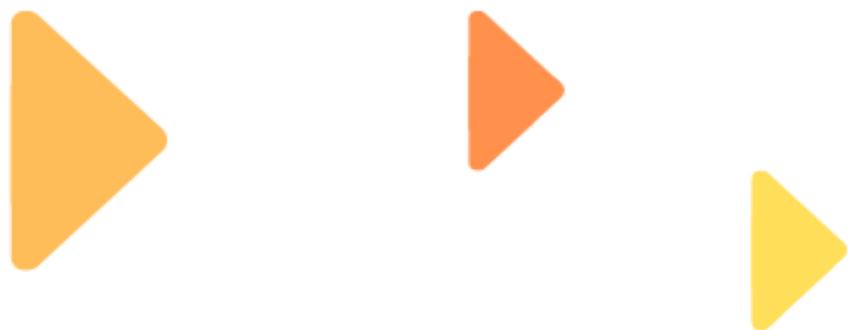




# Sure Start: celebration and reflection

Supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation



# Sure Start from the Beginning

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Naomi Eisenstadt

# How it all started: key features of a new govt

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- New Labour
- New relationship between No 10 and 11
- New ways of making policy: Modernizing Govt
- New ways of allocating resources: the CSR process and PSAs
- New Labour and children

# 1997 Manifesto

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- Commitment to free early education, all 4 year olds and eventually all three year olds
- Commitment to a National Childcare Strategy, relevant to welfare to work policies
- Anti poverty commitment (child poverty pledge 1999)
- A 'pilot' programme of Early Excellence Centres, bringing education and care together

# 1998: The CSR on children under 8

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## Key findings:

- Poverty is bad for children, especially experience of poverty in the early years
- Most public expenditure on over 4s, once children are in school
- Several departments involved in services for under 5s, but no overall strategy
- Wide differences of quantity and quality of early years services across the country
- The right kind of services could help narrow the gap between poor children and the rest

# Sure Start is born

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- Announced in Parliament, July 1998
- Initial plan of 250 local programmes; allocation of £450 million over 3 years, each local programme to reach between 400 and 800 under fours
- PSA set the overall aims and objectives but local freedom to design local programme to meet PSA targets
- Overall aim, improve life chances of children in poverty and narrow the gap
- Tight loose design consistent with Mod. Agenda:
  - User not provider led
  - Flexible, responsive services sensitive to local needs
  - Joined up across different agencies and professions
  - Focus on outcomes not inputs
  - Evidence based?
    - Yes, in terms of imp of early years,
    - no in terms of actual design

# Innovative Governance

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## At the centre

- cross departments: DfEE, Health, and HMT
- Cabinet level minister David Blunkett, SoS for Education, day to day control, Tessa Jowell, Minister for Public Health
- Steering group from 6 departments
- Personal accountability through head of the Unit

## At local level

- Lead body to organise the plan
- Acct body to hold the money
- Partnership board including all key agencies, voluntary sector and **local parents**
- Small area with no clear administrative borders

# What was a Sure Start Local Programme?

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- Required set of core services,
  - Outreach and home visiting
  - Support for parents and carers
  - Play and childcare
  - Health advice
  - Support for children with special needs
- supplemented by whatever local Board thought necessary to achieve goals and PSA targets

# An evolving policy

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- 2002 – CSR doubles Sure Start from 250 to 500 local programmes
- 2004 - Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children, a ten year childcare strategy
  - Commitment to Sure Start for everyone, everywhere, 3,500 Sure Start **children's centres**
  - Main control of the policy moved to Local Government, Early Years funding kept ring fenced at LA level, Sure Start rolled into wider early years and childcare funding, consistent with Every Child Matters
- 2011 – Early Years LA Grant becomes Early Intervention Grant
- 2013 – Ring fence for early years services completely removed, funding rolled into Local Government settlement

# Where are we now?

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- Drastic funding cuts in early years services overall, and particularly in Children's Centres
  - Between 2009/10 and 2013/14, Sure Start cut in funding 41% (Stewart and Obolenskaya)
  - By 2017, 16 LAs closed half or more their centres; 6 LAs closed more than 70% of centres (Smith et al)
  - Many centres merged, and many open centres open with limited services during restricted hours (hollowing out)
- Change in service design and key principles
  - Reduction in open access services
  - Increase in targeted, and/or referrals only services
  - Fewer centres required longer distances for users to travel to centres; neighbourhood base increasingly lost

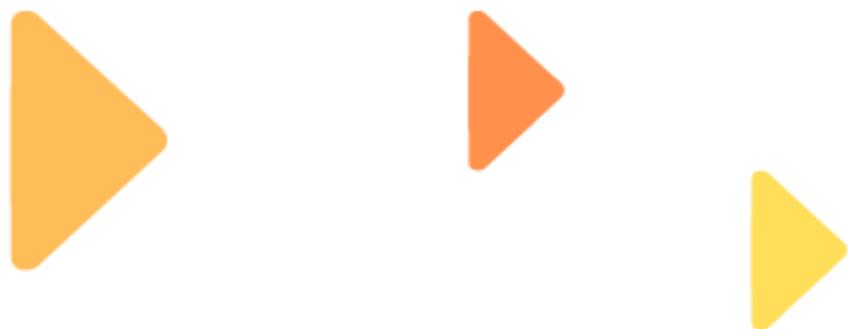
# Where next?

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- Key messages from evaluations of Sure Start and Children's Centres?
- What key policy thinkers at the time now think is worth saving?
- What the Government thinks about early years?
- Where are we on family policy more generally?

# Sure Start: celebration and reflection

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# Evaluating Sure Start

Ted Melhuish

University of Oxford

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February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

# UK, Sure Start - 2000 - 2005

- Targeted - 20% most disadvantaged areas
- 0-5 year olds
- Universal in area - All families in area served
- Locally driven agenda allowing for diversity
- Enhancement of existing services
- No clear guidelines given to practitioners

## Sure Start did not have a prescribed model

Each programme had autonomy to improve services, with general aims but without clear specification of services. But all programmes must deliver:

- outreach and home visiting,
- support for families and parents,
- support for good quality play,
- learning and childcare experiences for children,
- primary and community health care,
- advice for child and family health/ development
- support for people with special needs.

# National Evaluation of Sure Start

[www.ness.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk)

- Local context analysis: study of communities
- Implementation: what do programmes do
- Impact: do programmes affect children and families
- Cost-effectiveness: how money spent- is it effective
- TEAM: Edward Melhuish (Executive Director)
- Jay Belsky (Research Director)
- Alastair Leyland (Statistician)
- Jane Tunstill (Implementation Director)
- Mog Ball (Implementation Themes)
- Pam Meadows (Cost Effectiveness)
- Jacqueline Barnes (Local Context Director)
- Martin Frost (Local Context)

# Setting up Sure Start programmes

- longer than anticipated to set up programmes
- Most SSLPs did not approach fully operational level of expenditure until after 3 years

## Changes in Sure Start communities - 2000 to 2005;

### **Families**

More young children in SSLP areas

Less children in 'workless households'

### **Child health:**

Reductions in

hospitalisations for 0-3 year olds

low-birth weight in Indian ethnic group

4 to 17 year olds on Disability Living Allowance

### **School achievement** for in SSLP areas

Increases in

English achievement– age 11

Overall attainment – age 16

proportion staying on after 16

### **Crime and disorder:**

Greater than England reduction in:

burglary and vehicle crime

primary school permanent exclusions

unauthorised absences from school

# 2004: Cross-sectional results

Sub-group findings (3-year-olds)

<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/impact/documents/1183.pdf>

Among non-teenage mothers (86% of total):

- greater child social competence in SSLP areas
- fewer child behaviour problems in SSLP areas
- less negative parenting in SSLP areas

## 2004: Sub-group findings (3-year-olds)

### Among teenage mothers (14% of total):

- less child social competence in SSLP areas
- more child behaviour problems in SSLP areas
- poorer child verbal ability in SSLP areas

### Among lone parent families (40% of total):

- poorer child verbal ability in SSLP areas

### Among children in workless h/hlds (33%):

- poorer child verbal ability in SSLP areas

# SSLPs

Why are some SSLPs more effective than others?

## **Key dimensions related to effectiveness:**

- Effective governance and leadership
- Informal but professional ethos
- Empowerment of staff and parents
- Qualifications /training of staff
- Good multi-agency teamwork

# Sure Start 2005 - 2010

Sure Start Model changed following evidence from  
National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS)  
and Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE)

- Sure Start programmes become Children's Centres
- Services are more clearly specified
- Clearer guidance given on service delivery
- Greater staff training

## Children's Centres include:

1. early education and childcare.
2. support for parenting
3. child and family health services
4. helping parents into employment / training

# 2008 - Good Results for 3-year-olds

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0002519.pdf>

Of 14 outcomes 7 showed significant benefits for Sure Start children's centres

5 outcomes indicated beneficial effects:

- child positive social behaviour (cooperation, sharing, empathy)
- child self-regulation (perseverance, self-control)
- Parenting Risk (parent-child relationship, discipline, home chaos)
- home learning environment
- total service use

In addition there were better results in SSLPs for:

- child immunisations
- child accidents

But these 2 outcomes could have been influenced by timing effects

# Reasons for improved results

## 1. Amount of exposure

It takes 3 years for a programme to be fully functional. Therefore

- a. In 2003 families were not exposed to fully functional programmes
- b. in 2008 families using fully functional children's centres

## 2. Quality of services

- a. Now Children's Centres following NESS & EPPE evidence
- b. Staff experience acquired over 7 years leads to better functioning
- c. Hence families exposed to more effective services than earlier

# 2010 - 5-year-olds and their families

<http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR067.pdf>

## Significant effects associated with Children's Centres

- Mothers reporting greater life satisfaction
- Less chaotic homes
- Better home learning environments
- Children better physical health, less overweight
- Improvement in worklessness for Sure Start families

## But

- Less attendance at school meetings
- No effects on child development - Probably because from 2004, 95% of 3-5 year olds receive free pre-school

## 3 factors debilitating Sure Start

1. **2007 - Tony Blair** "By 2010, there will be 3500 children's centres, so that every family has easy access to high-quality integrated services in their community and the benefits of Sure Start can be felt nationwide"
2. **2008 – Global recession – cuts**
3. **2010 – change in government – little interest in Children's Centres**

# 2012: 7-year -olds and families

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR220.pdf>

## Positive results for Children's Centres

- (1) Improvement in parental discipline;
- (2) More stimulating home learning environment;  
*also for sub-populations,*
- (3) less chaotic home environment for boys;
- (4) better life satisfaction (lone parent and workless households).

In summary, Children's Centres have benefits for:

- i) family functioning and maternal well-being that persisted until children were age 7.
- ii) but no continuing impact on child outcomes, which is likely to be, at least in part, because from 2004 universal free preschool education from 3 years whether in Sure Start areas or not.

# CONCLUSIONS

In summary, Children's Centres have benefits for:

- i) family functioning and maternal well-being that persisted until children were age 7.
- ii) but no continuing impact on child outcomes, likely to be, at least in part, because from 2004 universal free preschool education from 3 years whether in Sure Start areas or not.

- Sure Start improved with Children's Centres model
- Many examples of good practice
- Still great variation between best and worst
- Need to learn from effective Children's Centres

# ISOTIS – study of inequality in Europe

([www.isotis.org](http://www.isotis.org))

We did a case study of a children's centre in exemplifying good practice.

<http://www.isotis.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/D6.2.-Review-on-inter-agency-working-and-good-practice.pdf>

It offered:

antenatal health care (midwives)

primary health care (health visitors)

day care (0-5)

early education (2-5)

parent support AND

primary school 5-11 years

i.e. ALL services needed from pregnancy to age 11 years.

Quotes from parents:

*"It's very easy, once you are in the centre you have midwives, support groups, health visitors, very easy access so anything you are concerned about and you can't book one to one through the health centre just come here, speak to one of the staff, they will tell you the days."*

*"You would not recognise me from the person I was a few years ago. I almost live here. I am no longer isolated. The centre has helped me so much, giving me confidence. I have achieved more than I could ever believe and I am now working."*

*"There has been great improvement in my sons understanding, language development and overall development since starting nursery."*

After we finished the case study DfE published the results for all primary schools in England.

This primary school was rated the best in the whole country.

*“An East End state school in one of the poorest parts of England has beaten every private school to come top in the Sunday Times league tables, published today. The 11-year-olds at St Stephen’s School Primary School in East Ham — where nearly all the pupils speak English as a second language and most are from Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds — were the best at reading, spelling and doing their sums. It is the first time that a state primary school has topped the tables.”*

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/best-uk-schools-guide-lgh8sfr8f>

**Demonstrating:- a full service Children’s Centre can produce outstanding results for children and families in deprived areas.**

NESS website: [www.ness.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk)

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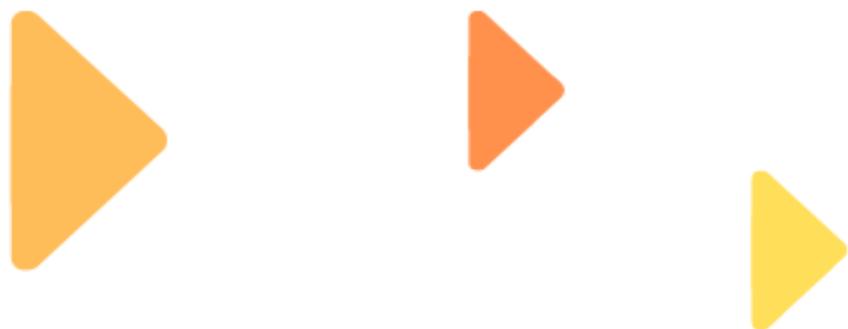
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# Sure Start: celebration and reflection

Supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation





# The impact of Sure Start Children's Centres on outcomes for children, mothers and families

Kathy Sylva

Co-authors: Pamela Sammons, James Hall, Rebecca Smees  
funded by the DfE

*Sure Start Conference*  
*London School of Economics*  
*22<sup>nd</sup> February 2019*



# Evaluation of Children's Centres in England

## ECCE

- **Sample of centres**
  - A stratified core sample of 120 well established Children's Centres was created from a starting group of 1,721
  - Centres overwhelmingly located in a 30% most deprived areas, running Full Core Offer
- **Sample of families**
  - 2,608 users, with data on families , children and service use
- **Sweeps**
  - End of child's first year, interviews in homes
  - End of second year, telephone interview
  - End of child's third year, interviews in homes, direct child assessment

# Creation of measures and data reduction

- Creation of Measures
  - Outcomes for families and children
  - Background characteristics of families
  - Baseline measures taken at around first year, family functioning, home learning environment of the child, parent mental health
  - Family Use of Centre: Discrete Services, Childcare (at centre or elsewhere) outreach activities
  - Centre Characteristics, Provision of Services, and Reach
- Cluster Analysis was carried out first for predictors and outcomes

# Impact analysis

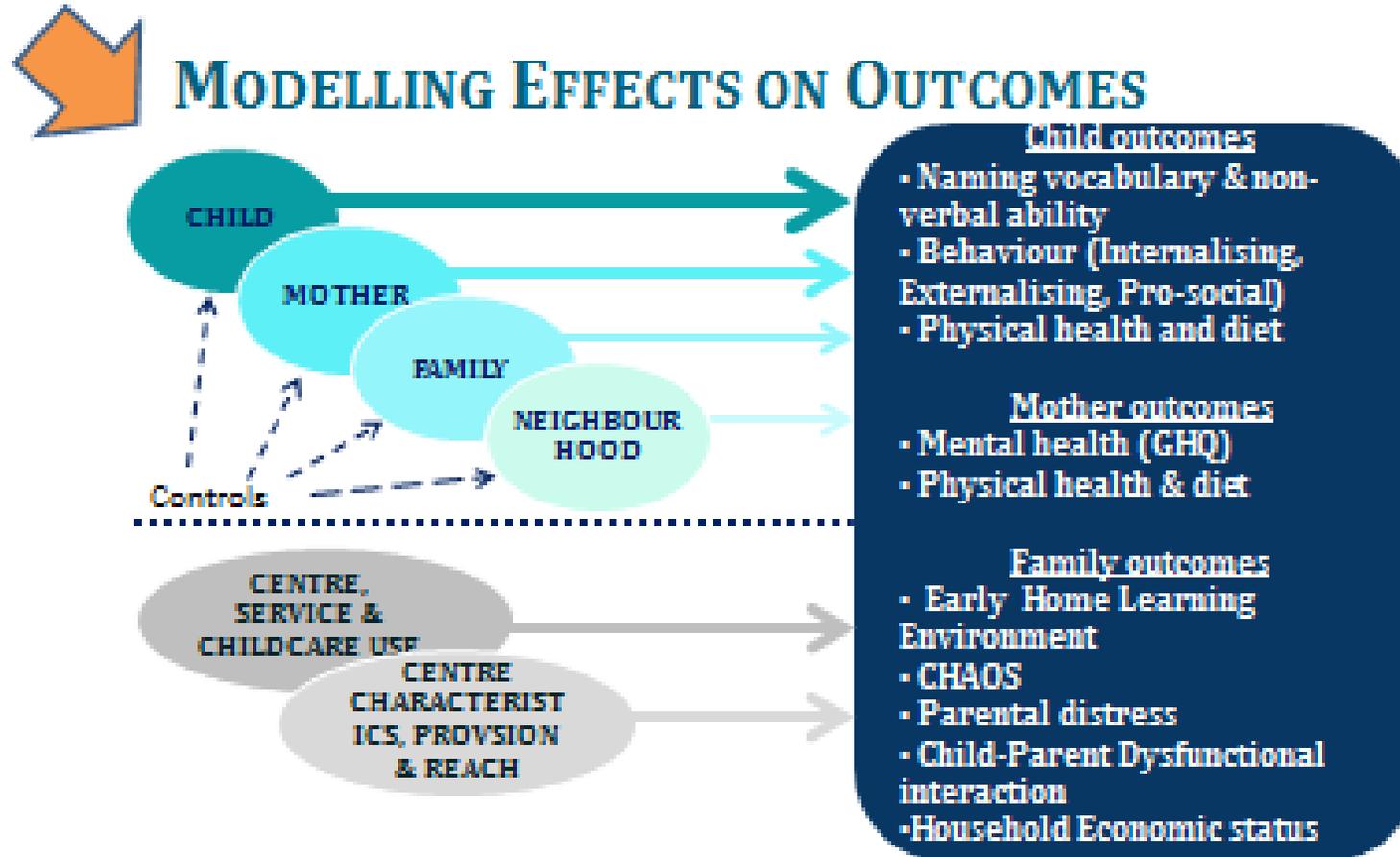
## **“Does engagement with children’s centres promote better outcomes for families, parents, and children?”**

- Impact is explored using multilevel statistical models that predict child, parent, and family outcomes when children were age 3 years plus, controlling for effects of other influences such as background characteristics of parents
- ‘Engagement’ with CCs is measured by families’ use of services over 3 time points, (baseline, aged 2 and 3 years) and via selected CC characteristics/services
- Where available, baseline measures taken at entry to the study (when child was age 9-18 months) were used to explore changes in outcomes across the evaluation period (wave 1 to wave 3 surveys).

## **The models test the overarching hypothesis that:**

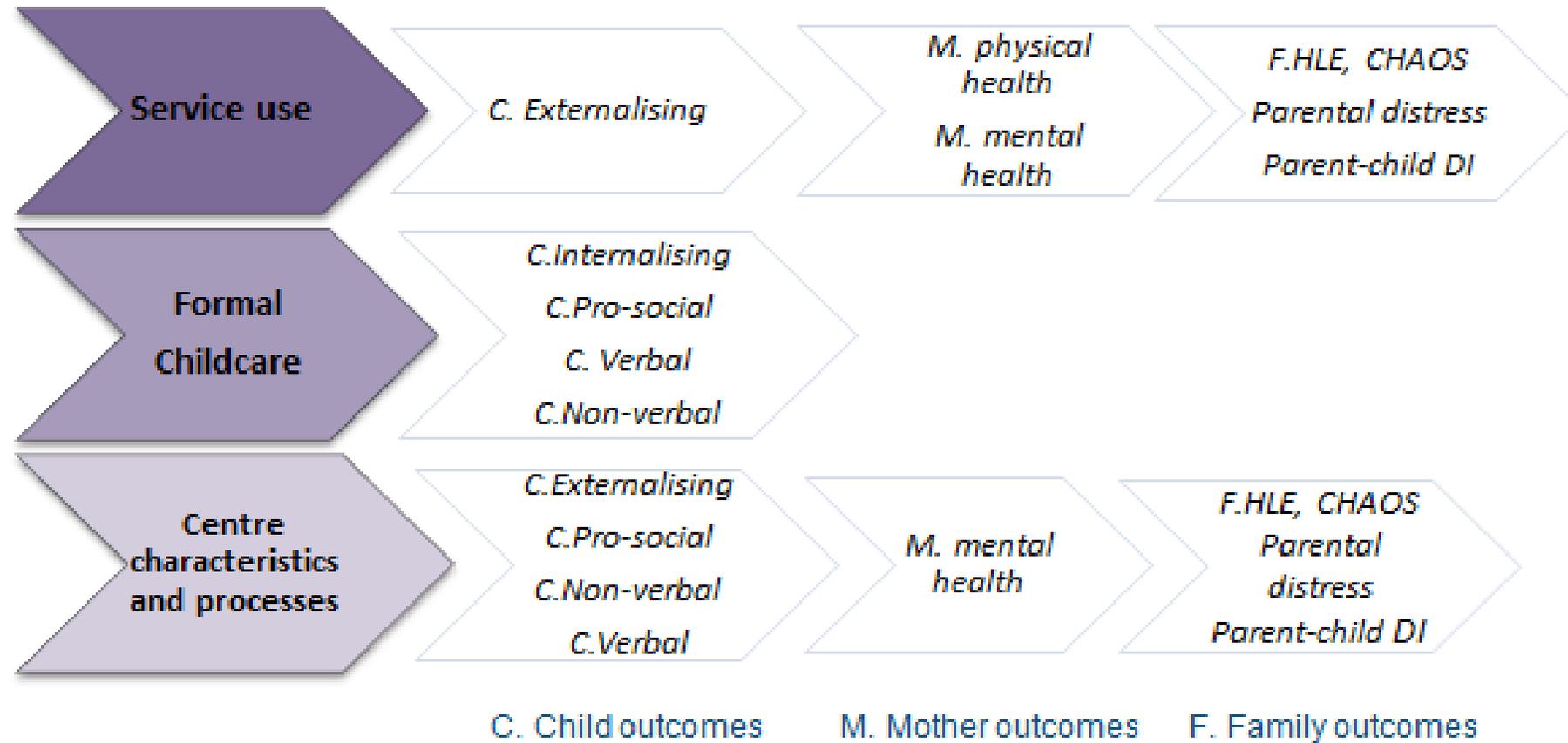
- Greater engagement (families’ use of service) and some CC characteristics/services may support better outcomes.

# Modelling effects on outcomes



- Contextualised models (CA) for child cognitive and behavioural outcomes where no baseline measure was available
- Change models (CVA) for mother and family outcomes where baseline measures were available

# Drawing together the impact of findings



# Decreasing children's externalising problems via improvements in the home learning environment

- Further analysis of the ECCE data using structural equation modelling
- Statistical results suggest that the use of SSCCs is associated with fewer preschool behavioural disorders (measured on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) via intermediate changes to the quality of home learning environments.
- Both National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) and the Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE) showed improvements in the home learning environment.
  - This recent study on the ECCE data shows that family improvements were associated with decreases in children's externalising behaviour problems, but not internalising problems.

# Drawing together the findings from ECCE

- Greater impact on outcomes for families and mothers; fewer effects for child outcomes (especially cognitive skills and child health) and Household Economic Status (SES).
- A number of measures of families' service use and characteristics of CC predicted better outcomes. These effects were more numerous than expected by chance.
- Indirect effect of reducing child externalising behaviour via improvements in the home learning environment
- Children's centres are targeting their high need families for specialised services, in line with their core purpose.
- Nonetheless, the main driver of child, mother & family outcomes is family background, especially the effects of financial disadvantage, mother's education and the Home Learning Environment. Children's centre use helps to reduce but does not eliminate influence of disadvantage.
- CCs are especially important for the High financial disadvantage group, but those attending CCs experiencing funding cuts showed no improvement.

# References

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-centres-their-impact-on-children-and-families>

An overview of the project and its publications can be found at:

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