**Parent Focus Group2**

**Date: 21 Dec 2021**

**Participants: 1 female and 1 male**

**Duration: 0:22:30**

Facilitator: Preamble

What do you think are the challenges for people now, living on low incomes, I mean, generally, or specifically in relation to going to healthcare settings.

Female: For me, it’s getting an appointment, for a start. Then, when you get an appointment, you’ve got to go somewhere, and then you’ve got to pay for parking. The parking is, sometimes, £2 or £3 an hour, which is, like, obviously you don’t have. You have to pay for that on top of stuff.

Interviewer: In terms of just getting the appointment in the first place is that, like, just the timing of the appointment?

Female: The timing, like, trying to fit it around, because I’m on my own and I’ve got the kids, and I’ve got the school runs to do. The appointments I have are normally school run drop-off time, pick-up time, or when I’m at college. So, then you’ve got to wait weeks. I’m on a waiting list for mental health services, and it's specialist stuff I need. It’s up to 12 months waiting list for the treatment I actually need.

Interviewer: Well, that is a long time to wait, isn’t it, for something? Have you had any experiences like that? Do you find that you need to get into see a doctor, is there-?

Male: Not really, not with the doctors. Dentists more, because my teeth are really bad at the minute, and trying to get an appointment at the dentist is like a needle in a haystack. You can’t get one. I went to the dentist a few weeks ago and they said I couldn’t get an appointment until next year.

Interviewer: Oh, crikey, because it’s nearly next year now. Yes, it’s a long time to wait.

Male: Anywhere between next year could be from January to mid-March. It’s hard, do you know what I mean? So, that’s why I don’t go to the dentist, I just let my teeth go [the way they do \_\_\_ 00:04:20].

Interviewer: So, at the dentist, the long waiting time, what about actually making the appointment, is that just phoning? Is that how you try to get-?

Male: The phone is the same. They keep you on the phone for ages, sometimes you can’t get an appointment over the phone. You have to wait until they ring you. You could be waiting, maybe, two hours or three hours for a phone call back off a doctor, or anybody else.

Female: Then, they won’t give you a time for them ringing you back, and it’s phoning, and you’ve got to be free all day. If you miss that day, then you’ve really had it.

Male: No, they don’t ring you back, do they?

Female: The dentist has been the same for me. I got the kids into the dentist a couple of weeks ago, and they both needed treatment done. I still had nothing through to say when I could get it done. So, by the time it comes to them actually getting the treatment done, there is probably going to be more needing done, because it’s been [Crosstalk 00:05:08].

Male: I have had a problem with the doctor, actually, for the past couple of days. My son has been vomiting after every feed.

Interviewer: It’s your little one that’s in here.

Male: Yes, yes. I rang the doctor and I said, “Can you give me a prescription for some Gaviscon?” What a trouble I’ve had to get that Gaviscon. I’ve been to three different chemists, and they’ve all sent me back to the doctor, with a return prescription written with ‘return’ on. So, they’ve given us a new one and I took it back to the chemist. They still sent me back to the doctors. I mean, he needs it.

Interviewer: Have they explained why they’ve sending you back?

Male: No, some chemists haven’t got it in, so I need to get sent back to the doctor. Or they’re sending the prescription back saying ‘return’, because they haven’t got it in the chemist. So, it’s a bit of a struggle for me.

Interviewer: Yes, that sounds like that’s not good service at all … I’ve just been trying to get an appointment. Well, when you finally get through, they then try to put you off by saying, “Use our website to book an appointment.” So, have you had experience of that, or is your GP-?

Female: Yes.

Male: Yes, I’ve been going through some mental health issues at the minute. I can’t get to sleep on a night-time. So, I rang the doctor, and they gave me a coping mechanism, sleep hygiene thing on the text, like the-

Female: [ \_\_\_ 00:06:29].

Male: How to cope with anxiety and depression. I don’t need that sort of help, I need somebody, professionally, to sit in front of me and tell me, and say, “Everything is going to be alright,” where they have to speak to you, and not looking at pictures on a phone, saying how you can get a stress ball and stop smoking nicotine to get to sleep, because I’m a smoker. It’s pathetic.   
  
I feel like it’s just laziness. I feel like they’re just palming you off to other services. Then, you go and see other service users, like, professionals, and they say, “There’s nothing we can do for you.” It’s vice versa, and it narks you.

Female: I feel like for mental health it’s really hard to get any help with- I’ve got my counselling through [charity name], and I’ve been seeing her for nearly a year now. I’ve been on the waiting list. Then, she referred us for secondary care, and then the secondary care rang her up and said, “It’s got to be the doctor,” even though it doesn’t have to be the doctor who will refer.

So, I had to then make an appointment with my doctor for her to refer me to it. So, it’s like, delay, delay and delay. With [name], they sent me that stupid text, at the beginning, saying, “Try this.” I’ve got flashbacks and nightmares, and PTSD at the minute. So, a little text like that saying, “Look at this,” is just not going to touch the sides of it.

Male: That’s what I’m saying, it’s just so stupid. I’ve lost five of my friends in the space of a couple of months, due to drug overdoses and stuff. It’s the stuff that you keep to yourself, because you can’t ever speak to anybody. That’s what I’m saying, professionals, they’re there to help you. I want to speak to somebody about [ \_\_\_ 00:08:09] and substances, or gambling, but what can you do? You just do things yourself.

Interviewer: When you finally get to the top of the waiting list, what about the scheduling of those appointments? Will that be difficult for you to get to those appointments?

Female: It depends when they eventually get to us, because it’s a long way off by the sounds of it.

Interviewer: Do you know where you’ll have to go? Will it be local?

Female: I don’t know if it will be local. Luckily, I drive, but then again, it’s petrol costs on top of stuff. Everything just seems to cost at the minute.

Male: All the petrol and the diesel are extortionate prices now, aren’t they?

Interviewer: Yes, they just seem to keep going up, don’t they? You said you’ve got college, as well, so you’d need to be able to fit this around that, with-

Female: College and kids’ drop-offs and pick-ups. I’m on my own and my mum lives in [place name], so it’s, literally, just me and having to be in every place at the same time is just horrendous.

Interviewer: Have you got other children, [name], or have you just got your little boy?

Male: I’ve got three children.

Interviewer: Oh, so have you had much experience of taking them to any-?

Male: I don’t get to see my other children.

Interviewer: Oh, you’re not seeing- So, it’s just your little one that you see at the minute.

Male: Just [child name], yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, we’ve talked a bit of that. I’m just checking my list. We’ve talked a bit about the transport and the travels. What about yourself? Do you travel to [Crosstalk 00:09:32]?

Male: Me, I do travel, yes, but I don’t use any public transport. I use my legs, I walk.

Interviewer: So, if you had to go into town though, if it was the [Hospital name], would you walk all that way down?

Male: Yes.

Interviewer: So, you wouldn’t get a taxi, or anything like that?

Male: No. Sometimes, but not all the time. It costs too much money.

Interviewer: It’s expensive, isn’t it, yes.

Male: Even the bus prices now, it’s nearly £5 for a day ticket.

Female: That’s ridiculous, isn’t it?

Male: It’s £4.80 for a day ticket.

Interviewer: It’s a big chunk of your money gone.

Male: I remember when it used to be £1.50 for a day ticket, or 70 pence, you know what I mean, it’s stupid. It’s like the prices of the cigarettes and stuff, the economy is just- It’s ridiculous.

Interviewer: When you finally do get to see people, and I know you’ve not had a good experience with being sent the kind of, link to whatever it was, an online thing-

Male: I’ve got it on my phone, I’ll show you, if you want.

Interviewer: Oh, yes. When you finally do see people, and not necessarily about- any healthcare or dental type thing, do you find that they communicate well with you? Do they tell you the information you need?

Female: Yes, my doctor is really good. I can’t fault her. She’s written to the mental health services as well, to see if they can get me bumped up the waiting list. She said she doesn’t know whether they’ll do anything, but she’s tried. They are really informative about the treatment that you need.

Interviewer: Well, that’s good to hear, if you can get there.

Female: At the dentist though, when I took [child name], she’s got autism and she struggles to brush her teeth and stuff, and she doesn’t like the feeling of it. He was really horrible to me. He was like, “Well, you have to be doing them.” But [child name] is like, my height, strong and to force her to brush her teeth is not going to end very well. But he didn’t seem to have any understanding.   
  
It was just like, “Well, she can’t get braces until you sort out the brushing.” I’m like, “Well, I can’t sort out the brushing, because it’s going to end up in a battle between me and her that I don’t need.”

Interviewer: No, that’s not really helpful, is it? Have you had any experiences, [name], around getting information from your doctor, or do you find that useful to you, usually?

Male: Not really. I don’t really use the doctor, so much, to be honest. I’m a really stubborn lad.

Interviewer: Typical man. (Laughter)

Male: If I’ve hurt myself, or if I’ve got something more, I just tend to deal with the situation myself. I don’t take any tablets, or any painkillers, I just get on with it. But I have been going to the doctors for the past couple of days, because I’ve had a bit of trouble with my legs. I’ve got lumps and that in my legs.

Interviewer: Oh, dear, yes, that’s something to get looked at.

Male: I’ve got it looked at, the doctor looked at it, but she just palmed me off and said it was a bit of soft tissue surrounding my tendon, in the back of my leg. I don’t think it’s that. to be honest.

Interviewer: Yes, is it painful?

Male: I went to one hospital, and they said it was varicose veins. Then, I went to the doctor and they’re saying it’s soft tissue around the tendon on my leg.

Interviewer: Did they give you some advice about what to do about that?

Male: No. I said, “Can you get rid of it?” She was like, “Oh, no. Just leave it.”

Interviewer: Is it painful?

Male: No, it’s not painful, it’s just like my legs aren’t my legs. This one is normal, but this one is not. It’s got a big lump on the back. It’s like, if I want to go and play football, and people are going, “What’s that lump on your leg?” I’m like, “Well, I don’t know what it is.”

Interviewer: Oh, well, maybe go back until you find someone that can give you a better diagnosis.

Male: It’s like I say, like the midwives, health visitors and that, they haven’t even been out to see the bairn or anything. They’re meant to come out every four weeks, and they haven’t been out for seven weeks.

Interviewer: Is that because of COVID?

Male: I don’t know.

Interviewer: Not been in touch to let you know.

Male: I just don’t know.

Interviewer: Up until then, had it been good at communicating and coming out?

Male: Yes, up to now she normally texts my girlfriend, but she hasn’t even texted to see how we’re doing. Maybe it’s because we’re doing alright.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you’ve built a relationship up with the health visitors that come out and get to know them?

Male: I don’t really speak to them, to be honest, it’s more my partner that does all that, really.

Interviewer: Are there any other things that you think, if money is tight, that make it difficult for you to access services? We’ve talked about the expense of- Because the hospitals are very expensive places when you get to the parking, aren’t they? I don’t know if you’ve had experience when your son was born. Were you in the [hospital name] then?

Male: I was there when she was giving birth to him, but even then, it was a bit nasty visiting the room, do you know what I mean?

Female: There’s quite a bit of stigma, especially when you’re from a low-income family. I feel like they treat you slightly different.

Male: They do. I’d agree with you there, a thousand percent.

Female: Some of them are amazing, and some just don’t get it and I feel like they, maybe, just treat you a bit like, “Oh, well, you’re low income and you’re not really worth treating,” type thing.

Interviewer: That’s terrible.

Male: I still get that treatment when I’m walking into a shop. You know you’ve got money and you’re still walking in a shop, and they still think, they still look at you and think, “Hmm, I’ll follow him round the shop for a bit.” You get it anywhere, can’t you? Money is hard, it’s tight, like, really, really tight. You’ve got to have money to look after these wee kids, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: It doesn’t come cheap, does it?

Male: These places like this, the [VCSE name], these are brilliant, their service is brilliant.

Interviewer: Do you come here a lot?

Male: I come here every week. Every Thursday I use the service, and every time I come in the service I’m greeted with a, “Hello,” and I’m greeted by all the professionals, and all the professionals are lovely, honestly.

Interviewer: Oh, that’s good to hear. I’ve only just really got to know them.

Female: Yes, they treat you like family in here.

Male: Yes, they do, honest to God. I couldn’t fault any of them, honestly. I’ve never had any trouble with them, and they’ve never disrespected me. I’ve never disrespected them. Their service has been ideal for me and my partner, and the bairn. I didn’t even know this was here until we got offered to come, and we’ve been coming ever since. We don’t need to come.

Interviewer: How did you get the offer to come here? How did you find out about it?

Male: I can’t really remember how I got to know the service.

Interviewer: Do you remember, [name]?

Female: Yes, I asked for early help. They came to the house and offered me to do the day programme, in the summer, which is domestic violence recovery programme. So, me and the kids came and did that. That was amazing. Then, we were assigned a worker who I see every week. She’s lovely and I’ve just done Freedom with them, as well.

We come every Thursday morning for a cuppa, to the Survivors’ Coffee Morning. It’s lovely. We get fed and we get a cup of tea, and we get a chat with people that have been through similar experiences.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s important isn’t it, someone that knows the-?

Female: Yes, because even your family don’t get it. You don’t get it until you’ve actually been there. I’ve had social services say to me, “Why didn’t you get out sooner?” That’s not what I needed to hear from this jumped-up woman.

Male: It’s horrible, isn’t it?

Female: You can’t, like- Yes.

Male: It’s horrible when they stand there and manipulate you and tell you what it is and that.

Female: Well, she just didn’t get it. I think you’ve got to have been there to actually get it. But all of these in here are amazing. The kids are- my two are in there doing crafts and that, this morning. It’s all free and stuff that they wouldn’t be getting to do, because I haven’t got the money to do it.

Male: That’s what I’m saying. I’ll come in here and I’ll sit down, and I’m like, I’ve got this to do with you, and that’s what I was saying, one of the professionals took my son away. As soon as you come in, they’re like, all around your kids. They’re asking if you’re alright, and is your mental health alright, and stuff like that. It just gives you a boost of confidence when you walk through the door, do you know what I mean?

Even if you’re feeling low and you come here, even for a cuppa, there are people to talk to. Like, I didn’t know [name] when I first started coming here. You get to know everybody in here, and it’s just like it says, like a little family in here and everybody knows everybody. Nobody calls anybody names or anything, and like I say, I love it in here.

Interviewer: It is a lovely feeling. I’ve been sitting here for an hour, waiting, and it’s been lovely just seeing everyone and how everyone chats and is supportive.

Female: Every single member of staff treats you like everyone should be treated.

Male: Not just that, they help you towards food and stuff. You only make a small donation, like a quid, or £1.50 and you walk away with a couple of bags, even if you haven’t got much money, you just come in here. You donate a couple of pounds, and you can get three or four bags to take home. There is food for you, for the rest of the week.

Interviewer: Brilliant, yes. It’s good to hear. I know that feeling, actually, you just reminded me that’s one of the things that’s come up a couple of times about, if you are at the hospital, you know, if your baby has been born, or you’ve had to take your child in, getting food at the hospital is one of the things that’s [Crosstalk 00:18:52].

Male: I forbid to buy anything from the hospital, to be honest. If I’m in the [hospital name] I go into [town name] and I go to the Pound Shop and get some stuff from the Pound Shop. Because you’re walking in the [hospital name] hospital and the drinks are, like, £2.59 or something. You get a meal deal for £3.50, it’s diabolical.

Female: Even getting a cuppa, it’s like a fiver in the hospital.

Male: Yes, [café name], it’s disgusting. Even the sandwiches in [café name],, down at Greggs you get one for, like, £2.75 and they’re six quid, or something in [café name],, do you know what I mean? It’s no good.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s one of the things, one of the things that’s definitely coming up is that that’s a problem, especially if you’re there for a long time. You know, some people with children are [Crosstalk 00:19:30].

Male: I remember years and years ago, if you wanted to go to the hospital with your partner, when they were giving birth, I know the dads and stuff were allowed to stay overnight. But they’re not allowed now, and you’ve got to go home.

Interviewer: Oh, yes, and I don’t know whether that’s COVID, because I know they weren’t allowing in the ward, were they?

Female: No, they wouldn’t let me with any of mine.

Interviewer: Would they not? It’s so nice to hear that it’s so positive here, it’s lovely. Are they going to be open next week between Christmas? Are they [ \_\_\_ 00:19:58]?

Male: No, they’re open again back on 4th January.

Interviewer: So, are you alright for next week?

Male: Get Christmas out the way. Get bladdered for Christmas. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Then back to normal.

Male: Yes, then just start the year fresh, again.

Interviewer: So, were there many other things that you can think of that you might think might be an issue, about getting healthcare for your family or for yourselves that we’ve not mentioned yet?

Male: I think there should be more groups like this.

Female: Yes, definitely.

Male: I think there should be more activities out there for you to do with your kids. Not everywhere you go you should have to have money. Not everybody has got money.

Female: Like a trip to the soft play is £40. You’re like, “How can anyone on, especially on our income, afford that?”

Male: That’s what I’m saying. There’s a soft play around mine, they only give you hour slots. So, you’ve got to, literally, get that hour slot. By the time you get there and pay for it, the half-an-hour is gone, and you’ve only got half-an-hour left for the kids and you’ve got to go home. Whereas you would like more time.

But there is nothing out there, there are no activities out there for you to do with your kids at this age. You’ve got to spend money, or you’ve got to either sign something or pay for something.

Female: For me, a big bother is, say one of mine goes into hospital, who is going to watch the other ones for us.

Interviewer: So, what would you do in that situation?

Female: I’d ring my mum, but if my mum is away, I literally have no one. I’d have to, probably, pay for childcare or a childminder, or something like that, to look after them. They don’t let you take them all in.

Interviewer: Would they not let you take the others with you?

Female: I don’t think they do, no, and especially at the minute with COVID.

Interviewer: Yes.

Female: Literally, like, it’s hard. I think they need to have a creche or something at the hospital, for people who haven’t got anyone else.

Interviewer: It’s a good point. It is really difficult if you’ve got to go in, and you’ve got no one to leave your other kids with. I think that’s the things that I wanted to ask you about, but are there other things that you wanted to say while we’re here?

Male: No.

Interviewer: I just want to stay in this nice, warm, room and I’m trying to keep you talking so I don’t have to go back out there, in the cold. (Laughter)

Male: I’m wondering if my son is alright. (Laughter)

Interviewer: [ \_\_\_ 00:22:20] he’s playing, we can’t hear him. I’ll switch off the recorder then, and just thank you once again. It’s really good to talk to you.

**END AUDIO**