

Choices - a magazine for families in East Sussex, Autumn 2009

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A warm winter welcome

Welcome to the winter issue of Choices – the magazine for parents and carers in East Sussex.

In this issue, we talk to families for whom specially-designed sensory rooms are providing space where children with special needs can be themselves.

We also find out about the work of the East Sussex Music Service, now in its 75th year, which is helping introduce thousands of children to the joys of singing, learning an instrument or the fun of discovering how to DJ or MC.

There's a chance for 11-19 year olds to win a Wii by visiting the new website connexions360.org.uk

A big 'thanks' to those of you who responded to our feedback form in the last issue. You'll find the winners of the shopping vouchers printed on the news page opposite.

We hope you enjoy this issue – don't forget to let us know what you think!

Editorial team - Choices

Special report - Don't confuse swine flu with meningitis

The Meningitis Trust is urging everybody not to mistake the signs and symptoms of meningitis with those of swine flu. Don't forget, meningitis can strike in minutes and kill within hours.

The rash that is commonly associated with meningitis doesn't appear in all cases, so it's important to be aware of the other symptoms. Symptoms can appear in any order and some may not appear at all.

Symptoms of meningitis can include;

- fever (possibly with cold hands and feet)
- headache
- stiff neck
- dislike of bright lights
- drowsiness
- joint pain
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- confusion
- in babies, an unusual cry and dislike of being handled

If in doubt, always seek urgent medical advice. Rapid deterioration will take hold if left untreated. The Meningitis Trust produces FREE credit card sized symptoms cards for people to keep in their wallets and purses go to meningitis-trust.org. The Trust also provide a 24-hour nurse-led helpline on **0800 028 18 28**. NHS Direct also has an online symptoms checker at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk or you can call NHS Direct on **0845 46 47**.

Find out about childcare and more!

The Family Information Service provides info on childcare for children of all ages, childcare costs, what's on for kids, as well as where to go for family support and advice. Our trained advisors are on hand to help. You'll find us at Eastbourne Library, Grove Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 4TL go to eastsussex.gov.uk or call **01323 463850**.

Please note – Childcarelink Update

This website is now closed. For childcare information go to escis.org.uk

Choices news

Newsflash: If you want to know more about the new Vetting and Barring Scheme visit eastsussex.gov.uk or isa-gov.org

NHS Credit Crunch Stressline

When times are tough, it's quite natural to feel worried or down. When these feelings go on for weeks they can start to affect your health. A new helpline offers support from health advisors who are trained to offer information and guide you through your crisis, to help you get back in control of your life. Call the NHS Credit Crunch Stressline on **0300 123 2000**.

You can also visit nhs.uk for information about coping with stress, depression or anxiety or direct.gov.uk for help coping with redundancy and managing your finances.

Phoning home?

Mobile phones targeted at children as young as four are expected to hit the high street this winter. Parents thinking of buying a mobile phone for youngsters up to 16 might want to consider safety advice from the Department of Health which recommends restricting mobile phone use by children because their brains were more vulnerable to radiation. Although research into the area has produced inconclusive results, most experts agree that it is sensible to limit use.

Health officials urge take up of MMR

Outbreaks of measles among children in England and Wales have raised fears among health experts that the UK may be facing an epidemic.

The number of cases far exceeds the total number last year in the north-east, when only 17 cases were reported and is already four times the total in Wales last year.

Health officials are urging parents to ensure their children are fully protected against the disease by taking up the MMR jab.

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Our two £25 prize draw winners

Thank you to everyone who told us what they thought of the last issue of Choices by sending back our feedback form. Your thought will help to shape future editions.

The two entries which won the prize draw were sent in by Karen Welfare, Lewes and Danielle Morrison, Bexhill-on-Sea.

Seeking out your local sensory room

Sensory rooms are providing much-needed space where children with special needs can use equipment designed to relax, stimulate and bring out potential learning. And perhaps more importantly it's a place where they can be themselves. In East Sussex parents can access a number of places throughout the county at little or no cost. Here we take a look at the sensory room based at Willingdon Trees Children's Centre, Eastbourne...

The room was created in 2007 to help children whose sensory, communication or physical difficulties meant they struggled with conventional play equipment. Community Development Worker, Clare Croft worked with a team of professionals and parents of children with special needs to decide how the room should be equipped.

The room

The result is a room in two halves; one for relaxation and sensory stimulation and a padded area for safe rough and tumble. The equipment is tough and non toxic so it doesn't matter if it is bashed or chewed. Soothing music can be added and there are changing images projected onto a wall. All the equipment is movable and can be arranged to accommodate any child's needs and is designed to be controlled by the child using large sensor pads.

The chill-out area contains a huge bubble tube like a giant lava lamp which changes colour when you chose a coloured pad, an ultra-violet light, a large rug with tiny lights that light up when you stand on it, a textured wall, fibre-optics which change colour when you move them and a sound activated 'light echo board' which lights up when you speak.

The soft play area has a ball pool, a slide, a mirrored cubby hole that seems to go on for miles and has tiny twinkling stars and a suspended hammock leaf chair which is a favourite with parents.

Making a difference

Rachel Moran has three children and brings her youngest two, 13-month-old Ellie and nine-year-old Karise who has autism, to the sensory room. Rachel said: "It is like a community and when someone new comes they are always made to feel welcome".

Rachel has observed that by mixing with other children with a range of different needs Karise has been able to appreciate other people more and her own autism. In the room, she can do what she likes without others looking at her as if she's different and she's always much calmer when she leaves.

Rachel runs the Special Parents Group to support families with children with additional needs. It is held at Willingdon Trees. Call 01323 506653 for details. Parents with children with any conditions and of all ages are welcome.

Marie Baker has two children six-year-old Katie and four-year-old Aimee who has Dravet Syndrome, a rare and life-limiting form of epilepsy. Marie says, "The sensory room is a fun place to go for them both and where we can all enjoy quality time together. Aimee loves the sensory area and watching the bubble tube and Katie likes to be active in the soft play area."

Parent and campaigner Marie Baker has recently set up a charity called the IDEA League UK (International Dravet Syndrome Epilepsy Action) and is working to raise money to fund medical research and provide essential 'pulse oximeter' monitors to families. You can see more on their website idea-league.org.uk

How does it work?

Families who want to use the room have an induction with an Occupational Therapist. The OT shows them how to activate the room and select the best equipment to enable their child to play and learn without being over-stimulated. After the induction families can book in for one hour at a time to use the room. There are a maximum of two families in the room at any time.

Willingdon Trees Children's Centre is keen to share the benefits of this wonderful resource with as many families as possible. However when there is high demand for the room they refer to a list of criteria and priority groups. The top priorities are families with under fives from the Eastbourne area with a diagnosed or recognised need (not necessarily diagnosed). Then come children under eleven with a diagnosed or recognised special need, adults with a recognised need, Children's Centre groups and the local school and nursery.

For more information

To find out about sensory facilities near you, please call **01323 463850**.

Have you got your FREE Book Start pack?

Bookstart, the national book gifting scheme which aims to help all children to develop a love of books from a very early age, have specially-designed packs for deaf, blind and partially-sighted children. To get your FREE pack call Sue Stevens on **01323 416324**.

Having your say on your school's future

The recent survey on services provided through schools may have prompted you to think how your community could make better use of your school's facilities. This consultation was designed to find out the need for childcare, parenting support and the out of school activities you'd like to see for both children and adults.

The survey formed part of the government's 21st Century Schools strategy which aims to open schools up, provide more services to children, their families and the wider community. In short, the plan is to make schools the hub of local communities, by extending the services they offer, places where cultural, social, sporting, IT and learning opportunities are available within easy reach.

There is no official blueprint for services. If you didn't fill in a survey this time it's not too late to have your say. Talk to your school, go to eastsussex.gov.uk or call Dave Sugg, Extended Schools Manager on **01323 747280** or dave.sugg@eastsussex.gov.uk.

Have you met your PIC?

Every school has a Parent Information Contact (PIC). Their role is to help you find the information, support or services that are right for you.
To speak to your PIC, contact your school.

Toys on wheels

More parents are discovering that borrowing toys from a library means youngsters can enjoy a greater variety of toys at little or no cost. It's a good way to find your child's favourites before you spend your hard-earned cash and you won't have to store big toys for long.

Many of the libraries are mobile, offering toys suitable for children from birth to five years. They include educational and themed toys and you can hire one to three at a time weekly during the term time. Toys are loaned for a week, but you can keep them longer.

If toys gets lost or broken, it's not a problem

Samantha Reed, who works for mobile library 'Toys in Motion' says, "If the toys get lost or broken or bits are missing it is not a problem, we just need to know. There is no charge for this".

Nevada Smith takes her three-year-old Megan as part of her Friday routine. She said, "My five-year-old looks forward to coming home from school to see what we have chosen. A brilliant service - thank you".

Discover your toy library

Toys in Motion – mobile toy library

Visits Crowborough, Peacehaven, Eastbourne, Polegate, Lewes, Newhaven, Hailsham.
Contact **01323 440002**

In2play On-wheels

Visits Hastings & St Leonard's areas.
Contact **07748 552951**

Bexhill & Battle Under Fives Association (BBUFA) Mobile Toy Library

Visits Robertsbridge, Battle, Sedlescombe, Etchingam, Rye, Stonegate.
Contact **01424 870888**

Lewes Toy library

All Saints Art & Youth Centre, Friars Walk, Lewes
Contact **01273 477631**

Money Matters

Don't forget your tax credits!

Tax credits offer help to more people than you think.

Help for families earning less than £58,175 a year (or £66,350 if they have a child under one)

Child Tax Credit helps to support families with children:

- 9 out of 10 families qualify for Child Tax Credit.
- you don't have to be a parent – anyone who is mainly responsible for a child can claim
- you can claim Child Tax Credit even if you are not working
- the amount you receive depends on things like the number of children you care for, if any child or young person has a disability and your income

Help for working people on a low income

Working Tax Credit helps workers who are employed or self-employed on a very low income. You can claim in addition to Child Tax Credit.

Help with childcare costs

You may be able to claim for help with the costs of registered childcare. This is known as the 'childcare element of the Working Tax Credit'. You may get the childcare element even if you are not eligible for the Working Tax Credit.

Need more information or a claim pack?

Visit the website: www.hmrc.gov.uk and click on tax credits

phone: **0845 300 3900**

text phone: **0845 300 3909**

What about money?

Top tips to help young people understand money issues and manage their money is available at whataboutmoney.info

The website takes you through the financial side of all the big life steps; the first job after school, learning to drive, having a baby, getting your own place or going to university.

There are sections on getting, spending and keeping money as well as student money. There is also an easy-to-use budgeting tool. If you can't find the answer to your question on the site you can ask it by email and it will be answered within 3 working days.

The site is designed for 16-24 year olds but who's checking birth certificates!

More free early education for 3 and 4 year olds

All three and four-year-olds are already entitled to free early education. This is known as the Early Years Education Entitlement (EYEE) and children currently receive 12.5 hours a week (up to 38 weeks a year).

From September 2010, in East Sussex there will be an increase from 12.5 hours to 15 hours a week. The new increase will be introduced in stages and began in September 2009. By September 2010 all three and four-year-olds will receive 15 hours a week.

Your child receives EYEE from the term after they are three. EYEE is offered by most pre-schools, playgroups and nurseries, some registered childminders, Local Education Authority schools and some nursery classes attached to independent schools.

For more information on how to get EYEE call **01323 463850**, speak to your EYEE provider or ring the EYEE Officers at Early Years Childcare and Extended Schools Service on **01323 747412** or **747425**.

Does your employer offer Childcare Vouchers?

It's worth finding out if your employer offers a voucher scheme to support employees with their childcare costs. This works by replacing part of your salary with vouchers that you then use to pay for childcare. The first £55 per week of any voucher you receive is exempt from tax and national insurance contributions. Your partner can also take advantage of childcare vouchers if their employer runs a scheme. Be aware that this may affect your pension.

To find out whether you will be better off using vouchers or tax credits or may be able to claim both visit payingforchildcare.org.uk/schemes.aspx

There is also information at www.hmrc.gov.uk/childcare/interaction-tc-cv.htm

For more information speak to your employer or HR department. You can also visit daycaretrust.org.uk and search for 'childcare vouchers' or contact the Daycare Trust on **0845 872 6251** (local call rate).

Do you want to know about childcare in your area?

Call **01323 463850**.

Another string to their bow!

Music doesn't just delight the soul. Research now shows that music has lots of other positive benefits including the development of our brains. Singing songs helps to stimulate language development. Working with rhythm is a great basis for improving our ability with numbers. Playing an instrument helps to develop motor skills. Best of all, music is an opportunity to have fun, make new friends and enables even children with severe disabilities to join in...

East Sussex Music Service is currently helping more than 14000 young people in the county experience the joys of music. Head of ESMS, Dr Tony Biggin is a firm believer in the power of music to enhance or even transform young lives. "Learning to play an instrument can bestow a wide range of transferable social skills such as patience, co-operation and the ability to listen to others," he says. "In fact, it often has a significant impact on success in all aspects of learning."

Lots of ways to get involved

For any child who'd like to 'give it a go' there are lots of ways to get involved. ESMS offers everything from Early Years Music for the under 5's, 'Great Big Sings' (where 4500 primary school pupils rehearse and perform specially composed songs), learning an instrument, vocal training, ensembles, courses in musicianship and theory, as well as Rythmix workshops in everything from African percussion and Samba drumming to music technology, DJ and MC skills.

Ability to work under pressure

Louise Melhuish, 18, who plays percussion in the East Sussex Youth Orchestra has found that performing in the orchestra has given her perspective and developed her ability to work under pressure: "After the pressure of a live performance exams don't seem so daunting". She also says that the young people in the orchestra buck the popular stereotype of teenagers today. "Members of the orchestra are disciplined and work hard to bring together all the sections of the orchestra to perform a piece in all its glory."

At the other end of the scale seven-year-old Jack, has just started guitar lessons. He chose the instrument because he "likes the sound" although he does have an eye on the future "I want to be in a band," he says. Two months in and Jack describes the lessons as "fun" and is excited about playing in his Christmas show. "Practise is hard work, I do it after school two or three times and at weekends, when I can, but sometimes I'm playing football and forget!"

Life-long interest

For most children music is simply enjoyable time spent with friends but for some it does provide the foundation to a life-long interest. Eighteen-year-old Emily Ball, who is about to go to university, played flute with the East Sussex Youth Orchestra for two years. When she was invited to join the orchestra, she was "terrified". But she made firm friends and the high standards of her peers gave her something to aspire to.

Touring with the ESYO meant performing in impressive concert venues such as La Madeleine in Paris to audiences of thousands. She described it as the only opportunity she had to play with a full orchestra and "the closest I've ever come to playing professionally".

To anyone left in any doubt about the merits of making music, Tony Biggin says: "It's the chance to participate in one of the most rewarding activities known to mankind."

Young musicians can join:

Saturday Area Music Centre ensembles
East Sussex Youth Orchestra
East Sussex String Chamber Orchestra
East Sussex Brass Band and East Sussex Young Voices
and look out for area groups such as the
South Downs Youth Concert Band
South Downs Youth Orchestra
South Downs Youth Percussion Ensemble
Hastings Area Youth Orchestra
Hastings Area Wind Orchestra
Hastings Jazz and Blues Band

Rhythmix!

Rhythmix offers music workshops to young people across the South East. From samba or rock to indie or world music, if you want to get involved Rhythmix can help music makers create their own sounds and style. Visit the website at www.rhythmix.org.uk/ for info on workshops, activities, music and videos.

For more information

If you'd like to know more about what East Sussex Music Service has to offer, go to eastsussex.gov.uk or call **01273 402555**.

East Sussex Music Service

The service celebrates its 75th anniversary this year and they are asking the public to send in their memories of the service for an exhibition.

Over the decades the service has helped to develop a lot of musical talent and former students are now professional musicians, composers, orchestral players, concert masters, playing chamber music and conductors. You can email your memories of the East Sussex Music Service for inclusion in the 75th anniversary exhibition to Caroline.Daykin@eastsussex.gov.uk

Taking a stand!

Coping with school bullies

Being bullied can be an isolating and damaging experience and is not just confined to the playground, but can take place to and from school or even at home.

Modern bullies make use of new technologies to threaten and intimidate, known as cyber-bullying, by using text, email or the internet.

What are the signs my child is being bullied?

Some children are good at hiding their feelings and the first you may know of the problem is when your child suddenly doesn't want to go to school, or seems to be avoiding specific lessons.

Watch out for your child coming home with cuts or bruises or torn clothes, asking for stolen possessions to be replaced, 'losing' dinner money or falling out with previously good friends.

Or there may be less obvious changes in behaviour such as; being moody and bad tempered, aggression with brothers and sisters, being quiet and withdrawn, insomnia or anxiety, wanting to avoid leaving the house or doing less well at schoolwork.

What can I do to help my child?

If you think your child is being bullied, but you're not sure, ask a few questions. Stay calm and talk to your child; ask specific questions about their day. You can also ask if they are looking forward to going to school tomorrow. Perhaps ask if there is anyone they would like to ask home.

Who can I talk to?

The East Sussex County Council Anti-Bullying Team offer information, advice and support to young people, parents and carers. They can provide direct one-to-one support to children and young people, as well as guide parents and carers through the entire process from reporting the problem to the school and working with the school to address it. However, dealing with bullying behaviour is not always easy and can take time to resolve.

Fortunately, schools in East Sussex take bullying very seriously and are now well-equipped to deal with a problem as it arises.

Support for you and your child

East Sussex Anti-Bullying Team 01323 747 081.

Support for your child

ChildLine 08001111 free 24 hour helpline.

www.achance2talk.com this is the ChildLine website - search for bullying.

cybermentors.org.uk this is part of beatbullying.org. You can send a message to one of their counsellors who are online 8am – 10pm and they will reply as soon as they pick up the message.

Support for parents

Parent Link 01273 481172 or www.parentlinksussex.org.uk

Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 free 24 four helpline or parentlineplus.org.uk

bullying.co.uk

beatbullying.org

bullybusters.org.uk freephone **0800 169 6928**

antibullying.net

Fun in the kitchen

Mango stuffed baked apples (serves 4)

You will need

1 mango (or dried fruit such as apricots or sultanas)

4 cooking apples

A sprinkling of soft light brown sugar

150 ml boiling water

Ice cream, cream or custard to serve

Method

Peel the mango, then cut the flesh away from stone and chop. Using an apple core or small knife, cut out the core of each apple.

Score a line around the widest part of each apple (this stops the apples exploding in the oven!) and place in a shallow ovenproof dish.

Stuff the hollow centres with pieces of mango (or dried fruit) and sprinkle with sugar to taste. Pour the water into the dish.

Bake at 180c, 350F, Gas 4 for 25-30 minutes until soft. Serve hot with the cooking juices from the dish and ice cream, cream or custard.

Roasted vegetable pasta sauce

This delicious, healthy recipe is an excellent way of getting the children to eat vegetables. Chop up any vegetables you have into rough pieces approximately 1 inch (2.5 cm). No prizes for presentation here – they will all be blended later.

Some favourites are:

Red/green/yellow peppers
Broccoli
Tomatoes
Onions
Carrots
Courgettes
Mushrooms
Celery

You will also need:

4 tablespoons olive oil
1 clove garlic, chopped
2 teaspoons mixed herbs fresh or dried
2 tins chopped tomatoes

Salt and pepper (optional)

Put the vegetables into a roasting tray, add 4 tablespoons of olive oil, garlic and herbs, and then mix well.

Roast at 180c (350F, Gas 4) for 45 minutes or until the vegetables are softened.

Add the chopped tomatoes, stir well and return to the oven for 15 minutes.

Then blend the vegetable mix in a food processor or stick blender, or you can mash with a potato masher. Add salt and pepper if required.

Your sauce is then ready to add to your favourite cooked pasta. You could stir in some black olives or garnish with grated cheese.

Net mums website has great information on how to feed a family on a budget and great recipes. Visit the website for some new ideas: netmums.com

Indoor fun for a rainy day

We can't rely on the great British weather so it is worth having a few indoor activities up your sleeve. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Release your inner artist and make a portrait

Children and parents can draw each other. You may be amazed by your children's observations. If you sign and date each portrait and do this as a regular activity you will have a lovely collection over the years.

Explore your home with a treasure hunt

Make a list of items that are scattered around the house. For older children you may want to give clues. You can give them a time limit to find as many as possible and bring them back to you.

Bring the flicks to your living room! Make your own cinema

Choose a DVD that you have not seen for a long time or hire one. Make some tickets, popcorn and show the children to their darkened seats with a torch.

Bring your home alive with the sound of music

Younger children will love making musical instruments. Save your cartons, plastic bottles and boxes and fill them with pasta or rice to make shakers. Vary the amount you put in to vary the sound. The children can then decorate their instrument and play along to their favourite songs.

Be a star!

Get the children to write a play. Then let them dress up and star in their own show in front of you, grandparents, neighbours and friends.

Family Tree

Have fun looking through old photographs then choose some and make a family tree.

Time capsule

Get the children to gather some items together that would tell someone about the time/year it was planted. Use a small steel or wooden box.

Breastfeeding: a new mum's story

Medical evidence tells us that mother's milk is crucial in building babies' brains and helping them to fight infection - which no formula can duplicate - and that a mother's bond with her baby can be enhanced by regular skin-to-skin contact. Although women have breastfed their babies for centuries, breastfeeding doesn't always happen easily. For any new mum, getting started can be a challenge as the milk supply adjusts and the baby learns how to feed.

Louise is 35 and has an 18-week-old daughter, Lily. Here is her experience of those all-important first few months.

Did you always plan to breastfeed? Yes

Why did you decide to breastfeed? I knew it was better for my baby, it's natural. I understood it doesn't always work for people so I had an open mind. It's easy, hassle-free (sterilizing bottles put me off).

How was it the first time? She didn't take to it for a couple of days so I was just patient. When the milk came in it was better, but painful.

How different is it now? Less painful and my nipples have adjusted. It's much more bearable and worth it in the long run.

How did you learn what to do? I saw two different styles of video at my pregnancy yoga and NCT classes which were helpful. It was hard to put it into context as I didn't have a baby yet, but it showed me the mechanics. I tried at hospital but she didn't take to it and I was only there six hours. The midwife came and saw me at home, watched me, gave practical advice and supported me.

Have you tried expressing milk? I'm haven't been prepared enough in the mornings to sterilize the bottles. With hindsight I would make point of doing it, so that other members of the family could get involved in the feeding. As it was, I didn't have a plan as there's a lot to take on board when doing you're doing everything for the first time.

What about nursing bras? They tell you to get fitted two weeks before birth, to get two and rotate them. No-one said about night times. I was wearing the same bras until I discovered soft night nursing bras. They are like T-shirt bra tops. They give support, you can feed, they hold breast pads in place are more comfy and you have time to wash day bras.

How do you feel about breastfeeding in public? I feel ok. I thought I would find it difficult. The videos I watched don't show you how to do it subtly. But you can be discrete and eventually I was able to do it quickly so no one has chance to see. Ultimately when your baby's crying you just want to feed her and you don't worry.

Any problems? Expressing! No-one else can feed her, which is difficult for work. She won't take formula. I was not prepared for it clothes-wise. I bought two 'special' tops but they were not very useful. I wear loose tops or buttons with vests under to hide my tummy. You need a bit of space and clothes that are not clingy.

Any tips for new mums? I think a lot of it down was down to my frame of mind. I was keen to do it but patient when it didn't happen straight away. Being tired and stressed affects your milk and your feeding. Midwives advised me to make it a nice experience for the baby and not to panic. They said it can soothe her to lie down skin-to-skin. I just tried to think 'Oh well she's not feeding' and lie down together. If the midwives are worried they'll tell you. Persevere – your baby's learning as well.

Getting the help and support you need

There's all kinds of help available

- You can ask your midwife, health visitor or GP for help in how to prepare for breast feeding, how to breastfeed and what you should be eating and drinking. They can refer you to a breastfeeding counsellor or infant feeding specialist.
- You can find a local support group – often run by new mums themselves – at your local children's centre. Call 01323 463850 for information.
- National Childbirth Trust (NCT)
0300 330 0771 (7 days a week, 8am-10pm)
nct.org/uk/info-centre
- Breastfeeding network (BfN)
0844 412 4664
breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk
- Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM)
0844 412 2949
abm.me.uk
- La Leche League
0845 120 2918 (24-hr helpline)
laleche.org.uk
- babycentre.co.uk
- breastfeeding.org.uk

“I am a much more positive parent now,” says Sam

How Samantha found motherhood easier the second time, what she discovered at a parenting course and why she now wants to support other mums, thanks to Hastings and St Leonards Children’s Centres.

39-year-old Samantha lives in Hastings with her husband Kevin and their three-year-old son Nathan. Samantha also has a daughter, 22-year-old Gillian.

Sam Says: “There is 19 year gap between my two children, so childcare has obviously changed quite a bit. I was only 18 when I had Gillian and there was nothing available really, maybe a playgroup or an occasional coffee morning. It’s completely different now as there are so many activities to do with Nathan at the local Children’s Centres in Hastings. It’s unbelievable and it’s made all the difference to being a mum for me.”

Getting the best out of parenting

Samantha has recently completed The Incredible Years, a ten week parenting course: “It’s easy to find yourself on a wheel going round-and-round and wondering, ‘Is all I’m going to be saying is ‘no’ and ‘stop that’? Basically the course is about improving parenting skills and learning through play, finding out about giving praise and what to do when it comes to time-out. It’s about giving that little bit extra and enjoying being a mum.”

Meeting other mums

Like many mothers of young children, Samantha went through a stage when she didn’t feel like socialising: “I practically had to be dragged out of the door but going to the Children’s Centre with Nathan has been really good for me. It’s a good way to ‘sound off’ and be able to talk to other mothers about how they do things. It’s also made me realise that there is something that I want to do ultimately – help other mothers in the community.”

Helping other families

When Nathan goes to school Samantha would like to get into Family Outreach work and is currently getting as much experience as she can: “I’ve been on the Community Parenting course at the Centre and I’ve also taken a course to provide support to breastfeeding mums. Sometimes mothers feel more at ease talking to another mum about a problem, so it really is a good system. “

Sam concludes: “Parenthood has certainly been easier second time round and, as a result of that, I feel a lot more confident as a parent – and as an individual.”

Find out about a children’s centre near you...

Parenting courses are available at Children’s Centres throughout East Sussex for mums and dads of children from tots to teens. For details of your local children’s centre go to eastsussex.gov.uk or call **01323 463850**.

Sussex Sport – What’s hot?

With national initiatives like Change 4Life and the 2012 Olympics on the horizon, sport and activity are firmly at the top of the agenda. The Sussex County Sports Partnership (SCSP) website helps the people of Sussex find clubs and activities happening in their area. So what is hot in East Sussex?

Website hits show a big increase in demand for extreme sports among the young including BMXing, skateboarding and parkour (free running). ‘Back to Netball’ sessions across Sussex have been a hit, helping adult women back into sport and one of the growing team sports in Sussex is Ultimate Frisbee!

To find out how you can get involved in a new sport in your area visit sussexsport.org

For information on Change4Life and ways to get healthy and active visit nhs.uk/change4life

Be a sport. Volunteer!

Sports clubs are always looking for keen volunteers to help out as coaches, officials and administrators; or you could volunteer at one of the many sporting events run each year.

The Sussex County Sports Partnership Trust run the Volunteer Reward Scheme (VRS) for people of all ages. The scheme allows you to count up all your volunteered hours and exchange them for points to turn all of your hard work into rewards.

There are four levels to achieve, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. Each level receives different rewards with Platinum achievers invited to the annual Sussex Sports Awards event for a three-course dinner and presentation evening!

Emma Bowden, who is a student, is on the platinum level of the Volunteer Reward Scheme. She volunteers teaching sport for Seaford Head Community college and working as support for Seaford Lifeguards.

She said “I love teaching younger children sport and teaching them the things that I know. Volunteering has helped me improve my confidence, style of teaching and decide what I want to do in the future, which is to teach people with disabilities”.

To find out more about the VRS please visit: sussexsport.org/run-sport/volunteers

The rewards

Bronze - Certificate, pen, bag, free workshop voucher

Silver - Certificate, t-shirt, free workshop voucher, £25 towards coaching or officiating course

Gold - Certificate, hoodie, free workshop voucher, £50 towards coaching or officiating course

Platinum - Certificate and trophy presented at Sussex Sports Awards

Connexions 360 - Visit us and win a Wii!

If you're between 11 and 19, take a look at our new website Connexions 360 at connexions360.org.uk. Get help and advice on topics like choosing your options, money, sex and relationships and jobs and lots more. You can use the 'What's on your doorstep' search to find out what's happening near you, plus read real life stories and do our quizzes.

To celebrate our launch, we're also giving you the chance to win a Wii, so make sure you enter before 28 December 2009.