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## **Kids Thrive - Baby Choir**

Evaluation of an arts based program for the nurturing and engagement of babies and their carers

Prepared for Kids Thrive Inc.

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**Debbie King** is a well-known evaluator of social programs.

She was Managing Partner of Success Works, an internationally regarded Melbourne based consultancy firm for 8 years and is a member of the Australasian Evaluation Society. She has conducted over 60 large and small evaluation projects including the Evaluation of the Sexual Assault Reform Strategy for the Victorian Department of Justice; the Evaluation of Teacher Professional Leave for the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Evaluation of the Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program for the Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet.

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## Introduction

I have been asked by Kids Thrive Inc.<sup>1</sup> to prepare an evaluation report on their Baby Choir program.

This report presents a summative evaluation of Baby Choir during 2013.

## The Baby Choir Program

Kids Thrive Inc. received funding from the Harold Mitchell Foundation and ANZ Trustees to provide Baby Choir during 2013.

Aimed at increasing attachment between babies and their carers; increasing connection between babies, carers and their community; and offering a non-threatening gateway for carers to access the Banyule Community Health services and supports, Baby Choir focuses on nurturing babies and carers in the early years of their relationship.

The program is provided free of charge on a weekly basis to babies and carers attending Banyule Community Health (BCH).

Baby Choir is facilitated by Kids Thrive Creative Co-Director, Andrea Rieniets along with Maternal and Child Health Nurse, Sharleen Cook and Community Health Nurse, Elishka Sageman.

Like other Kids Thrive programs, Baby Choir aims to address the needs of children and families experiencing disadvantage by:

- Using the arts to develop new social skills
- Promoting social inclusiveness and community connectedness
- Encouraging community cooperation and participation
- Fostering awareness and understanding of community issues
- Imagining alternative, positive pathways for children and families in environments with few perceived options
- Exploring creative approaches to transforming challenges and obstacles into opportunities for growth.

## The Evaluation

This evaluation has been sought by Kids Thrive Inc. to identify the impact of Baby Choir for its adult and baby participants during 2013.

### Project Logic

The evaluation has been guided by a project logic. The project logic is included at **Appendix A**. The project logic makes the thinking that underlies the project explicit and exposes the underlying 'hypothesis' on which the program is based. The purpose of the project logic is to be clear about the activities, outputs and expected outcomes of the project so that the correct evaluation questions are identified. The project logic is developed iteratively with the program managers.

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<sup>1</sup> Kids Thrive is an Arts and Community Cultural Development organisation, housed in the Emerald Hill Arts Precinct of South Melbourne. Kids Thrive partners artists with children's specialists to create arts-based programs and resources to connect kids and communities, whilst addressing identified needs and social issues. Kids Thrive was incorporated in October 2010.

## Evaluation Approach

This evaluation uses a summative approach aimed at determining the impact of Baby Choir during 2013. Summative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program at the end of the program's activities. The focus is on the outcomes achieved and the difference that has been made.

## Evaluation Questions

Based on the project logic the following summative evaluation questions have been developed for this evaluation. The questions are based on the project outputs and short term outcomes identified in the project logic:

1. To what extent have babies and carers participated in Baby Choir?
2. What has Baby Choir delivered?
3. To what extent has Baby Choir supported the positive engagement between carers and their babies?
4. To what extent have carers had regular positive informal contact with other carers who share similar experiences?
5. To what extent has Baby Choir supported positive interactions between carers and service providers

These questions form the framework for the presentation of the Evaluation Results in the next section.

## Data Collection

Key documents and data sources for this evaluation have included:

- Participant Survey - A copy of the survey is attached at **Appendix B**. There were 5 respondents to this survey.
- Staff Survey - - a copy of the survey tool is attached as **Appendix C**. There were 3 respondents to this survey
- End of year interviews with staff and participants conducted by Kids Thrive.

## Data Analysis

Data has been analysed using a constructivist approach. Constructivism is based on the understanding that the "truth" of a situation is individually and collectively *constructed* by the people who experience it<sup>2</sup>. In constructivist evaluation it is assumed that there are many different ways of interpreting or understanding the intent and impact of an activity and that to understand the activity the evaluator must gather together those understandings from a range of sources. For a constructivist evaluator the truth of the situation is what the people who experience it describe.

For this reason, the evaluation relies on triangulating data supplied by a range of stakeholders and obtained through the examination of documents and other data. As a constructivist evaluator it is also important to acknowledge that the data collection process will have been influenced by the experience, attitudes and perspectives of the data collectors and the data analysis will have been influenced by my background and age, gender and cultural perspectives. For this reason the evaluation is open for review by others with the invitation for them to offer alternative interpretations to the data analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> The other major approaches to evaluation are positivist or post positivist. These approaches start from an understanding that truth is objectively knowable (positivism) or able to be accurately approximated (post-positivism).

## Evaluation Results

In this section each evaluation question is answered based on an analysis of the data. A summary of the results is provided at the end of this section.

### 1. To what extent have carers and babies participated in Baby Choir?

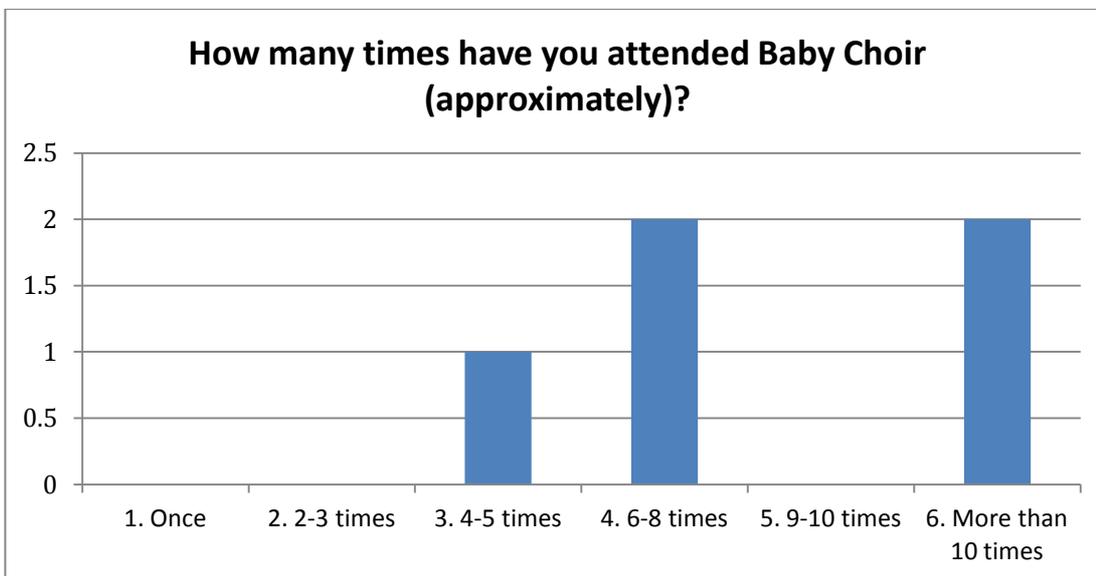
Baby Choir has been offered as a weekly drop-in program free of charge to carers and babies attending Banyule Community Health (BCH). There is no onus on parents or carers to attend unless they wish to on the day.

Statistics collected by Kids Thrive Inc. indicate that 73 adult carers and 71 children aged from 2 weeks to 4 years attended over the course of the 2013 program, with:

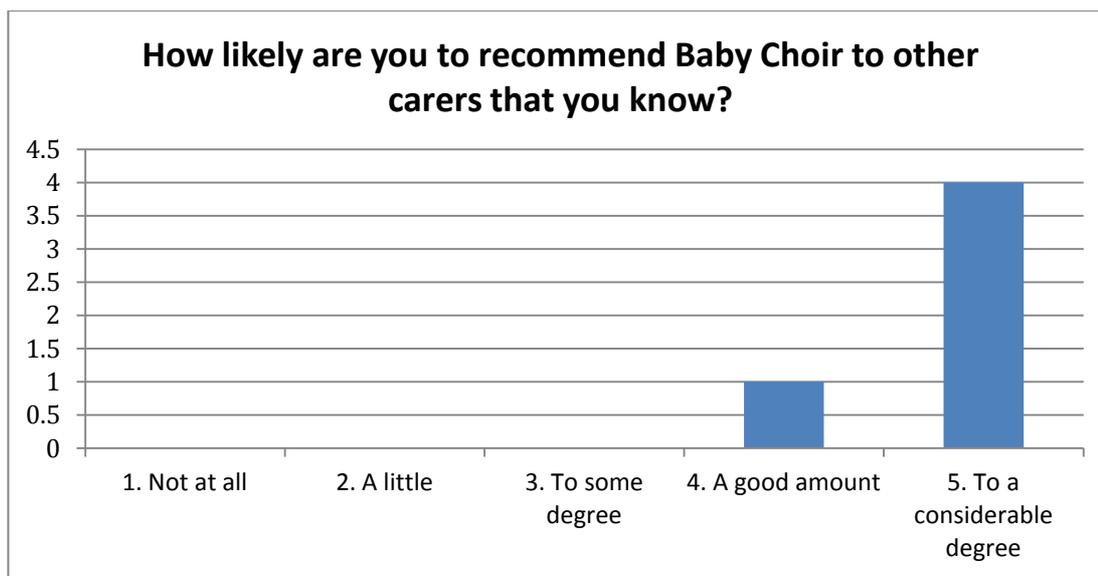
- 60% attending more than 3 times
- 26% attending more than 6 times
- 8% attending more than 9 times

An average of 20 people attended each session.

All five respondents to the Participant Survey indicated they had attended more than four times and four said they had attended more than 6 times:



In relation to referrals to Baby Choir from carers to other carers, their responses to the survey indicate that all five respondents would recommend Baby Choir to other carers- 4 out of 5 to the maximum extent possible:



## 2. What has Baby Choir delivered?

Kids Thrive Inc. report that Baby Choir has delivered:

- 25 weekly sessions involving 73 adult carers and 71 children aged from 2 weeks to 4 years
- 3 community engagement events
- 312+ community audience members
- 1 frontline meeting
- 1 Evaluation session with participants
- 1 Evaluation session with professionals
- 1 original song created on the initial foundations of rhyming words and on experiences as carers.

## 3. To what extent has Baby Choir supported the positive engagement between carers and babies?

In answer to an open-ended question about whether or not the carers saw any benefits to their relationship with their babies, three of the participants made the following comments:

*[I have a] better bond through music at baby choir which is continued at home.*

*Yes, my baby really responds to music. I am not that musically inclined myself, so without baby choir it might have taken me a lot longer to realise he loves music. And my appreciation has also increased.*

*Yes, Baby Choir has taught me how to relax with my baby and enjoy the music.*

In their evaluation session with Kids Thrive artists, participants also made the following observations:

*I realised that [my baby] loves music and we use it at home to calm down and diffuse tantrums.*

*I use "Slow Dancing" after bath and before bed to soothe him. It's magic.*

*We lie down and be quiet together for a few minutes. It's easy to forget to do that.*

*We sing the songs together as a family at home and it's really helping [my baby's] development He kicks and smiles as soon as we start.*

*I use the slow breathing to grab a moment wherever I am to be nice to myself, to chill out.*

*Tuesday is the highlight of our week.*

*This is a really loving group. I love coming here. It helps my state of mind, to keep me positive.*

In response to the question in their survey about the main benefits of Baby Choir, three participants nominated the strengthening bond with their child:

*Introduction of fun, music and dance with my daughter.*

*Social and communication skills for my child. Fun through music*

*Spending time with my baby where we are both enjoying the activity, being out in our community and meeting new people.*

A staff member also commented on the impact of Baby Choir on the bond between carers and babies:

*The most significant achievement from Baby Choir is the strengthened relationships between child and parent. This is obvious by our strong attendance, positive feedback from families and demand for the choir.*

The same staff member also noted:

*The feedback from mothers is very positive. Building on their relationships and giving permission to stop everything else and deeply enjoy an hour with your child without any other distractions is gold.*

Another staff member noted that the benefits were not only about bonding and engagement but extended to:

*A connection through the music [which] is evident, as well as additional movement and improved early speech. Above all else, fun with mum or dad.*

Another nominated specific benefits for the babies:

*Time with their parent without interruption. Very relaxed parents.*

Staff members also commented that the benefit to them of Baby Choir was to engage with carers and babies engaging lovingly. In their work they most often see people when they are distressed by environmental, systemic or personal crisis. The staff involvement in Baby Choir was noted as restorative to professional health workers in disadvantaged communities.

In answer to a rating scale question about the impact of the program on the degree to which carers who participated in Baby Choir had improved their engagement with their child, all three staff members nominated either level '4 - a good amount' (2 respondents) or level '5 - to a considerable degree' (1 respondent).

In summary, based on their qualitative feedback from carers and staff, Baby Choir has supported positive engagement between carers and babies.

#### **4. To what extent have carers had regular positive informal contact with other parents who share similar experiences?**

The fun and enjoyment carers have had through Baby Choir is evident in their open-ended responses to survey questions.

One participant noted

*I started attending Baby Choir when my son was only around 3 months old. He has grown to love it and smiles as soon as we walk through the door. It has built a love of music and singing for him, as well as teaching myself how to sing, and enjoy singing, to my son. It is great to be able to come along with no pressure and enjoy a relaxed fun atmosphere*

*where you can meet other parents and the children can interact with other children/babies of various pre-school ages.*

Another noted the social benefits for their child:

*It's been a chance for my baby to interact with other children and learn about song and dance.*

And another noted their personal learning and their improved connection to their community:

*I have enjoyed so many things about Baby Choir. The singing and communal participation. My baby loves it and gets very excited about the music and movement and the other people in the group. It's helped me to incorporate music into many aspects of our day. I am also grateful for the involvement in the community and the people I have met, it's helped to make me much more appreciative of the area I live in.*

Another appreciated the interaction with other parents and the stress release:

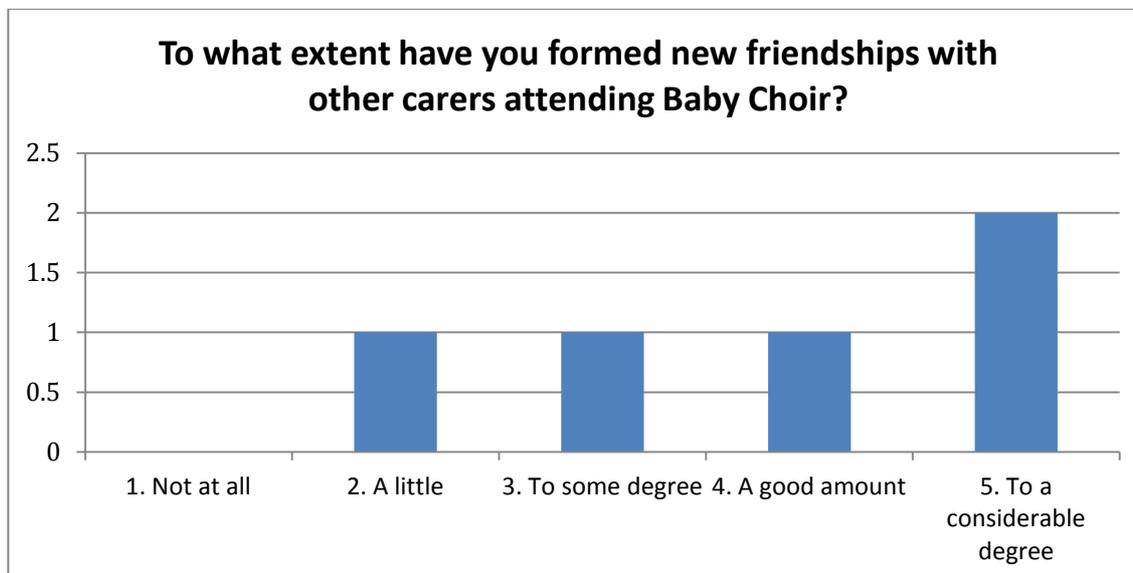
*I've loved the singing and dancing and interaction with other parents. It's also a great way to relieve some of the stress of having a baby.*

A staff member made the following observation in relation to the main benefits of the program:

*Social connectedness, fun, time out, made to think about self care. A feeling of being nurtured and for some even noticed. A space in which to have fun and not worry about everything else. I think possibly this group has given some of them the confidence to use songs and nursery rhymes with their children. Provided insight into being mindful when interacting with their children.*

In answer to a rating scale question about the degree to which carers developed positive relationships with other carers who participated, all three staff members nominated either level '4 - a good amount' (2 respondents) or level '5 - to a considerable degree' (1 respondent).

Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which they had formed new friendships as a result of Baby Choir. All nominated some degree of impact with 3 out of 5 suggesting the impact had been a good amount or higher:



In summary, Baby Choir has supported carers to form new connections with other carers and with the community more broadly.

## 5. To what extent has Baby Choir supported positive interactions between carers and service providers?

Staff members see this as a fundamental goal for Baby Choir. One put it this way:

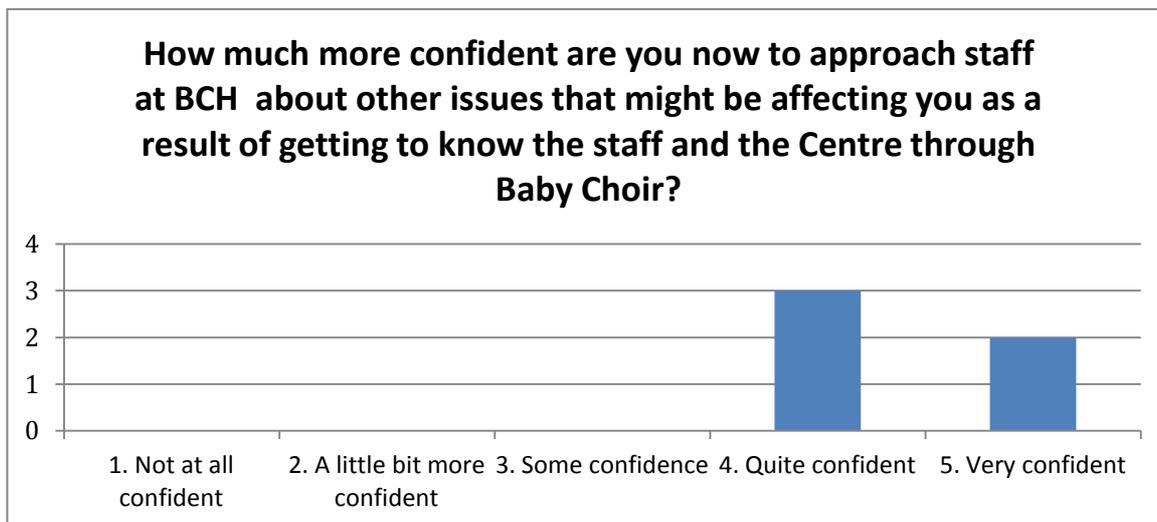
*The key to connection for vulnerable families is ensuring that there is a truly fun and caring element to the program. Many early years programs start with families from a deficit perspective; Baby Choir builds on strengths and gives tools to take away and celebrate and share.*

Another staff member commented

*Baby Choir ... has become a great tool for our early years' staff to build stronger relationships with our most vulnerable families. Using music, dance and laughter in such a fun welcoming environment is incredibly important in ensuring a good connection to highly skilled professionals. The choir is also the starting point for many families with their local community. For many, children are the key to unlocking the potential of activities, opportunities and supports that a local community can provide. Baby Choir is making this possible.*

In answer to a rating scale question about the impact of the program on the degree to which carers had improved their engagement with BCH and its services, one staff member nominated '2 - a little; one staff member nominated '3 - to some degree' and one nominated '5 - a considerable degree' (1 respondent).

Participants were asked how much more confident they were now to approach staff at BCH about other issues that might be affecting them as a result of getting to know the staff through Baby Choir.



All 5 respondents said they were quite or very confident to approach staff now.

One participant noted that the Centre was a safe place for her:

*It's a chance to get out of the house and go to a place where nobody judges you!*

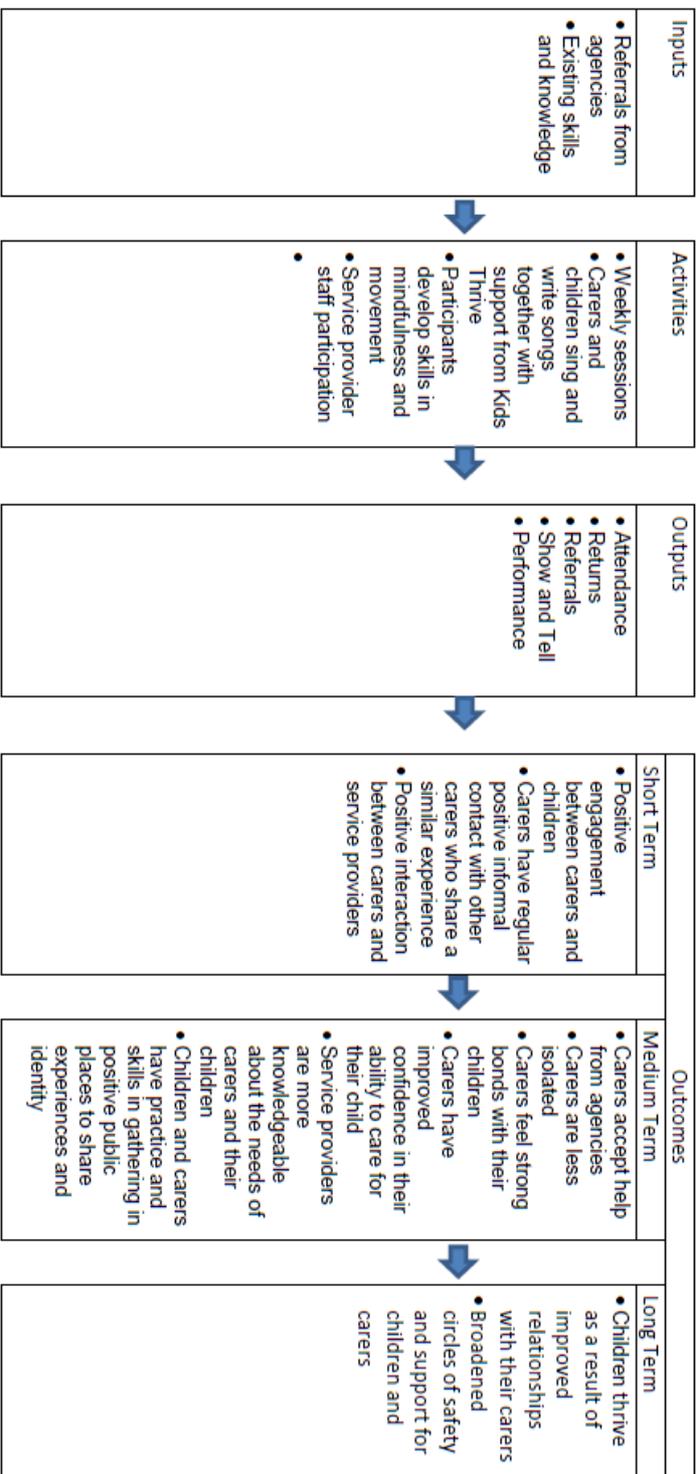
In summary, it is apparent that in the opinion of participants and staff responding to the survey; Baby Choir has supported positive interactions between carers and the service providers which has, in turn, made it more possible for the carers to seek support for other matters.

## Conclusion

Baby Choir is a small scale program that would seem to be delivering significant benefits to its participants, both carers and babies, and to the service providers who see this as a new way to engage with vulnerable families. It is clear that the program is a positive and pleasurable activity that opens up pathways and opportunities for families that may not otherwise have been possible. At a more fundamental level, Baby Choir offers carers a new set of parenting skills and insights to assist in their day to day role as carers.

## Appendix A – Project Logic

### Kids Thrive Baby Choir – Project Logic



## Appendix B – Participant Survey

Thank you for your participation in this short survey. We are evaluating the outcomes of the Baby Choir and would appreciate your feedback. Your answers will remain anonymous.

1. How many times have you attended Baby Choir (approximately)?
  - i. Once
  - ii. Twice
  - iii. 3– 5 times
  - iv. 5-8 times
  - v. 8-10 times
  - vi. More than 10 times
2. What have you enjoyed most about your participation in Baby Choir?
3. What do you enjoy least about your participation in Baby Choir?
4. On a scale of one to five how much enjoyment have you had from your involvement in Baby Choir?
  - i. None at all
  - ii. A little
  - iii. Some
  - iv. A good amount
  - v. A lot
5. On a scale of one to five, how much enjoyment has your child had from your involvement in Baby Choir?
  - i. None at all
  - ii. A little
  - iii. Some
  - iv. A good amount
  - v. A lot
6. On a scale of one to five, to what extent have you formed new friendships with other carers attending Baby Choir?
  - i. Not at all
  - ii. A little
  - iii. To some extent
  - iv. A good amount
  - v. To a considerable degree
7. On a scale of one to five, how likely are you to recommend Baby Choir to other carers that you know?
  - i. Not at all
  - ii. A little
  - iii. To some extent

- iv. A good amount
  - v. To a considerable degree
8. On a scale of one to five, how important is your attendance at Baby Choir to you?
- i. Not at all
  - ii. A little
  - iii. Of some importance
  - iv. Quite important
  - v. Very important
9. On a scale of one to five, how much more confident are you now to approach staff at the Community Health Centre about other issues that might be affecting you as a result of getting to know the staff and the Centre through Baby Choir?
- i. Not at all confident
  - ii. A little bit more confident
  - iii. Some confidence
  - iv. Quite confident
  - v. Very confident
10. What are the main benefits of Baby Choir in your view?
11. Is there anything you've learnt at Baby Choir that you use at home or elsewhere?
12. Do you see any benefits to your relationship with your little one/s?

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix C – Staff Survey

Thank you for your participation in this short survey. We are evaluating the outcomes of Baby Choir and would appreciate your feedback. Your answers will remain anonymous.

1. How would you describe the main achievements of Baby Choir?
2. What are the main learnings for you from your involvement with Baby Choir?
3. What do you think are the main things the mothers who participated in the Baby Choir gained from their participation?
4. What do you think are the main things the children who participated in the Baby Choir gained from their participation?
5. What other gains (or losses) have there been for your organisation from your participation in Baby Choir?
6. On a scale of one to five, how would you rate the overall achievements of Baby Choir in 2013?
  - i. Very poor
  - ii. Poor
  - iii. Neither poor nor excellent
  - iv. Good
  - v. Excellent
7. On a scale of one to five, in your opinion to what degree did the mothers who participated in Baby Choir develop positive relationships with other mothers who participated?
  - i. Not at all
  - ii. A little
  - iii. To some extent
  - iv. A good amount
  - v. To a considerable degree
8. On a scale of one to five, in your opinion to what degree did the mothers who participated in Baby Choir improve their engagement with their child?
  - i. Not at all
  - ii. A little
  - iii. To some extent
  - iv. A good amount
  - v. To a considerable degree
9. On a scale of one to five, in your opinion to what degree did the mothers who participated in Baby Choir improve their engagement with your Centre and its services?

- i. Not at all
- ii. A little
- iii. To some extent
- iv. A good amount
- v. To a considerable degree

10. On a scale of one to five, in your opinion how much more likely is it that the mothers who participated in Baby Choir will seek and accept help from your Centre for other issues?

- i. Not at all
- ii. A little
- iii. To some extent
- iv. A good amount
- v. To a considerable degree

Thank you for your participation.