Toward continuity of care across the childbearing/early parenting continuum: the Newborn and Family Drop-in Service.

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Background
Promoting continuity of care across the childbearing/early parenting continuum is a priority for healthcare services, in order to promote health and wellbeing for mothers and infants. In Australian maternal and child health services there is a history of providing both universal and targeted services across this continuum. However, achieving this priority is difficult given the division of services into two discrete organisations, maternity and child health.

Innovation
In this paper we will discuss the The Newborn and Family Drop-In Service (NAFDIS) which operates in SE Queensland. The service aims to provide an accessible, community interface for families, and draws on the expertise of both midwifery and child health professionals to provide responsive information and support for parents with infants 0-2 months.

Evaluation
The service has been evaluated in a collaborative project between local university academics and maternity service clinicians. Ethical clearance was sought and approval for the project was granted by the University of the Sunshine Coast and local Health District, Human Research Ethics Committees. A longitudinal method was employed, and the evaluation was conducted in the first 3 months of 2010, gathering survey information from women on their first visit and then again, when their infant was around 12 weeks of age. The evaluation specifically examined the program’s ability to promote continuity of care by examining the way the service was accessed and used, maternal efficacy, participants’ infant feeding and settling practices as well as other sources of informational, emotional and social supports utilised.

Conclusions and Implications
We will discuss the results concerning the effectiveness of the program and how this evaluation is informing further service development in the region. Of particular interest is the participants’ high level of satisfaction with the ‘coaching’ or hands-on assistance they received with their infant care issues, importantly with breastfeeding, and also the importance of the service to them in the first couple of weeks post-natally, to provide accessible, informed help, in a community setting, where the women had a great deal of control about when and how much they attended.