

My name is Suellen, i am 33 years old and am a single mother to my three children aged 5, 4 and 1. I suffer from anxiety and after the birth of my youngest was diagnosed with post natal depression.

I unfortunately lack the informal supports a Mother may have such as grandparents, sisters or even extended family. I have maintained two special friendships from my schooling years both these ladies being employed on the mainland. I have met many fellow Mums at playgroups, parks and similar but these have never progressed to dependable friendships more so acquaintances to say hello too and have a chat with.

I first started accessing the Chigwell Family Centre in 2013 when i began to feel overwhelmed with the behavior of my second child. Having two children under two in winter became isolating and at times stressful. The family centre met all our needs and we visited frequently.

After the birth of my third child my need for support increased greatly. I felt anxious most of the day, challenged by the behavior of my second child, sleep deprived, lonely and guilty that i wasn't parenting well enough for my babies. Our visits to the family centre began to grow in frequency, my children were offered engaging age appropriate environments to play and explore while i could take a step back, talk to another adult, read a information brochure or even have a long awaited hot coffee. I never felt like i was being observed or judged, we were just allowed to be and use the environment to meet our needs. My children would make mess or throw tantrums and no one looked twice, and most often a staff member, volunteer or fellow parent would offer a hand to support.

We were in attendance one day when a volunteer approached me and asked about my little family. I immediately felt at ease and understood. It was this interaction that gave me the insight and confidence to reach out for greater support for myself and my babies, and it was right before us when a

representative from a service provider was at the centre. This referral has opened up several opportunities for support that we are engaged with and pursuing which have benefited our whole family. Without this support i believe i would still be in "survival" mode and not truly experiencing the joy of parenting. I actually believe that i wouldnt know such services exist or we would qualify if it wasn't for this referral.

The Chigwell Family Centre offers me The Village i dont have at home. My children feel a sense of belonging, community and importance. I feel less isolated and lonely, more confident in my parenting and the knowledge if i reach out there is always a solution to anything.