my kids with anyone, if I let my kids play with anyone... they haven’t made friends [in the area] yet... I don’t know if they are good or bad”.

In areas with a substantial majority of a particular ethnic group participants who belonged to the majority ethnic group often expressed a greater feeling of social cohesion to other participants in Oldham. One Pakistani resident
in Glodwick described the area as: “Glodwick...it’s a safe environment, its close knit and I like that...I work at weekends, so they [parents] look after her... I am fortunate to have my family around. I wouldn't be able to work otherwise”.

Some participants complained about the cleanliness of their neighbourhoods. One participant, a mother living in Glodwick, said: “People in Glodwick don’t care about cleaning up... why don’t people clean up their own mess?”. Another Glodwick resident who was a young Pakistani father told researchers: “Oldham Council are lazy bastards. There’s rubbish in the streets and big rats. I tell the council but they don’t come for ages. They do clean the streets and do recycling, but what does this do to help us?”

Participants in both St Mary’s and Coldhurst complained about not feeling safe in their local area. Views on crime and personal safety were often expressed in racial terms. A young Pakistani father told researchers: “Every other day someone’s house gets robbed. Security cameras around make us feel humiliated – makes us feel like us Pakis are criminals”. A father from Guinea said: “The first condition of your children is the area and environment. The children need to be educated. They are listening and picking up on things all the time. I cannot tell them not to go out”.

Some parents spoke positively about the convenient nature of the area they lived in, with shops, schools and other facilities all within walking distance. A Bangladeshi father told researchers: “I like the area. I have lived in Oldham for 19 years. We have shops and schools and the town centre is very convenient for me”. A Chinese mother who had lived in Oldham for two years said: “The shopping centre nearby is very convenient”. One Ugandan mother who had moved to the area to study said: “I can access everything easier, I like the shops but I came back here for uni”. Another White British father who had lived in Oldham all his life said: “Living in Coldhurst is OK cos you can walk into town...also it’s close to the motorway”. He also said he had seen improvements in the area, particularly around Alexandra Park, which “had got better and having security was good”. He explained that the park had previously been a ‘no go’ area.

“Every other day someone’s house gets robbed. Security cameras around make us feel humiliated.”
Housing

noun

1 [mass noun] houses and flats considered collectively: [as modifier] : a housing development

2 the provision of accommodation: [as modifier] : a housing association

Source: Oxford University Press
5. HOUSING: WIGAN FINDINGS

Neither the quality of housing, nor the waiting period to be housed, were highlighted as problems by many Wigan participants. Participants spoke of being generally able to find accommodation very near to their family, which was a primary concern to the majority of participants.

The main complaint seemed to be that houses were not always big enough for all their children: "My sister is in a two bedroom house with four kids and there’s no room for anything, all their clothes are in boxes". One father, separated from his child’s mother, told us "[my daughter] can’t stay with me at the moment because she can’t sleep on the sofa". However, even he seemed to think he was in for a good chance of getting a bigger place as a result.

There were complaints of a lengthy wait for rehousing. One participant complained that she had "been on the list for five years" and her current home was "hectic...can’t move...too small...two bedrooms... don't seem interested [housing supplier]...two cots, two beds, one room". Another participant said "I’m trying to get a move, I’m only in a two bedroom house but they won’t move me. My partner has three kids from a previous relationship, he has a 14 year old who can’t stop over because he can’t stay in the same room as the girls. I want a move to Pemberton, Norley or Worsley Hall but preferably Norley as they have bigger houses and I definitely don’t want to move too far. I could be looking at another five years on the waiting list."

Another mother said “I’ve got a three bedroom house and all my sons have to share a bedroom. There aren’t any four bedroomed houses on the estate and I wouldn’t want to move away.”

There were some complaints about the state of the houses but in these cases there was an acknowledgement that repairs were carried out promptly. "The houses are disgusting, they’re just tiny and there’s always something wrong with them but the repairs are carried out when reported to the contact centre.” Another mother explained “I don’t feel like I get listened to. It’s like you really have to kick off before they’ll listen. When we moved into the house it was filthy. I told them we weren’t going to move in until it was decorated. They said no, so I kicked off.”

One mother felt that there is a problem with immigrants taking priority in being housed by the council: "It’s not that easy now to get a house here, it used to be when I came here 11 years ago but things have changed now. My cousin can’t get a house because the list is reserved for refugees and things like that. If you have a roof over your head you don’t get anything, even if you’re overcrowded". No one else described this perception.
“Bringing up a 0-5 year old in this area is crap...There is nothing to do. I’m stuck in the house all the time. There are baby groups but I don’t want to go there, the kids do my head in. There used to be a kids club here but it stopped because there was no one to run it. St.Cuthberts does a gardening club after school. My daughter goes there but I don’t know why, she never does any gardening for me. My eldest does drama and cheer leading. She doesn’t want to go because it’s not proper cheer leading, they don’t have the pom-poms and costumes like they do in America.

“I got some information from Sure Start, but I won’t go because I don’t like the people. The workers are alright but I don’t like the people. One little girl screams all the time, and the parents don’t look after the kids properly.

“I have had postnatal depression for 14 years with all the kids, and all the support is stopping because there is no funding. I have had a Link Worker, who called in and looked after the children for an hour every day, but she is going because the funding is going. There are a lot of people going to come crashing down because the support is going. The Link Worker is great because I could just talk...He [the baby] is going to do my head in today.

“I’m trying to get a move. I’m only in a two bedroom house but they won’t move me. My partner has three kids from a previous relationship. He has a 14 year old who can’t stop over because he can’t stay in the same room as the girls. I want to move to Pemberton, Norley or Worsley Hall but preferably Norley as they have bigger houses and I definitely don’t want to move too far. I could be looking at another five years on the waiting list. I registered in 2006 but I had rent arrears so they stopped any transfer but I have paid up the arrears now.

“My partner is lazy. He can only get agency work. He really depresses me. It’s not worth him working and coming off the income support for one day’s work. He has been out of work for five years.

“We do our food shopping at Asda. It’s handy but absolutely extortionate. He [points at her baby] eats like a pig and more than the 11 year old, and the girls eat like pigs too, so everything is always running low. It’s not an easy life living round here.

“We can’t go out unless we save up. The kids wanted to go to Chester Zoo so I’ve saved up. It took me a few weeks to save up and we are going at the weekend but we are going to be short
of money by the end of next week. It's about £100 with the tickets and food.

"I worked for three months in the pound shop in Wigan but they laid me off. I'll go back to work part time when he goes to school.

"I don't feel safe where I live, it's full of hooligans round here... I just got a dog. He's a pup. He's a cross between a Bullmastiff and a New Foundland. You need a big dog to feel safe round here. It's for protection more than a pet, if anyone broke in, and the pet attacked them, it would just be put down.

"My family is not really supportive. We are all there for each other, if push came to shove but it's not like it used to be, but I don't really want any friends around here. But then I wouldn't move anywhere else because of my children's schools. I was moved so many times when I was little I would never move my kids.

"A typical day for me would be: get the kids up, breakfast, get the kids to school, back from school, clean up, (well I say clean up but the house is a shit hole at the minute because I'm so tired), take the dog for a walk, kids home from school, tea, kids go to bed... and partner doesn't help at all... once I've saved up enough money he's gone and he isn't coming back.

"On the footpath from Bramble House to Newtown you find loads of needles. I wouldn't send my kids to the shop after 9pm, they have to stay in the street".

"Alcohol is a really big problem round here. If it's nice, they start at 1am in the street, and it's all the time. Seeing people drinking alcohol in the street doesn't affect my kids now but it will do.

"I want my children to be better than me, I want them to finish school. I left school at 15 and had a child. I drum it into my kids – "do you wanna end up like me? No you don't!" I say to my six year old – "what happens when you kiss a boy?" and she says "you have a baby, eeewww!".

"All the support is being withdrawn. "Right from the Start" is being withdrawn. I'll really miss the key worker. There is nothing left for me to do. I will really miss the counselling.

"I have been on the waiting list for four weeks to see a counsellor for cognitive counselling. It's where they give you hard tasks to do that you have to complete. But I could be waiting anywhere up to six months. The doctor couldn't have done much more.

"I've got two children from a former relationship, two children from a current relationship, three children from my partner's previous relationship who stay every Friday... he wonders why I have schitz attacks! I throw him out and he goes to live with his mum. Usually he moves out for a week. This happens at least once a year, at least.

"The house is in my name and he's not coming on it. I've not got any energy to clean, the house is a shit hole at present.

"His mum lives at Worsley Mesnes. She is the one that bought the car; he thinks it's an eternal debt to her. She doesn't like me and I don't like her but we tolerate each other for the kids. She babysits her son... he's a right mummy's boy.

"His [her partner's] typical day starts at 11pm. He drinks, then he goes on the computer, he goes to bed at some point, usually wakes up at 1pm and goes to his mum's to see if she needs anything doing and that's pretty much it.

"Really I'm like a single parent even though I'm not.

"He would rather me go to work and him stay in the house.

"My previous partner strangled me. I won't be beaten up by a man or a woman. None of the children have contact with him or his family even though they live locally. I was with him for one year two months, but I've been with C... [current partner] for nine years.

"It would be really useful to have a drop in centre to speak to people for just five or ten minutes... that's all it takes sometimes. At the doctors you need to make an appointment and then wait a week to be seen, and then when you get there they want you out. But by then it's all over.
5. HOUSING: OLDHAM FINDINGS

Housing was described as a major source of stress for many participants from Oldham. Interviewees were quick to bring up problems of damp in their houses, and repairs that took “forever” to get done. Participants often described a feeling of a lack of control over their own homes. They felt they had to constantly “hound” First Choice Homes before getting a response. They also described being prevented from acting independently, as First Choice Homes warned them against doing repairs themselves. One White British father said: “it’s going to take three weeks to repair the kitchen light, and it took five weeks to get the communal landing lighting fixed – I could do it so easily, but I can’t because I could get charged for it and they say it’s against Health & Safety”. One Pakistani mother was disappointed by the quality of repairs carried out by First Choice Homes: “they came to do it [fix the bathroom] but they don’t do it as properly as we would do”. Participants described feeling frustrated and unable to take responsibility for their own homes.

Many participants spoke of concerns for their own health and that of their children as a result of damp in their homes. One African father described how his whole family now slept in one room so as to avoid the damp in the rest of the flat: “I am worried about my children’s health, they may get asthma... We sleep on one mattress in the front room; me, my wife and two children, I am scared of rolling over onto my children and hurting them”. Another mother had visited the Citizens’ Advice Bureau (CAB) to get advice about taking First Choice Homes to court due to the health problems her daughter was experiencing, that she felt were caused by their damp house.

“A number of participants complained about the unfairness of the system for allocating social housing. One White British participant described the ‘points system’ as being “stacked against us... they give priority to those who work voluntarily for the council. Because we work, we can’t do that”. The same family felt they also suffered as a result of being a White British family: “people who move into the country get the priority... people like us feel like second class citizens – they come here wanting to milk the free schools and NHS”. The African father (referenced above for living in a damp property) told researchers “I have bid on other properties, about 15 a week, but because I am on ‘standard priority’ I have no chance”.

Participants also expressed frustration over the welfare system in relation to housing entitlements. Two of the couples interviewed explained that they had chosen not to live together so their benefits wouldn’t be cut back. As one White British mother said: “If I let him live with me, then I won’t get my benefits or my house, so I’ve made a decision not to let him live with us”.
Father: “It’s not easy [being off work]. I’ve been to College today to try and find a course but it’s hopeless...I’ve not got any GCSEs”.

Mother: “We’ve been in this house for nine years...The houses are brilliant...If it wasn’t for Barnado’s there’d be nothing [to do in the area]...Coldhurst Park...I wouldn’t call it a park”.

Father: “there isn’t any swings around or anything, it’s boring”.

Mother: “I used to live in Limehouse and organise activities, but here there’s nothing, only Barnado’s...[and] we take them swimming”.

Father: “We have to pay for it [swimming] and it’s them, people like H...[Asian next door neighbour] that come over to this country and get it for free. I don’t mind if it’s free or not but I think it should be fair”.

Father: “[...] down the road keeps an eye out for our kids...They [Asian neighbours] don’t talk to you...I’d love it for everyone to get on”.

Mother: “The school have been really good. His [eight year old son’s] last report was really good. He goes to Holy Cross”.

The following information reflects the issues raised by participants interviewed in their own home by an Oldham Council employee. The researchers met the couple in the street and were invited to interview them at home. The interview was recorded by a note-taker from thinkpublic. As far as possible the notes below represent comments directly made by the participant in response to questions and prompts from the interviewer.

Interviewee: Mother (28) and father (32)
Relationship Status: Married.
Children: Two children of eight and four years.
Ethnicity: White British
Time in Oldham: Both participants grew up in Oldham.
Employment status: Father has been off work for two years with a foot injury. Mother looks after the children full-time.
Housing: Live in a First Choice Homes Property in the St Mary’s Estate.
Father: “I’ve been back on Job Seekers since my operation was done... Oldham Royal discharged me at work. They told me that it was recovered, and I was okay to go back to work, but it just snapped straight away... My old job are holding me a post until I have the sign off from the doctor, but they can’t tell me how long that will be... I worked my way up to a supervisor.”

Mother: “I went back to work [after I had my children]. I really enjoyed it, but it got harder and harder to pick the kids up... And if we had to get a childminder in then what’s the point? It would be too expensive.”

Mother: “We used to have family around, but my grandma has moved to Blackpool... Other family members have moved away, or gone to prison.”

Father: “When we first moved there was lots of White families. Now they are filling it up with Asian families. Now they won’t talk to us, we’ve tried... Next door are alright, because we have got to know each other a bit, and they are right next door... but a lot of them won’t even open their doors to us. My concern is why are there only Asian families? Her sister is in Failsworth and she is desperate to get somewhere here.”

Mother: “When our window was leaking I rang up [First Choice Homes] and said, when it rains, it rains in my house... it took them seven months to fix it... you have to hound them.”

Mother: “They [the children] are always nagging for stuff. He wants a Nintendo DS, but we just can’t afford it... We’re going on holiday... We can’t wait; we have been saving up for a year. It’s all inclusive, with a water park. They are going to love it.”

Father: “We get DLA for L... [four year old who has a hearing impairment], that’s really helped.”

Mother: “[The highlight of being a parent], it’s watching them grow up.”

Mother: “The hardest times were when C... [the eight year old] was younger... he was very clingy me, and wouldn’t settle with his father... I used to go out when he got home after work and sit on the bench at the end of the street so that I could get some space. He was the devil... I used to call the Health Visitor up, she used to come over for a brew when it was difficult.”

Mother: “I love living here because the park is so close... You can get anywhere on the bus. We need a park.”

Mother: “On days like this [when it’s sunny] the kids go out and play, and we go to Oldham Edge in the car for a walk. But once you have done it 20 times, they get a bit bored.”

Father: “There is trouble round here because of the druggies... They appear from nowhere, as people you haven’t seen before, but then before you know it they have gone again.”

Mother: “I’ve put a complaint in about all the dog poo and they told me to take a photograph of it. I called them and said “you get paid for it, you do it”. I see the people that are doing it, but I’m not going to go around and be the spy.”

Father: “There was a politician that came to H...’s [next door neighbour’s]. Everybody [from the Asian community] was in there. I asked if I could go in, but they wouldn’t let me... They told me they wanted all the whites off the street... I’d love it for everybody to get on. This separation is how riots start, and I don’t want my children growing up with that... We’ve got African, and Chinese people down our street. We all get on, but they never join us... Maybe that’s part of their culture, but I don’t like things going on in peoples homes. I told them, if you’ve got something to say to me, then just say it.”

Father: “We used to have street parties where everybody joins in, but now nobody join’s in”.

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employment

noun

1 the state of having paid work: a fall in the numbers in full-time employment

the action of giving work to someone.

[count noun] a person’s trade or profession.

2 the utilization of something: economies can be made by the full employment of existing facilities.

Source: Oxford University Press
We discussed the issue of employment with 43 participants. 19 of these participants were in relationships where the father or male partner was the sole breadwinner. Of the remaining participants, four were in relationships where both partners worked, eight were single mothers who did not work and eight were in relationships where neither partner worked, two were in relationships where the mother was the sole breadwinner, and two were mothers that volunteered at Children’s Centres. Amongst participants who worked, most worked in low skilled and manual occupations.

As the majority of participants were mothers perceptions of work were predominantly expressed from the female perspective. Many female participants were not currently working and were perceived by researchers as being proud of being ‘full-time mums’. A number of mothers did, however, express a desire to return to work once the children were at school. When expressing this desire they identified various factors that made this difficult, including a belief in the importance of a mother spending time with her children, the challenges of finding flexible employment and childcare arrangements, and the loss of personal confidence in their ability to find and sustain work. This mother’s response was typical: “I don’t work, he [my partner] works at ASDA...when he [my son] goes to school I will look for somewhere to work...I used to pack pharmaceutical drugs”. She had previously attempted to return to work but said: “I didn’t like it ...I [now] put all my work into him [my son]...I don’t understand how people work and pay for childcare...I don’t want him to be brought up by strangers”.

Mothers often mentioned a lack of affordable childcare options as a significant barrier to returning to employment. For some, childcare provided by families played a key role in enabling a return to work: “When I go back to work, the in-laws will have him, they had A [her son] when I started going back to work before as well. My mother in law used to go to Sure Start with A’. However, for other participants, parents and other family members were unable to provide this support because they themselves worked.

Another single mother spoke of how she felt that getting back to work would increase their confidence and restore their feeling of independence. One mother who worked as a paralegal said: “I don’t want to think that I’m never going to use my brain again...for my own ambition and self satisfaction...and for the girls [her children] to see me being at work and not just a housewife”.

I did want to go back to college, but I think I’m too old now, I’m 30! I want to go back to picking and packing, but I want shift hours, to bring enough money in to support the family. Picking and packing is the only thing I know that pays enough”.

Participants frequently identified a lack of personal confidence as a barrier to returning to work. One mother described how she had lost confidence in her ability to work since she became a mother: “I was born in Glasgow but I moved here when I was 12. I used to love drama when I was at school, I was always in the top set, but then I came here and there was nothing. I used to love childcare too… I’ve got lots of interests, but cos I’ve been out of work for so long now, I don’t know...I don’t know, I just chat to my friends instead [of getting a job]”.

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“Two mothers described how they were building their confidence and skills by volunteering at Children’s Centres: “I’ve helped out on reception here and I have also joined the parental forum so we can say what we like or don’t like, or what we want. It’s really good. It gets me out. I’d be at home on my own otherwise...I’d like to go back into childcare. But I know I haven’t worked in so long, that’s why I’m volunteering”. Another mother had successfully returned to work through volunteering: “I started as a volunteer here at West Field and now I work here. I want to help other mums, I love helping other mums. My boss tells me that sometimes...”
I do too much but it’s because I want to help people. They are open with me because of the way I am". She told us about how working had benefitted her confidence: “When I had my twins, I felt as though I lost my identity. I was just known as ‘mum’. Now that I work I’ve got my name back. People know me for being me”.

One Turkish father described how his general perception was that people in Wigan and England in general had “lost the desire to work, and lost the plot to encourage children [about] the importance of working”. Both he and his wife were employed in shift work and shared childcare. He described his concern when his daughter asked him “can we not spend time as a family?”. His response was: “England has become soft... I don’t want my kids to think it is OK not to work”.

**Budgeting and Personal Finance**

The majority of participants described money as a key concern for their family but said that they were “managing”. Some participants mentioned noticing that gas and electric bills had risen significantly and that supporting children was an expensive task. Participants described having to be very careful with their money to survive: “We do our food shopping at Asda, its handy but absolutely extortionate, [points to baby] and he eats like a pig and more than the 11 year old, and the girls eat like pigs too, so everything is always running low, it’s not an easy life living round here”. One mother told us: “I want to get back into work. My husband is a manager for McDonalds. We manage alright on one income but we have to organise ourselves... we watch what we spend. We live on £15,000. We get what we can afford, not what we want”.

“A lot of young people don’t know how to budget. It took me four years to learn how to budget... no one teaches you how to budget, it needs to be on the curriculum”.

Some participants mentioned having to sacrifice things they needed in order to afford treats and leisure activities for the children. One mother said: “We can’t go out unless we save up. The kids wanted to go to Chester Zoo, so I’ve saved up. It took me a few weeks to save up and we can go at the weekend but we are going to be short of money by the end of next week. It’s about £100 with the tickets and food”.

Budgeting was described by some as key to a comfortable life. One mother who had grown up in a wealthy village outside of Wigan told us: “A lot of young people don’t know how to budget. It took me four years to learn how to budget... no one teaches you how to budget, it needs to be on the curriculum”. Another mother talked proudly about her partner’s ability to save money: “He’s a proper saver- I call him skinny, tight. But he gives me anything I want within reason. He’ll compare prices of nappies and fabric conditioner. I’ve known him for 20 years- I knew he had a good head on him. He knows what he’s doing and he’s a good dad. But I never knew he was like that with money”. She spoke of how he had been able to buy her a “mini mansion” as a result.

Two participants said they were bearing the burden of debt created by an ex-partner. One father who was also carer for his partner’s children from a previous relationship said: “It’s an uphill battle paying for the gas. My girlfriend’s ex put his name on the bills and then he ran up a massive bill. We’re having to pay it back. So if we put £30 on a week, they take £20”. Another mother described how she was unable to get a council property due to a debt on a previous house caused by her ex-partner vandalising it. She was now living further away from the rest of her family in private rented accommodation and suffering from serious anxiety.
Of the 42 participants interviewed in Oldham, 19 were in relationships where just the father was working, five where both partners were working, seven were single mums and were not working and, one was in a relationship where neither partner was working, and two were prevented from working due to their immigration status.

Some participants demonstrated a real dedication to working. One White British father who was currently working in a foundry, told researchers: “I’ve been made redundant nine times but normally only been out of work for a couple of weeks – I go out canvassing”. Another father responded to being made redundant by setting up his own business as a self-employed joiner.

Amongst the Bangladeshi participants, many fathers were employed in restaurants or food shops, often working shifts at night. One Bangladeshi father who had moved to the area to run a shop told us: “they [the Bangladeshi community] are very poor...Many work in take-aways and restaurants...due to discrimination in the mainstream labour market”.

For mothers who did express a desire to work, childcare was identified as a barrier. One White British mother who lived with her partner and their two children told researchers: “I went back to work, I really enjoyed it, but it got harder and harder to pick the kids up. And if we had to get a childminder in then what’s the point? It would be too expensive”. Another White British mother told us: “I didn’t want to quit work, I love work, but it left me with about £40 a month”. Motivations for returning to work included greater self-reliance and to be a positive role for their children. One Chinese mother said her main goal in life was to be able to “depend on ourselves. I want to work, I don’t want so much depending on the government”. Another said, “It would get them to see that you have to get up and get out to earn money, and you can’t just stay in and rely on other people for money”.

Some participants spoke of the Job Centre as being the first place to go to when looking for a job but rarely described it leading to employment. One single mother had a particularly negative perception: “the way they speak to you, they think you are stupid...[they are] rubbish, not worth it...I was told I would be better off on benefit, and I was telling her I wanted to work...People like us get bad press, and the majority of us want to work”. One White British father said of the Job Centre “[they are] a complete scam as you can print off five jobs and go – and most aren’t suitable”.

**Budgeting**

Participants generally expressed their financial situation in terms of “a struggle” but felt “we survive”, as expressed by one Bangladeshi father. It was recognised by many that work opportunities were dwindling and, at the same time, the cost of living was rising. As another Bangladeshi father put it: “Money at the moment is a problem- spending has gone very high in everything. Cooking oil used to be 60p per litre and now costs £1.20. Petrol costs £1.34. It does affect our daily life, but we manage”.

Many identified careful budgeting as a core skill for managing family life. One White British single mother who had been unemployed since the birth of her first child said: “I manage with bills and all that and make sure they [her six children] have the best trainers and clothes. But they know they can’t have treats because there are six of them now, but they understand. I don’t want anything for me, I don’t need anything. Everything I buy goes into the house, it doesn’t bother me”. Another White British single mother talked about using a ‘weekly payment store’ to manage the costs of household purchases: “I pay £35 p/m. I can just cope with it”.

“It would get them to see that you have to get up and get out to earn money, and you can’t just stay in and rely on other people for money”.

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**6. Employment and Income: Oldham Findings**

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aspiration
noun

1 (usually aspirations) a hope or ambition of achieving something.

Source: Oxford University Press
7. ASPIRATIONS: WIGAN FINDINGS

The most common aspirations Wigan participants expressed were to have "happy children" and a "bigger house". One mother told us if she could wave a magic wand and change anything in her life: "I would have a new house in Leigh... with a big garden". Another father said his hopes for the future were "a nice house for me and my daughter and enough money so I can have driving lessons so I can take my daughter on day trips to places like Blackpool" and "have a good laugh".

Participants spoke of their desire for their children to obtain better qualifications and better jobs than they themselves had. One single mother who had a hairdressing qualification but was currently a full-time mum said: "I want the children to grow up with a good job and qualifications... I want them to go to college and just do something with their lives".

Some mothers expressed aspirations to work in ways that benefited the community. Training to become a Teaching Assistant was a popular option. One mother, responding to an initiative currently offered by Children’s Centres, said: "The course is free, you can’t say better than that". This mother also shared with us her ambition to draw upon her personal experience of postnatal depression to support other mothers with the condition. However, this did not seem to be something that she perceived as being a real option.

One mother we spoke to was doing a foundation course at university that would allow her to go on to study nursing. However, it looked as though the cost of education would act as a barrier to further progress. She said: "It’s 9,000 pounds so I probably won’t do it now... I’d never be able to pay it back. NHS are stripping back bursaries. I get help with childcare but..."

Parents’ views of, and engagement with, their children’s schools was explored in many interviews. For many, schools were selected on the basis of location and personal connections, rather than academic achievement: "I’ve already got him down for Westfield School- it’s just down the road from me. My little sister and brother went there, so they just said ‘bring him here, we’ll have all the family!’ So I decided to put him there".

Although parents expressed a desire for their children to gain better qualifications and jobs than they had, some also expressed limited expectations for their children’s performance at school. For one mother, her aspiration was for her children to finish school: "I want my children to be better than me, I want them to finish school".

"A nice house for me and my daughter and enough money so I can have driving lessons so I can take my daughter on day trips to places like Blackpool”.

"I want the children to grow up with a good job and qualifications... I want them to go to college and just do something with their lives”.

My only income is from my university loan and child benefit... There’s no definite [regarding university funding] and with a child in need of some certainty".
Many parents in Oldham expressed academic and professional aspirations for themselves and for their children. Parents’ motivations were often connected to a desire to move away from the area. One young Asian father told us his main goals were “To get a job and move out of area – it’s not good for kids. Kids look at older people and see they’re not doing anything, so think we won’t do anything either”.

A number of participants were in further education themselves, particularly those who had come to England from other countries. One West African father told us: “I’m a student as well [as working full time and being a father], studying accountancy at Manchester College, I just want to go far...As soon as I have finished I want to get a job...My wife wants to do English [ESOL] and she wants to do ticketing in a travel agents...Education...is the key to the future”.

Many participants described barriers they felt were standing in the way of them realising their ambitions. A White British father who had been out of work for two years due to a foot injury told us: “It’s not easy. I’ve been to college today to try to find a course but it’s hopeless... I’ve not got any GCSE’s”. Others felt blocked by their financial situation and having to look after their children. One mother told us she wanted to return to training as a midwife, but was prevented from doing so as she’d found out that this time around she’d have to pay for it.

For some parents who felt it was too late for them to achieve themselves, their ambitions were passed onto their children. A Bangladeshi father in Coldhurst told us: “I work in a restaurant... I don’t want my children to work in a restaurant... he is free to choose his own path in life, but I would like him to be a lawyer”. A Pakistani mother told us: “My son goes to Hulme School [private school], we made that decision because his dad wasn’t able to be educated but he wants his son to be”.

A number of parents we spoke to were critical of their children’s schools. One Bangladeshi father told us: “I’m a school governor at my son’s school. I go to meetings and continually speak to them. At the moment they’re getting very good results. At first they weren’t doing so well, when he started 8 years ago it had bad results, but the school is now improving”.

Education was often discussed in terms of race. Many participants felt they had to choose between an ‘all-Asian’ or an ‘all-White’ school for their children. No one we spoke to liked the idea of keeping children segregated in that way, but neither did they want to be the one to break the mould. One White British father interviewed with his wife in a Tumble Tots sessions said: “Richmond [school] opposite is a good school but 100% Asian, we’d rather she went to St Pat’s nearby which is a good mix... We don’t mind a mixed race school but we don’t want her to be the only white kid”.

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One White British family shared with us the difficulties they’d had in applying for school for their daughter: “when we were applying for schools we were supposed to get a letter, but we didn’t receive it – we found out from the school it was the last day for applications – and had to quickly get it in – if we’d had more time we could have put in more choices and a better chance of getting her in... You don’t always get what you want - you can end up taking two buses. Kids nearby should get priority”.

“I work in a restaurant... I don’t want my children to work in a restaurant... he is free to choose his own path in life, but I would like him to be a lawyer”
FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations have been drawn from the research findings. They are broad recommendations for public services in Wigan and Oldham.
Kinship:

- Public services should seek to acknowledge and celebrate the important contribution grandparents and other extended family members make to caring for children.
- Services to support grandparents with caring responsibilities should be developed. These services should equip grandparents to play an active role in supporting families.
- Services should explore ways of more closely integrating formal support services with informal support provided through family and friendship networks. For example, classes and advice for parents could be promoted to extended family members so that they can more effectively support parents who approach them for advice.

Relationships with services:

Children’s Centres:

- The services at Children’s Centres should be communicated more positively. They should aim to present themselves as places that support all families, not only for remedial support or children with severe problem.
- Children’s Centres should seek to reduce anxiety over attendance by offering new routes in, such as ‘buddy schemes’ or ‘bring a friend’ days.
- Children’s Centres should be promoted as being places for everyone that has parenting responsibilities, particularly fathers and grandparents.
- Public services should seek ways to encourage parents to meet outside of formal settings.

Social Services:

- Social Services should seek to reduce the fear of Social Services taking children into care by providing clearer explanations of the criteria for family interventions. Reducing this anxiety could result in parents being more willing to seek help from other services preventatively rather than at the point of crisis.
- Social Services Link Workers are very well regarded by some in Wigan. Social Services should continue to support and promote the work of Link Workers and explore opportunities to extend their reach amongst families who stand to benefit the most.

Post-Natal Support:

- Promote awareness of, and access to, post-natal support services.
- Explore non-medical and peer-to-peer support systems for post-natal depression.
- Explore preventative measures for post-natal depression, aiming to build up social networks and resilience for expecting mothers.

Support for families of children with behavioural problems:

- A diagnosis of ADHD is often seen by parents as gateway to accessing other support. Ethnographers felt that parents pursued a diagnosis of ADHD to explain bad behaviour and so reduce parental responsibility. Public services should encourage parents to feel that they can get the support they need without requiring diagnoses of behavioural problems. In response to requests to have a child tested for ADHD, public services should signpost parents to parenting support and advice services.

Health Visitors:

- Public services should seek opportunities to maintain and expand the role of Health Visitors. Health Visitors have the potential to reach parents at a very early stage, make effective interventions, and make parents more knowledgeable about and open to engaging with other services.
GPs:
- As a trusted service, GPs should encourage access to other support services as much as possible.

Sense of place:
- Participants’ sense of place was heavily influenced by their fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. Explore interventions to address fear of crime.

Arts, Leisure and Culture:
- Many people were not aware of arts and leisure facilities in their vicinity. Arts and leisure providers should explore promoting their services more actively to parents through other services such as children's centres.
- Some residents expressed nervousness about trying new arts and leisure services. Public services should explore ways of increasing residents’ confidence to attend arts and leisure events and services.
- Transport and money are perceived as major barriers to attending arts and leisure services. Public services should explore new ways of communicating the costs and transport options for accessing arts and leisure services.

Employment and income:
- Public services should seek to promote mothers’ confidence in working or returning to work.
- Public services should seek to promote affordable childcare services.
- Public services should explore and support peer-to-peer and community child-care arrangements.
- Public services should promote options for flexible employment options.
- Public services should explore psychological barriers to work and encourage people to pursue jobs in other areas.
- Public services should encourage employers to offer flexible employment options.
- Some participants expressed an interest in sharing their budgeting skills and the importance of having a good understanding of debt management. Public services should support residents to help each other with their budgeting and financial management.

Aspirations:
- Some parents were described as having limited involvement and knowledge of their children's formal education. Public services should promote parents' involvement in education.
- Though having high aspirations for their children's futures, some parents described having low expectations of their children's school achievement. Public services should also seek to increase parents' expectations of their children's educational achievement.
**FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS: OLDHAM**

**Kinship:**
- Public services should support and promote opportunities for residents to meet and develop social ties with people of all backgrounds in their local area. This could include promoting existing services to groups identified by this report as being particularly isolated. It could also involve supporting the development of new community social initiatives.
- Public services should promote opportunities for people from different backgrounds to meet and develop social ties.
- Public services should promote opportunities for asylum seekers to participate in local community life.

**Parenthood:**
- Public services should investigate improvements to access to childcare support.
- Public services should investigate ways of reducing social isolation amongst parents of young children.

**Relationships with services:**
**Children’s Centres:**
- Those who attend Children’s Centres find them very useful - those people should be encouraged to promote use of the centres to others.

**Post-Natal Support:**
- Promote awareness of, and access to, post-natal support services. Explore non-medical and peer-to-peer support systems for post-natal depression.
- Explore preventative measures for post-natal depression, aiming to build up social networks and resilience for expecting mothers.
- Some parents were reluctant to access the service because it would be an admission of failure. Post-natal support services should promote themselves as a mainstream and popular support service.

**Disability support services:**
- Parents feel that they have to fight to get a diagnosis. Public services should seek to better support parents through the process of applying for support.

**GPs Services:**
- As a trusted service, GPs should encourage access to other support services as much as possible.

**Health Visitors:**
- Public services should seek opportunities to maintain and expand the role of Health Visitors. Health Visitors have the potential to reach parents at a very early stage, make effective interventions, and make parents more knowledgeable about and open to engaging with other services.

**Arts and leisure services:**
- Some participants felt that arts and leisure services were not well publicised. Arts and leisure providers should explore promoting their services more actively to parents through other services such as children’s centres.
- Public Services should seek to provide more parks and open spaces to families across Oldham.

**Sense of place:**
- Oldham is perceived by many as a place in which many people are transient and not living there by choice. Public services should seek to support events and activities that encourage pride and the feeling of shared belonging.
- Racial tension is a concern for many residents. Many residents expressed a wish for better integration. Public services should promote activities that bring together people from different backgrounds in safe environments.
- Public services should seek to promote opportunities for asylum seekers to become involved in the local community.
- Participants’ sense of place was heavily influenced by their fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. Explore interventions to address fear of crime.

**Housing:**
- There is a perception amongst some people in Oldham that the council’s housing allocation policy gives preferential treatment to non-white residents. Housing services...
should provide easy to understand and transparent information about the housing allocation policy.

- Slow repair services and restrictions preventing them from maintaining their own homes make some residents feel disempowered. Explore opportunities for social housing residents to improve and maintain their own properties.

**Employment and income:**

- Public services should seek to promote mothers’ confidence in working or returning to work.
- Public services should seek to promote affordable childcare services.
- Public services should explore and support peer-to-peer and community child-care arrangements.
- Public services should promote options for flexible employment options.
- Public services should explore psychological barriers to work and encourage people to pursue jobs in other areas.
- Some participants expressed an interest in sharing their budgeting skills and the importance of having a good understanding of debt management. Public services should support residents to help each other with their budgeting and financial management.

**Final Recommendations: OLDHAM**

- Public services should encourage employers to offer flexible employment options.
- Participants often connected their failed aspirations with living in Oldham. Public services should promote the idea that successful people do live in Oldham.

**Aspirations:**

- Public services should support residents to help each other with their budgeting and financial management.