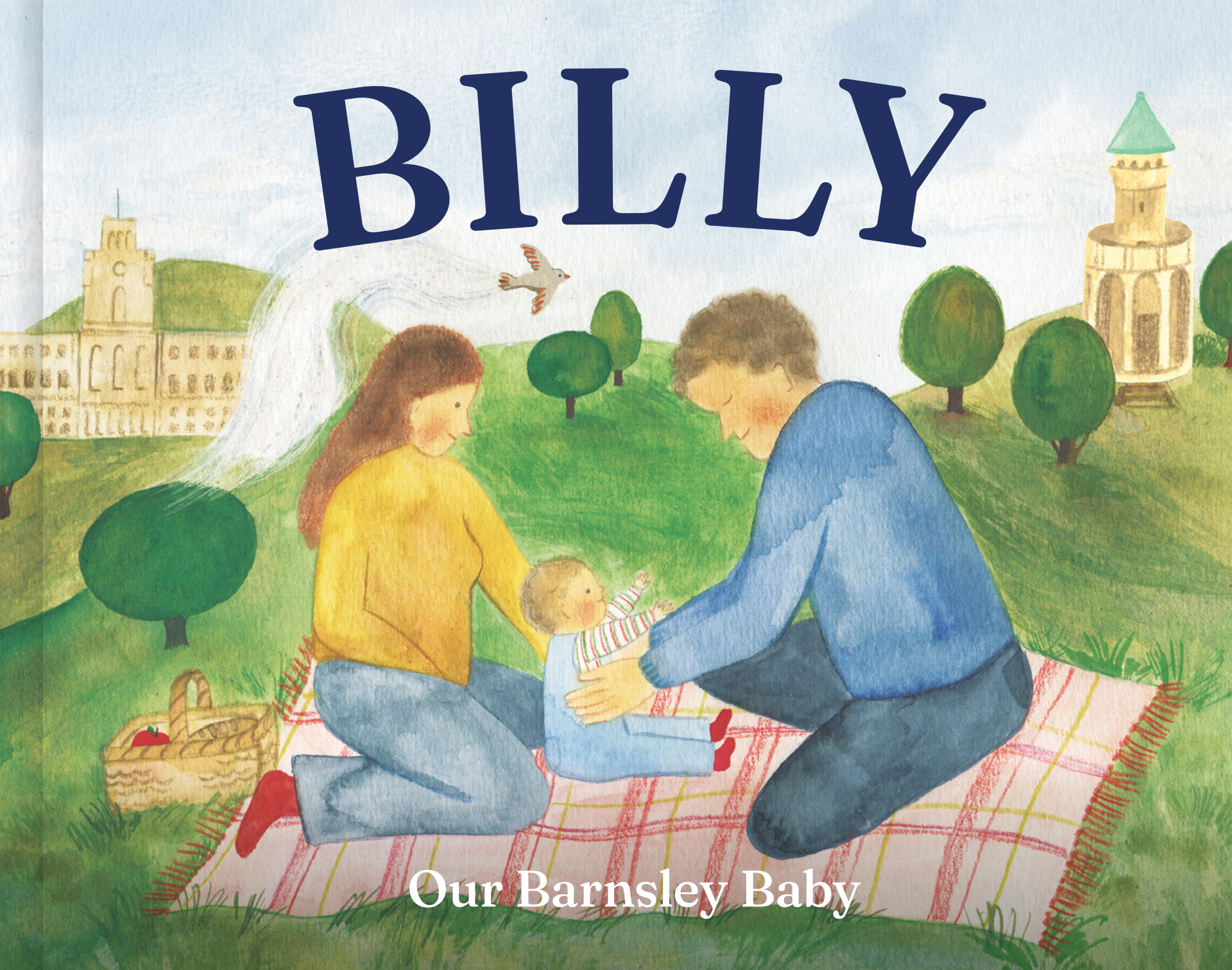


BILLY



Our Barnsley Baby

*“Healthy trees grow
from well-nurtured
seeds and saplings.”*

Professor Mark Mon-Williams

Around 2000 babies are born each year to families living in Barnsley.

In our story, Billy's parents are a mum and a dad, however we recognise that all children and families are unique.

Some infants might also have a disability or may not reach development milestones at the same time as other children their age.





Our story begins in Barnsley, where a happy couple decided they were ready to start a family.

They were lucky enough to find themselves pregnant naturally, within a few months.



Women with planned pregnancies have higher levels of subjective wellbeing, both during pregnancy and in their children's early years. Subjective wellbeing means how happy and satisfied you feel about your life.

The wellbeing of Our Barnsley Baby begins in pregnancy.

There are many things that can help give them the best chance of healthy development. There are also lots of services that can support Our Baby's parents.



The first part of a baby's brain and spinal cord appears just three weeks after conception. These are the building blocks of the baby's central nervous system.



Parental mental health and health behaviours in pregnancy can have a substantial impact on the wellbeing of the growing foetus.



Prolonged high levels of stress in mothers during pregnancy can affect the child's ability to learn and remember things.



A healthy pregnancy and early and effective support are therefore crucial in setting up the unborn baby for a healthy, happy life.



This is now Billy's story...

I've been curled up in my Mummy's tummy for 24 weeks now. I can hear her talking and laughing – she reads to me every night too.

I know Daddy feels a bit silly singing to my Mummy's tummy, but I really love hearing his lullabies.

Sometimes I let them know I'm listening by giving them a good kick.

I feel close to my Mummy when she strokes her tummy.



Babies can hear their mother's voices most clearly, but anyone can talk and sing to them in utero. This helps them to get to know voices, which will help them feel safe and secure and lays the foundations for social and emotional development.



My Mummy attends all her midwife appointments to make sure I am growing well. And Mummy and Daddy have started going to 'Welcome to the World' antenatal group where they meet up with other families who are having babies.

They talk about how they are feeling and they're already planning play dates for me and my new friends.



Over 140 midwives in Barnsley support parents and carers through pregnancy, ensuring mother and baby stay safe and healthy.



Having a baby is a major life change, and strong support networks during pregnancy help parents navigate challenges with confidence.

I couldn't wait to meet the world and so I made my arrival a few days early.

After I was born, the midwife laid me on my Mummy's bare chest and tucked me under a blanket.

It felt strange to be out in a new environment but my Mummy holding me close to her, made me feel calm and relaxed and helped me to have my first breastfeed.



The very first breastmilk, called colostrum, is packed with antibodies and immune-boosting substances. It acts like a natural vaccine, protecting newborns from infections such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, and sepsis. Midwives can help with collecting colostrum even before baby is born!



For the first few hours of my life I laid in skin-to-skin with my Mummy and then my Daddy. I could feel their warmth and hear their hearts beating, this made me feel safe and close to them.



Skin-to-skin contact after birth, helps the baby to adjust to life outside the womb. It also supports the mother to initiate breastfeeding and develop close, loving relationships with their baby. Regardless of feeding choice, skin-to-skin with both parents has multiple benefits.



Lots of people came to see us in the early weeks, but the time with just my Mummy and Daddy was special.

When they held me close to their faces, I could see their big smiles. This helped build lots of connections in my brain.



Becoming a new parent can be wonderful, but it can also be difficult. Parents can speak to their Midwife, GP or Health Visitor if they are struggling.



They kept me close, day and night, so they could respond quickly to my needs, especially when I was hungry.



New babies have a strong need to be close to their parents as this helps them to feel secure and loved. When parents are responsive to babies' needs for food, love and comfort, this supports baby's brain development, they will be calmer and grow up to be more confident and resilient.

I love watching Daddy's funny faces and especially games of peekaboo. These interactions help my brain grow.



A baby's brain is only 25% developed at birth. Their experiences during their first 1001 days build the foundations for life.

Mummy takes me to a playgroup at the Family Hub. I love being here and my Mummy does too. She chats to other parents and gets information from the people that work there. My favourite bit is when we sing nursery rhymes together.



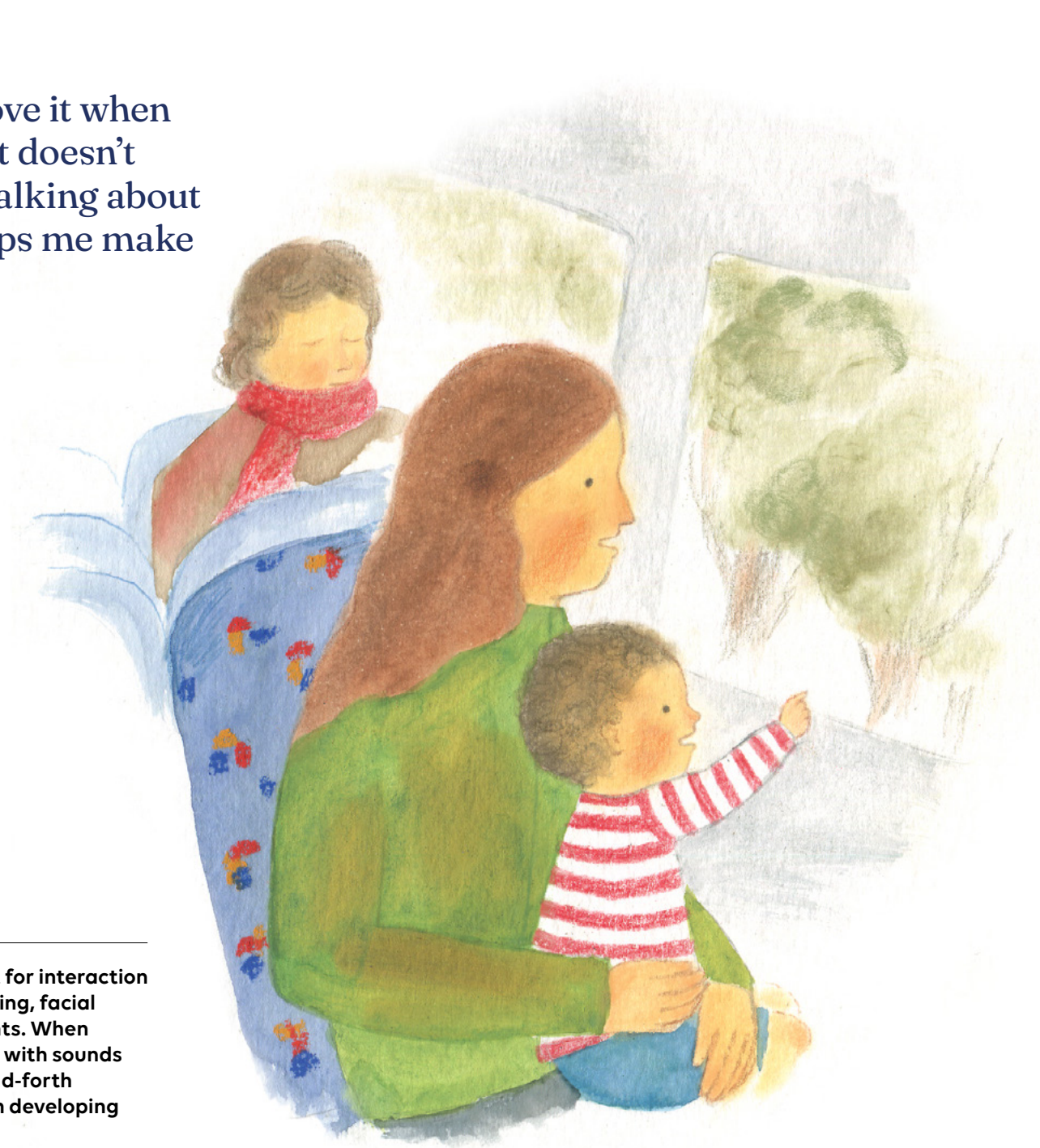
The library has so many books but I enjoy looking at the same one again and again!




Sharing books together provides further opportunities for bonding, laughing and talking together.



I chatter a lot now and love it when people talk back to me. It doesn't matter when or where, talking about the things around us helps me make sense of the world.



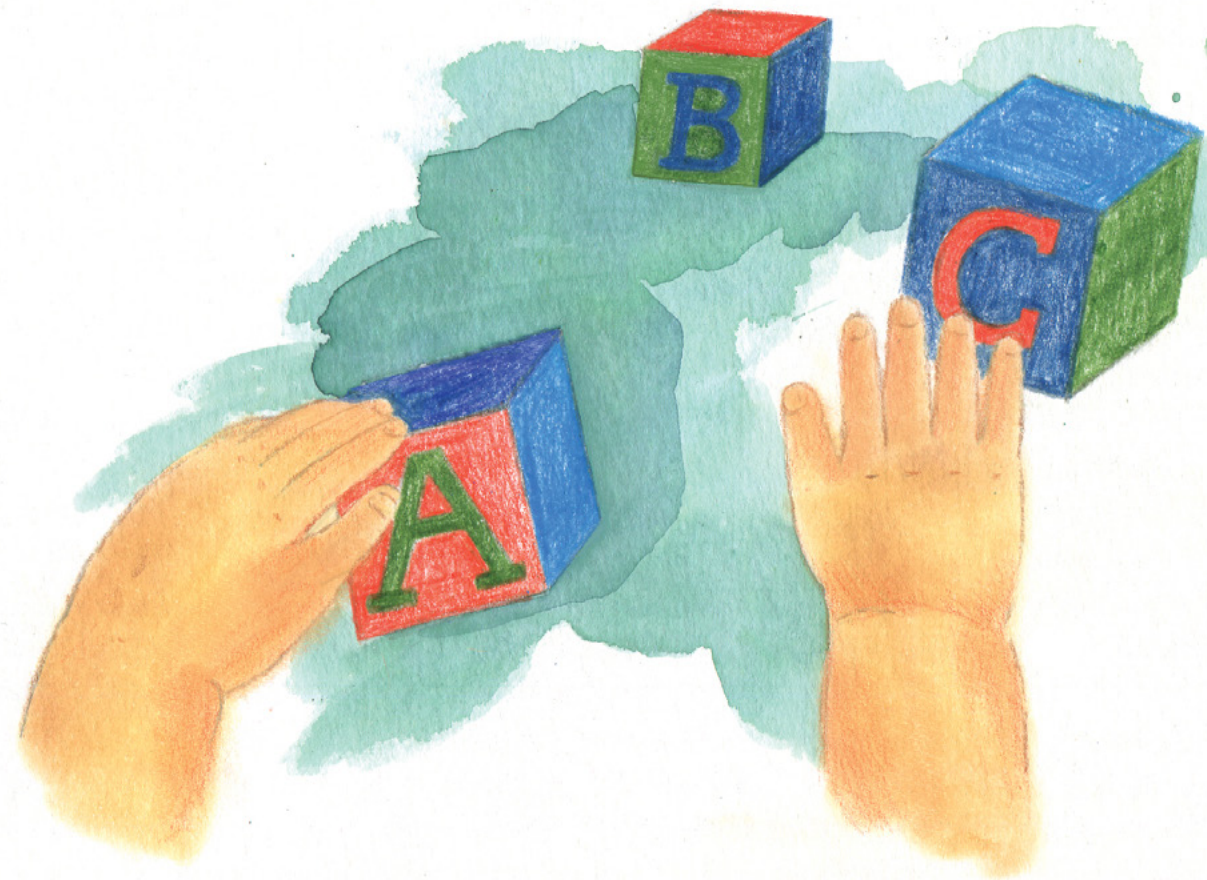
Babies naturally reach out for interaction with others through babbling, facial expressions and movements. When caregivers respond in kind with sounds and gestures, this back-and-forth process plays a vital role in developing the wiring of the brain.



I love to spend time outdoors,
exploring what's around me.
There's so much to discover
and it feeds my imagination!
It's much more exciting than
watching TV!



As well as supporting good physical development, spending time outdoors gives children a different and exciting environment where they can have fun, letting their imaginations run wild.



My curious mind loves playing with toys. If I get stuck or upset, I can show my grown ups that I need help.



Play helps children and babies make sense of the world, explore new possibilities and challenge themselves. Playing with their peers provides a safe space for children to explore and learn to manage their feelings and build resilience.

As I get older, my world gets even bigger. I've started nursery now and spend lots of time playing and chatting with all the different friends I've made there.



Development of social skills in this period is associated with better social adjustment and relationships in later life. This can have a strong impact on life-long wellbeing.

Billy's first 1001 days were filled with lots of little experiences and interactions.

These helped develop a healthy brain, laying the foundations for his cognitive, emotional, and physical development and shaping the rest of his life.



Every child deserves these opportunities.

Raising a child is a shared journey that brings together the whole community – parents and grandparents, neighbours and nursery staff, NHS and Council services, and local community and voluntary organisations.

Together, we can create a world where every child can thrive. By nurturing children in their first two years, we not only build amazing brains but also create a fairer, more prosperous future for Barnsley.

Barnsley Council has received significant investment over the last 3 years from the Department for Education's Start for Life programme. This has enabled us to develop a rich Start for Life offer.

Here are just a few examples of the initiatives and programmes that support families in the first 1001 days, that have been delivered over the last 12 months.*



0-19 Public Health Nursing Service (Barnsley Council)

The Public Health Nursing Service supports pregnant women and children (ages 0–19, or up to 25 with SEND) through the Healthy Child Programme. Working with partners, the team provides assessments, promotes immunisations, conducts developmental reviews, and offers parenting and lifestyle guidance. Specialist teams include the Phoenix Team, which supports vulnerable families in North Barnsley from early pregnancy to eight weeks postnatal.

The Phoenix Team focuses on families with safeguarding concerns, mental health issues, SEND, substance use, domestic abuse, minority backgrounds, care experience, or premature births. Their aim is to support perinatal mental health, improve communication, reduce neglect, and increase smoking quit rates. The initiative was a two-year pilot being evaluated by Oxford University.

*Unfortunately, some of these services may no longer be available due to the expiration of their funded contracts through the Start for Life programme.

Also part of the Public Health Nursing Service, the **Family Nurse Partnership**, is an intensive home visiting programme for young first-time mothers (aged 19 and under), their partners and wider families. The programme enrolls clients in early pregnancy (from antenatal booking up to 28+6 weeks gestation) and works with the family until the child is between the age of one and two years.

The programme uses in-depth methods to work with young parents on attachment, relationships, and psychological preparation for parenthood, building trusting and supportive relationships through a therapeutic relationship.

One mum said, **“My Health Visitor has been so amazing over the last 12 months. She is compassionate, thorough, knowledgeable and approachable. She was the friendly face that I most definitely needed whilst adjusting to motherhood.”**

The 1001 Days Team (Barnsley Family Hubs)

The 1001 Days Team work with Barnsley mums, dads, parents, and carers on a 1:1 basis during the perinatal period (pregnancy to age 2), offering additional support and guidance to strengthen positive parent-infant relationships and parental mental health and wellbeing. The team deliver a range of evidence-based interventions, such as Triple P Baby, Video Interaction Guidance and PEEP, to support positive parent-infant connections, the development of parenting skills, and boosting parental confidence and coping skills during the first 1001 days. The service also connects families to local support services and provides opportunities for families to build positive moments together through Family Hub activities.

“It’s really helped us having someone involved to help us... It was really difficult to start with, but with all the advice and help you gave us it made us feel like we were getting everything right. Triple P has really helped us learn how to communicate.”

— Anonymous Service User

Talking Therapies

(South West Yorkshire NHS Foundation Trust)

The Barnsley Talking Therapies team provide clinics in GP practices and virtual appointments to support pregnant women, birthing people and their partners in the first 1001 days, who are experiencing mild anxiety and depression. During the period April 2024 – March 2025 over 500 women in the perinatal period accessed the service. The average recovery rate for the year was 58% for women who completed a course of treatment with the service.



Perinatal Mental Health Service

(South West Yorkshire NHS Foundation Trust)

The Perinatal Service work with pregnant women and birthing people in the first 1001 days, who are experiencing moderate to severe/complex mental health difficulties. Support and treatment allow them to learn skills to help them to recover from their mental health difficulties so they are able to be the best parents they can be. A range of parent-infant interventions are also available to support with bonding and attachment.

“I truly believe your support and care played a huge part in my journey to becoming a mother. I’d like to thank you both for your guidance during this time; it will always be greatly appreciated & cherished. Thank you.”

— Anonymous Service User

Bump, Birth and Beyond

(Barnardo’s)

Bump, Birth and Beyond is a two-year pilot delivered in Worsborough, supporting pregnant women, birthing people and their families to access community and statutory organisations at the earliest opportunity. The Service delivers a holistic family intervention model connecting families, communities and support services. Bump, Birth and Beyond has supported 107 families in the last 10 months increasing access to services, tackling barriers, reaching communities, tackling child poverty and reducing health inequalities.

“I think I have progressed immensely and can tackle anything life throws at me. I am so glad I phoned Barnardo’s. They will never know how much my marvellous life has changed, for the better.”

— Anonymous Service User

Dad Matters

Dad Matters aims to help dads have the best possible relationship with their children and families from the very beginning. The service supports dads with attachment and bonding, emotional wellbeing and help to access other services. They provide information on birth, labour and beyond, including and valuing dads in all parts of the perinatal period.

Support is offered on a 1:1 basis, in the home or community as well as through ‘walk and talks’. This includes advice and support within Barnsley Hospital Maternity Services, including Antenatal and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Over 100 contacts were made by Dad Matters with dads in outreach settings in just the first 5 months of the service being set up.

By the end of the first visit one dad said, **“thank you, you’ve made me feel normal, I didn’t want to put it on anyone else.”**

A dad from one of the walk and talks explained, **“It was really good to talk to other dads; my wife has mums and tots and its hard as I didn’t know anyone else to talk to.”**

Recommendations for Prioritising the First 1001 Days: Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life

The first 1001 days of a child's life – from conception to age two – represent a period of unparalleled opportunity and vulnerability. During this time, foundations are laid for lifelong health, wellbeing, and success. We welcome the reference to the first 1001 critical days in the Government's new 10 Year Health Plan for England and recognise that Barnsley Council and partner organisations have a vital role to play in making these early days a strategic priority to ensure all children have the best possible start.

1. Integrate the First 1001 Days into All Policies and Strategies

Embed the importance of early childhood development in local authority and NHS strategic plans, commissioning frameworks, and policy reviews.

Assess the potential impact of all new policies on infants, parents, and families in the early years to ensure their needs are considered at every level.

2. Support Parents and Infants Through Business and Community Partnerships

Encourage local businesses to sign up to breastfeeding-friendly initiatives, such as the Barnsley Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme, and to become Breastfeeding Friendly Employers.

Develop partnership programmes that provide practical support for working parents, such as flexible work arrangements and parental leave policies.

3. Foster Strong Parent-Child Connections

Promote the importance of presence, responsive care, and quality time over material belongings, highlighting the fundamental role of nurturing relationships in early development.

Offer parenting programmes and resources that support emotional bonding and attachment during the critical early years.

4. Maximise the Impact of Family Hubs and Best Start in Life Services

Ensure Family Hubs and Best Start in Life initiatives offer a coordinated, accessible, and sustained package of support for families throughout the first 1001 days.

Create mechanisms to make these services sustainable and ensure their legacy for future generations.

5. Co-Design Services with Families

Actively involve families in the design, evaluation, and continual improvement of Start for Life and early years services, ensuring relevance to local needs.

Design maternity and early childhood services that actively include fathers and non-birthing partners, recognising their vital role in a child's development.

6. Equip Staff with Essential Skills and Confidence

Provide ongoing training for all maternity and early childhood staff in infant feeding, emotional wellbeing, and family support.

Ensure staff feel confident supporting families from all backgrounds and have up-to-date knowledge of local services and referral pathways.

7. Enhance Accessibility and Equity of Support

Develop targeted outreach and communication to ensure families – especially those most vulnerable – know how and where to access support in the first 1001 days.

Remove barriers to accessing services, such as language, location, or stigma, to ensure every family feels able to seek help.

8. Engage the Wider Community

Develop community-wide campaigns and events to bring families and generations together, reducing isolation and building networks of support.

Support small local groups, such as community playgroups and voluntary sector organisations, to provide inclusive family activities and safe spaces for connection.

By making the first 1001 days a strategic priority, councils and partner organisations can profoundly influence the health, wellbeing, and life chances of children and families across our communities.

These recommendations provide a roadmap to creating the conditions for every child to thrive – now and for generations to come.

Anna Hartley is Executive Director of Public Health and Communities at Barnsley Council. By law, Directors of Public Health (DPH) are required to produce an annual report about the health of people who live in their Local Authority.

Last year, Anna's first report as DPH looked at health inequalities and homelessness, and we heard from Barnsley residents who had experienced considerable challenges, but who still found hope and a better life.

Billy – Our Barnsley Baby was developed as an illustrated alternative to the Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2025. It focuses on the critical first 1001 days and our commitment to ensuring that all children in Barnsley have the best possible start in life.

Anna would like to thank the Children and Young People's Public Health team, led by Dr Amy Baxter, as well as our partners across Maternity and Early Childhood Services – who have worked together in partnership to bring this story to life.



Useful Links

Here are some links to useful information referred to in Billy's story.

Local Services

Barnsley Hospital's Maternity Services:
www.barnsleyhospital.nhs.uk/maternity

Barnsley's 0-19 Public Health Nursing Service:
www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/health-and-wellbeing/children-and-young-peoples-health/barnsley-0-19-public-health-nursing-service

Barnsley Family Hubs:
www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-young-people-and-families/family-hubs

Information about childcare and nurseries in Barnsley:
www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-young-people-and-families/childcare-and-nurseries



You can also find out more about this year's Director of Public Health report, including local support services, by visiting:
www.barnsley.gov.uk/DPH-Report

Online Resources

How to keep well in pregnancy:
www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well

Advice about mental wellbeing in pregnancy:
www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/mental-health-in-pregnancy-and-after-the-birth/mental-health

Ideas for bonding with your baby during pregnancy:
www.nhs.uk/bonding-with-your-baby

Information and guidance on feeding your baby:
www.nhs.uk/feeding-your-baby

Book Start programme:
www.booktrust.org.uk/how-we-help/programmes/bookstart

Get baby brain-building tips from Look, Say, Sing, Play:
www.nspcc.org.uk/advice-for-families/look-say-sing-play

Find simple early years activity ideas on the EasyPeasy app:
www.easypeasyapp.com/for-parents-and-carers

Billy – Our Barnsley Baby is an insightful and heartwarming tale that captures the journey of parenthood and the first two years of a child's life. The book was developed as an illustrated alternative to Barnsley Council's Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2025.

The story of Billy and his family offers a mix of personal anecdotes and evidence-based information about early childhood development, celebrating the joys of parenthood but also providing valuable insights and resources to support families during this critical period.

The book closes by providing recommendations for prioritising the first 1001 days, offering a clear roadmap for policymakers, healthcare providers, and communities to ensure every child has the best start in life.

Overall, *Billy – Our Barnsley Baby* is an inspiring and informative read for parents, caregivers, and anyone invested in the well-being of children.

Illustrated by Katie Grindley



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Metropolitan Borough Council