AIMS For a better birth...

Semana do bebe

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Lucy Potter shares her experience of the Leeds Baby Week

The city of Leeds launched its first Baby Week in September 2016. The week-long event aims to bring together maternity, children's and families services hosting activities and seminars, with representation from public, private and voluntary sectors.

The concept was originally taken from the Brazilian Semana do Bebe; a national early years initiative now funded by UNICEF which over the last 17 years has helped reduce infant mortality, increase awareness in breast feeding and help connect services with indigenous communities. The research and evaluation rests with promoting national policies and improving service delivery to babies, infants and toddlers.

The idea to implement Semana do Bebe was taken on by mum of two, family outreach worker and community activist Lucy Potter. In 2013 Lucy embarked on a travelling fellowship to seek good practice overseas and bring it back to her own community in Beeston and Holbeck in Leeds. Lucy was invited to attend a seminar in Canela (South Brazil) and witnessed Semana do Bebe first hand. She was inspired to bring it to Leeds and said; *'There is so much good work happening in Leeds, so many passionate workers helping parents to engage with services in Leeds. It's Baby Week waiting to happen! Wouldn't it be great if we could have one week that brings that together in all sectors and celebrate this work?'*

South and East Clinical Commissioning Group offered financial support to get Baby Week started, with plans to make it an annual event. The funding enabled a launch, with guest speakers and activities in local children's centres. As well as the CCG, there was support from Child Friendly Leeds and Leeds Beckett University who were involved and helped promote the week. There was parliamentary involvement including Cllr Jane Dowson
Deputy Executive Board member for Children, Families, Apprenticeships, Cllr Lisa Mulherin Executive Board Member for Children and Families and the Lord Mayor Cllr Gerry Harper 2016/17. Child Friendly Leeds helped team up with other private stakeholders, to host stalls at the events and run activities such as Bumps & Babes with a baby wearing walk and pram push, and demonstrations from the West Yorkshire Sling library. Also included were Health Visitors and Speech and Language specialists from Public Health.

Similar to the Brazilian model of promoting policies, Baby Week helped promote The Best Start Plan, a targeted early intervention policy for families, and the Leeds Maternity Strategy including more personalised services from community midwifery teams and the launch of the Buddy App with content

tailored to Leeds. Most of the family support services in Leeds are underpinned by the third sector, so there was an involvement with a variety of voluntary services including; Home-Start, NCT, City of Sanctuary. Bosom Buddies and young dads from Health for All and Leeds Dads, with the main purpose to help raise awareness on the first 1001 critical days of an infant's life and improve access to services for families.

Baby Week has opened up the stage for all different areas of maternity services to meet, and provides opportunities for professionals to network and communicate across sectors.

Baby Week gives a chance for voices to be heard and stories to be shared. The organisers are currently preparing for this year's Baby Week event 11th – 16th September 2017. If you are interested in finding out more about Baby Week and a full list of par ticipants please see www.babyweekleeds.com or contact lucy@babyweek.com

Lucy Potter

