



Wirral Child Health and Development Study

WELCOME TO THE FIRST STEPS STUDY NEWSLETTER!

 ISSUE
NO. 1

Dear Parents and Children,

We are getting in touch with everyone on the study to tell you that all your help with the research has started to produce some very exciting results! We are making new discoveries about how children develop and in this first newsletter we would like to share some of our first findings with you. We also want, above all, to thank you for your fantastic contribution because the research would not have been possible without you.

The study has received over £3 million funding from the Medical Research Council so far, which means the scientific community feel it is a very important UK study. The aim is to discover more about how children develop from the time they are in the womb, and throughout their childhoods. This knowledge will be used to benefit other children and families, perhaps preventing behavioural and emotional difficulties arising in the future.



The Lauries Community Centre in Birkenhead — the study base

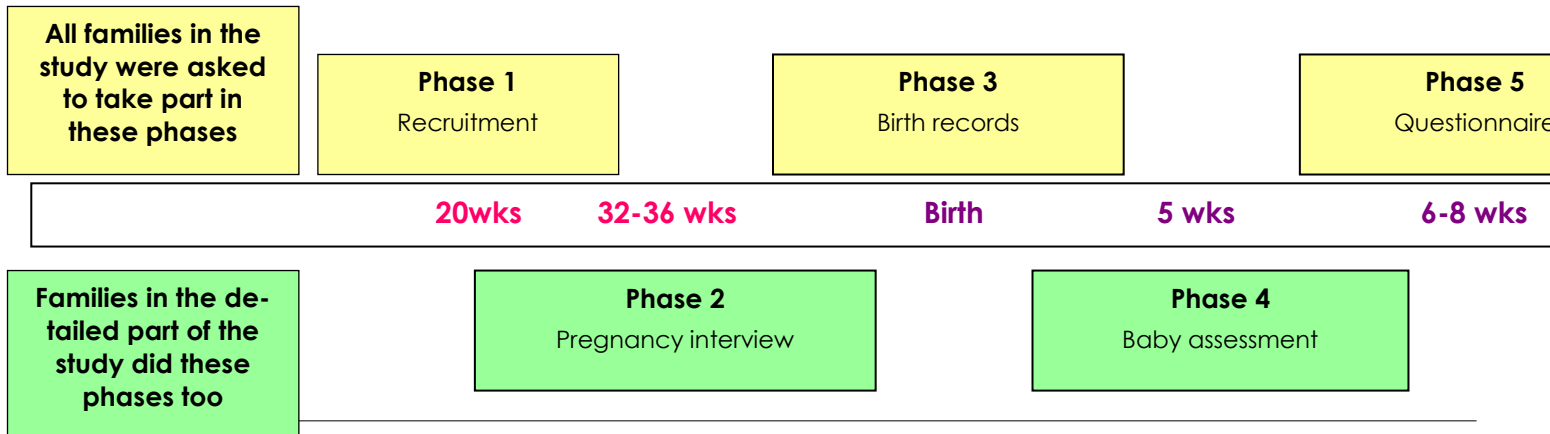
First, a Bit About You!

During 2007 and 2008 more than 1200 families met with our research midwives Belinda, Karen and Carol in the antenatal clinic at Arrowse Park Hospital and agreed to take part. We asked all of you to send us questionnaires back when your babies were 2-3 months and 1 year of age. We got a good response despite everyone being very busy as new parents! We also asked over 300 mothers to come to see the team at the Lauries Centre. We interviewed mothers and filmed them playing and doing tasks together with their baby. So far we have assessed each child's development in many different ways at different ages, including their behaviour, emotional reactions, thinking and language. We have measured baby heart rate, genes and stress hormones in saliva too! All the information we collect is very precious - so we THANK YOU for all your time and energy. You have played a big part in helping families of the future already... and we keep learning more and more.....

And Who are we?

Our Research Team - Study Leaders: Prof. Jonathan Hill & Dr. Helen Sharp. **Study Administrators:** Liz Green, Niki Sandman & Rebecca Holmes. **Research Midwives:** Karen Lunt, Carol Bedwell & Belinda Thompson. **Adult Interviewers:** Julie Carlisle, Kate Marks, Michaela Broyden, Holly Hope, Jenny Lee, Jo Roberts, Gemma Culverwell, Kirsty Entwistle, Nicky Wright & Fay Huntley. **4-week Infant Assessors:** Florin Tibu, Jeanette Appleton, & Carol Sadler. **Postnatal Extensive Researchers:** Melissa Bensinyor & Elaine Roy. **Mother & Baby Assessors:** Kate Marshall, Helen Jones, Alice Hulbert, Gillian Fairclough, Stuart Kehl & Louise Fisher. **Research Health Visitors & Psychologist:** Donna Yarlett, Louise Adams & Giovanna Moretto. **Data Manager:** Karen Murphy. **Research Technician:** Laura Davies

The Phases in the Study So Far—From Pregnancy to Age 4



Now some results from the early phases of the study.....

From Pregnancy To Five Weeks Old



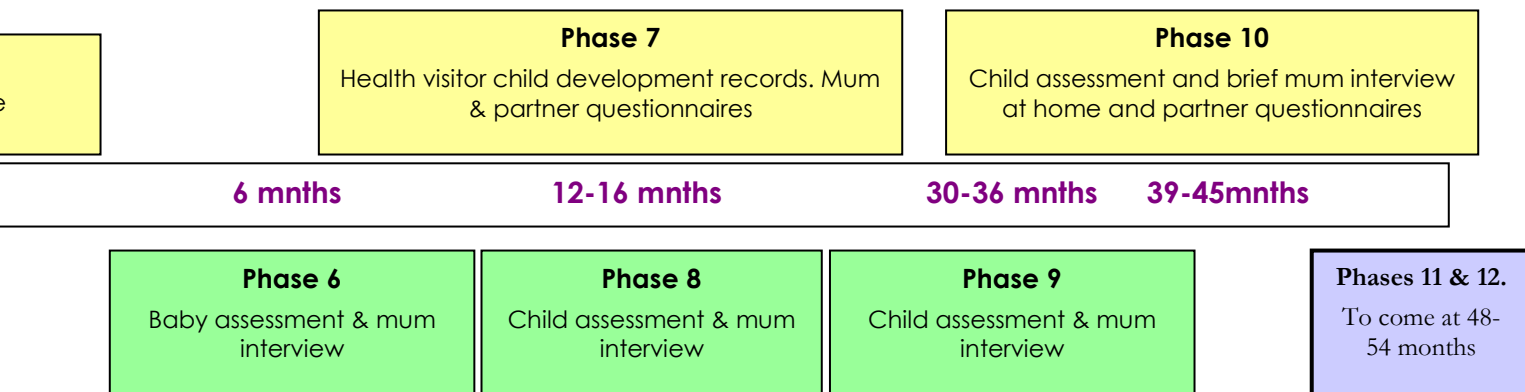
Left: Little baby Chloe with our researcher Florin Tibu during her 1st visit to the centre.

These next results are from those of you who came to the Lauries centre during pregnancy and soon after birth. Over the next months we will also be working on telling you about results from everyone in the study.

We know from other studies, and now we are finding out from our study, that mothers' emotional state and stress levels while they are pregnant influences their babies' emotions early in life. We think this is because of an effect of the hormone cortisol which we measured during pregnancy in the saliva we gathered from some of you. We are amongst the first researchers to find out that this effect is different in boys and girls. We have found that daughters of mothers who were more stressed in pregnancy were more emotional whereas their sons were less emotional. We are basing this on the assessment we did with babies taking part in the detailed part of the study when they were only a few weeks old. The babies were assessed by Florin, Jeanette and Carol. They observed the baby's emotional response to minor stresses or challenges such as having their reflexes tested or being moved from lying down to a sitting position.

So what does this mean? We and others think that nature has evolved a way of preparing babies, before they are born, for the kind of challenges they will meet in the future. So it seems that perhaps girls are prepared by more easily showing emotions so that others know how they feel and can help them, while boys are prepared by not showing emotions and becoming more independent. So if you were stressed when you were pregnant it probably made a difference, but not necessarily as a bad thing, it may have just affected how your baby responds emotionally to challenges. This may or may not sound like your baby because, remember, there are many influences on how children show emotions, not just what happens in pregnancy. We do not yet know whether the way babies respond to challenges in life changes over time. We think that for many babies it probably does. That is why we keep asking families back so we can study these changes over time!

We have presented these research findings at an international child development research conference and will be aiming to publish in academic journals over the next year.



What is happening at the moment?

Phase 9- For the 300 families in the detailed part of the study

Phase 9 assessments take place at the Lauries centre when children are around 30 months old. They started in Autumn 2010, and we have seen over 150 mothers and children so far. It will carry on until the end of 2011 and perhaps a little into 2012. In some ways the Phase 9 assessment is like earlier ones—we want to understand about children’s behavioural and emotional responses to events, and also measure their heart rate and cortisol (a stress hormone). At this phase we have introduced new puzzles and games to help us to find out what children remember and how they plan. The child on the right is playing a language game to see what kind of instructions a 2 year old can understand.



Phase 10-For all families in the study



Phase 10 Team

We have also started the next phase of the study, where we would like to visit all mums and children aged around 39 months old at home. The research team, Giovanna (research psychologist), Louise and Donna (research health visitors) will be in touch soon if they haven’t been already. This will be the first time that we have had an opportunity to meet all the families in the study and we are looking forward to seeing you. We will be assessing each child’s development, asking them to complete some puzzles and games, and we will ask you in detail about their health and behaviour. We also really want to hear from the fathers or father figures in each family! We want to know their views on life at home and their child’s development in these pre-school years.

Science Note - why is everyone of you important?

The First Steps study uses what is known as an ‘epidemiological sample’. This means we aimed to include everyone in a geographical area, so that the people taking part represent the population of that area. If this area on Wirral is similar to the rest of the country, then we can conclude that the sample is similar to the rest of the country. Wirral is very much like the country as a whole because it has people living in towns, suburbs and the countryside. So it is a very good place to do epidemiological research. If all of you take part we can be confident that what we find out is very likely to be true for children across the whole country, and also in other developed countries. So every family is very important to the research and we really value your continued help and support with this.

The First Steps Team right now...



The First Steps team would like to thank you for all the time you've put into the study so far. We are currently planning the next phase of the study for when the children are around 4 years old. We plan to send out newsletters when we have more to tell you about the results from the study and we would love to hear from you if you want to give us any feedback about any part of the study. We hope to develop a website shortly for parents to read and be updated about the study and we now have an email address as well as the usual phone contacts for you to use to reach us. So, once again many thanks for all your help so far— and please remember to stay in touch !

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Have you had a change of address, telephone number or e-mail or will you be moving soon?

Please let us know by phoning or emailing us or completing the form below and posting it to the above address.

Participant's (Mum's) Name:

New Address:

Post code:

Home Telephone:

Work Telephone:

Mobile:

Child's Name:

Child's D.O.B

E-mail:

GP Details: