We are busy carrying out the age 7 child assessment phase and we are hoping to see all 900 families in the study. We don’t know who enjoys the assessments more, the children or the researchers - 7 year olds are fascinating! We are collecting important information on how children develop, and in addition we have learned lots about Minecraft, Minions and My Little Pony! We plan to see each child as near to their 7th birthday as possible and this will keep us busy until July 2016.

We have seen over 450 families so far at this phase either at the Lauries Centre or at a home visit. We are also collecting questionnaires from class teachers about children’s behaviours, emotions, relationships and performance in school. So far we have around 110 schools on the Wirral and across the UK who are helping us.

We have a new and improved website (https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/psychology-health-and-society/research/first-steps/) and hope to be active on Facebook and Twitter this year.

We have published 10 papers in scientific journals, had study findings reported in national newspapers and presented study findings in conferences all over the world. Locally we have presented to health professionals, head teachers and council leaders. None of this would have been possible without the help of all our study families on the Wirral and beyond.

Dr Jonathan Hill and Dr Helen Sharp (Liverpool University) still lead the study. Jonathan has now moved from Manchester University to Reading University, but is still very much involved.

If your child is already 7 and you haven’t heard from us then please do not hesitate to get in touch with us, we would love to hear from you. Our contact details are on the inside page.
For families in the more detailed part of the study, we have been carrying out mother and child assessments in our lab in the Lauries Centre in Birkenhead. We have completed around 146 lab assessments so far and the tasks include:

- Mother and child interactions during joint play tasks and discussions
- An eye tracking emotion-matching game where the computer follows each child’s eye movements when looking at human faces
- Computerised measures of emotion recognition and the ability to understand about other people’s behaviour towards them
- Biological and physiological responses to social situations and a variety of sounds and pictures
- A set of games and puzzles assessing cognitive development
- Computerised and table top tasks assessing specific mental abilities, such as memory, attention and effortful control over their actions
- And most important of all, a trip to the prize cupboard at the end of the visit!

We are so grateful to you for giving us your time and support, and for travelling from far and wide to see us.

For the families in the wider part of the study we have been carrying out home visits using a subset of the lab tasks that can be completed at home. We have completed 297 home visits so far across the Wirral and the rest of the UK and have had a fantastic response.

These tasks include:

- A fun decision making task with a chance to win stickers and sweets
- Computerised planning and emotion recognition tasks
- A picture-based assessment of vocabulary and understanding of words
- Mother and child interactions during a joint task and discussion
- And of course, a prize for all their hard work!

Thank you so much for inviting us in to your homes.

You may recognise some of our researchers, either from this current round of assessments, or from previous phases. Many of our researchers have been with the study for several years now and look forward to seeing all of the children grow up.

The only person missing from the photo is Matt but he has a fun crossword on the back page for you to complete!
Becoming a parent for the first time is one of the biggest life changes you will ever experience and can be a very stressful time. We set up the Wirral Child Health and Development Study to study the effects of stress on the mother and child, both during pregnancy and throughout the child’s life. We have just published new findings from the interviews some of you completed during pregnancy and when your baby was around 6 months old. We asked lots of questions about the different types of stress mothers were experiencing and also assessed symptoms of depression. We found that mothers were more likely to become depressed if they experienced stressful events in their relationship with their partner than if they had experienced other types of stressful events. This has important implications for health professionals working with pregnant and postpartum women by suggesting that screening for specific types of stress can identify those at greater risk for depression.

Watch this space! As a result of your help we are starting to learn a lot more about the differences between boys and girls. Any parent who has run a birthday party for 7 year olds knows this already! What is new is that even from before birth we think boys and girls respond to stress in different ways. This might mean that when they develop emotional or behavioural problems boys and girls might need different kinds of help. More on this in the next Newsletter.

We are making new scientific discoveries with your help – THANK YOU!

Keep in touch
Don't forget to help us stay in touch with you by letting us know of any change in address, phone number or email address. You can call us free on 0800 051 7597, text us on 07956297412, email us at first.steps@liv.ac.uk or write to us at First Steps Study, The Lauries Centre, 142 Claughton Road, Birkenhead, CH41 6EY.

Don't forget to look at our website: www.liv.ac.uk/psychology-health-and-society/research/first-steps/

Your views on First Steps! What does it mean to be in the First Steps study?

We would love to hear from you about your views and experiences of taking part in the research study.
Our researchers have got their wires in a twist! Can you help them work out which game they should be completing?

Matt's word search for bright sparks!

Can you find the 10 hidden words?

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IMETNDSDGCTL
NECNEICSKYHD
QZUBMNVHVVIA
SRXREOYVRENH
CYSWMIBERMKC
APVNOTEXNMIR
RPLEROYONFNA
EAPUYMLYLGE
DHTNEGZPUSH
RSKRGQNHVLVE
LGDAOUAXNANR
VCMLAZNPYSAD
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THINKING
EMOTION
MEMORY
HAPPY
SAD
ANGRY
SCARED
NEUTRAL
SCIENCE
RESEARCH