Application of Social Network Analysis within the Social Services Context

Opportunities for alternative questions

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What we'll cover

- Why understanding networks is important – and what they add to social services programming
- What Social Network Analysis (SNA) is and how it fills a gap
- Applying SNA to understanding infant sleep decision making



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What are we missing when we don't measure relationships?

Traditional evaluation tells us…	But often not...
• Who participated • What activities occurred • Whether outcomes changed • Stakeholder perceptions	• How information moves through a system • Which actors are most influential • Whether referral pathways strengthened • Where collaboration bottlenecks exist • How support networks shape behaviour

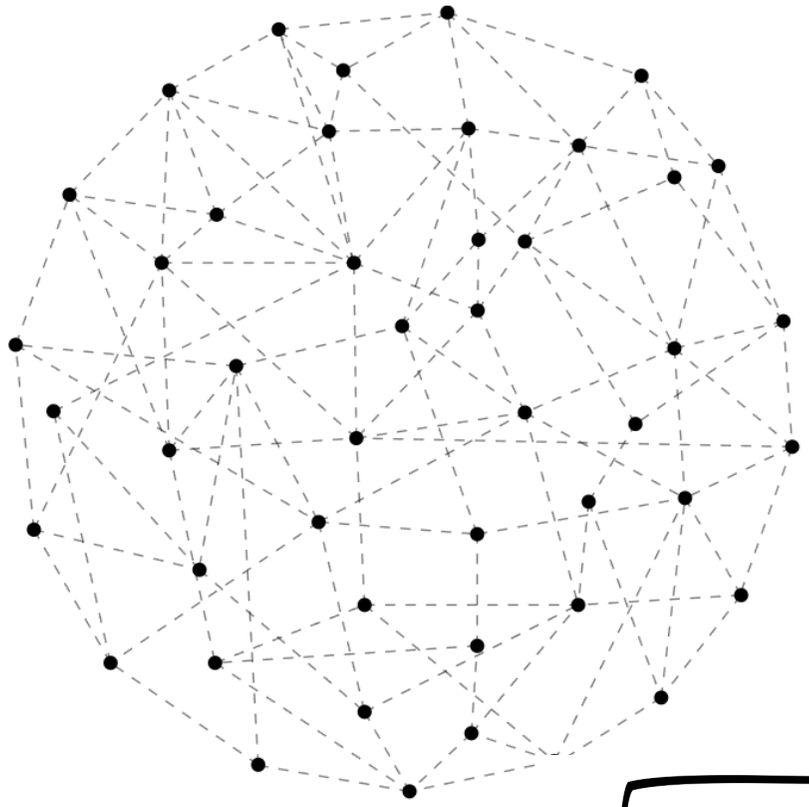
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A systems method for measuring relationships?

SNA enables evaluators to:

- Visualise networks
- Measure connections between actors
- Understand information and referral flows
- Identify influential actors
- Detect gaps, bottlenecks and opportunities

What is Social Network Analysis



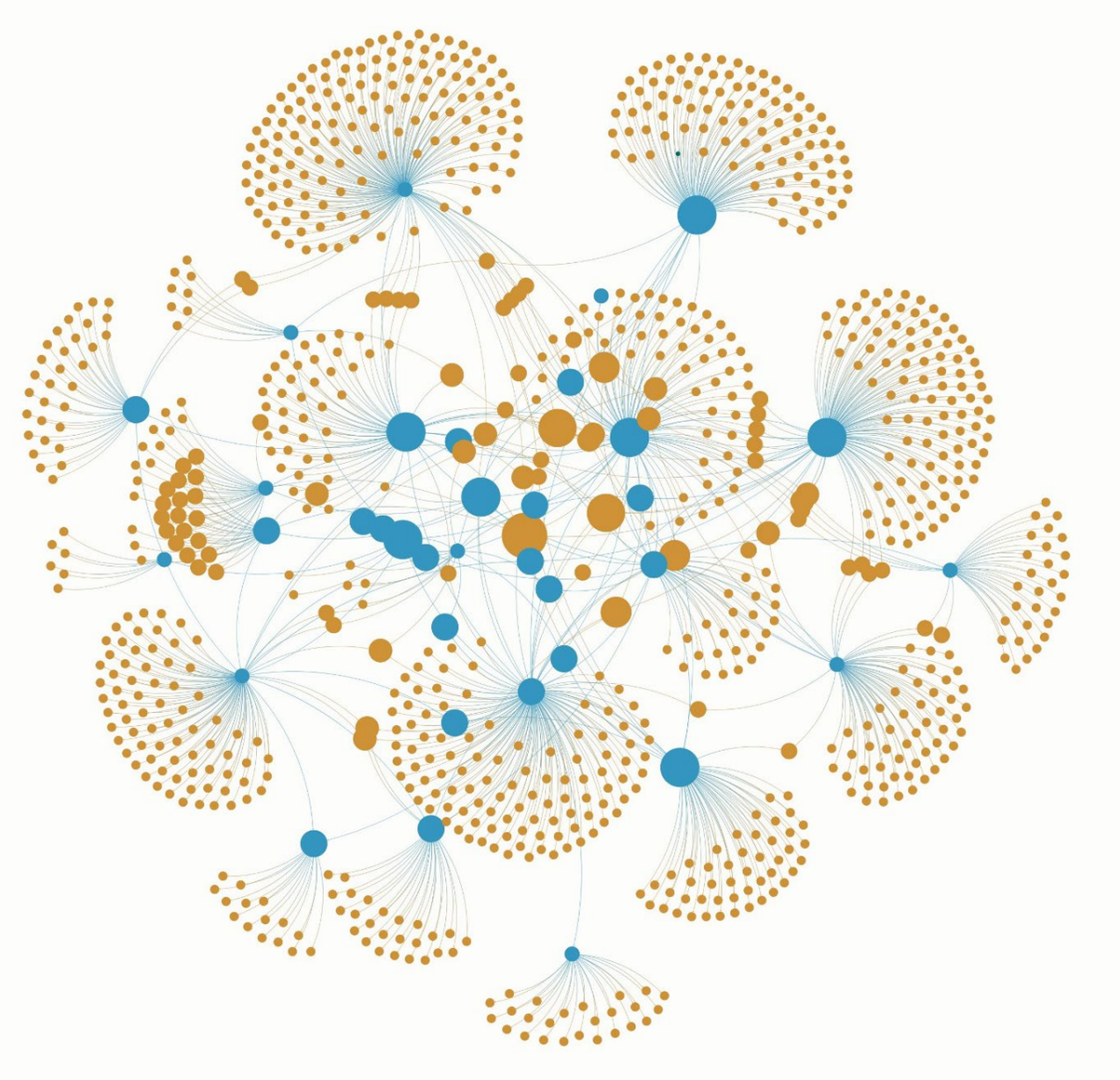
Hi, I'm a Network!

At its simplest:

- It's a relational mapping technique
- It produces network maps
- These maps can be analysed
- The analysis can give us insight into what the network is doing

Most important: it can apply to **any form of network structure.**

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In short:

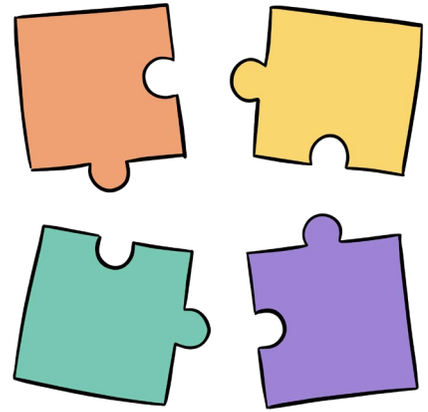
SNA is a way of **capturing, visualising and analysing actors and their connections as a system.**

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Boundaries:
Finding the limits or edge



Components:
What are the things that are within the boundary?



Connections:
How are the components connected and interacting, and for what purpose?





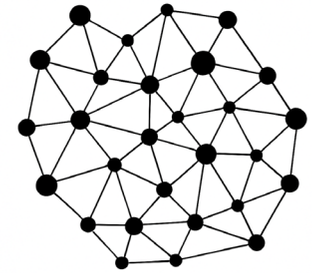
Function:
What is the network doing?
What purpose is it fulfilling?

Defining networks

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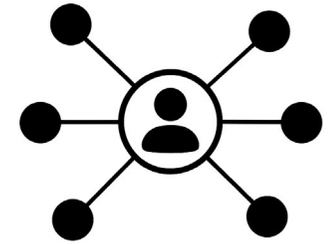
Types of networks

Term	Meaning
Socio-centric	Basically ‘complete network’ – examining the entire network (no gaps) within a bounded system. For example, a sociocentric approach in a workplace would look at all staff and relationships. Challenge comes from generating the network.
Ego-centric	Starts with a person in the network (i.e. the ‘ego’ part), with the focus of analysis on them and/or multiple others. Think of it as mapping out the first degree of separation, potentially not the second (i.e. connections of their connections). Produces lots of little networks which may or may not be connected, typically easier to generate. **But many are focused on organisations.**



Everyone and their connections

Sociocentric = the community’s entire web, viewed from the outside in.

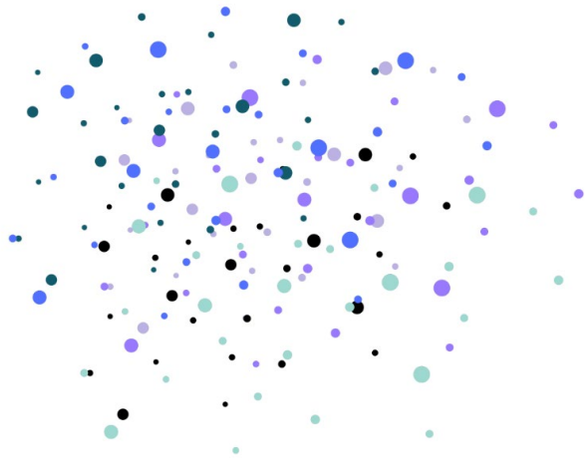


Multiplied by ‘x’ respondents

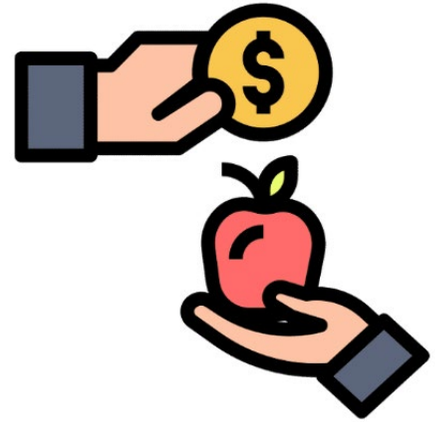
Egocentric = your personal “web” of contacts, viewed from the inside out.

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When is SNA more suitable?



Diversity – There are a number of interacting hetergenous components (lots of things, not the same).



Interdependence – There is a reason for the relationships between the components (there is an exchange)



Nesting – there is broader interconnection that crosses boundaries, that we have to limit

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Understanding Infant Sleep Decision-Making



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How we are approaching the project

Individual question	Approach to analysis / visuals
Who shapes this parent's decisions?	Map contacts with advice weight and strongest influence
Where does support come from?	Compare advice, emotional support and practical help
How connected are the sources?	Map contact-to-contact ties and calculate how interconnected they are
How does the parent handle advice?	Who they trust, and whose views they have confidence in
How do personal networks vary?	Compare each parent's composition, support and connections

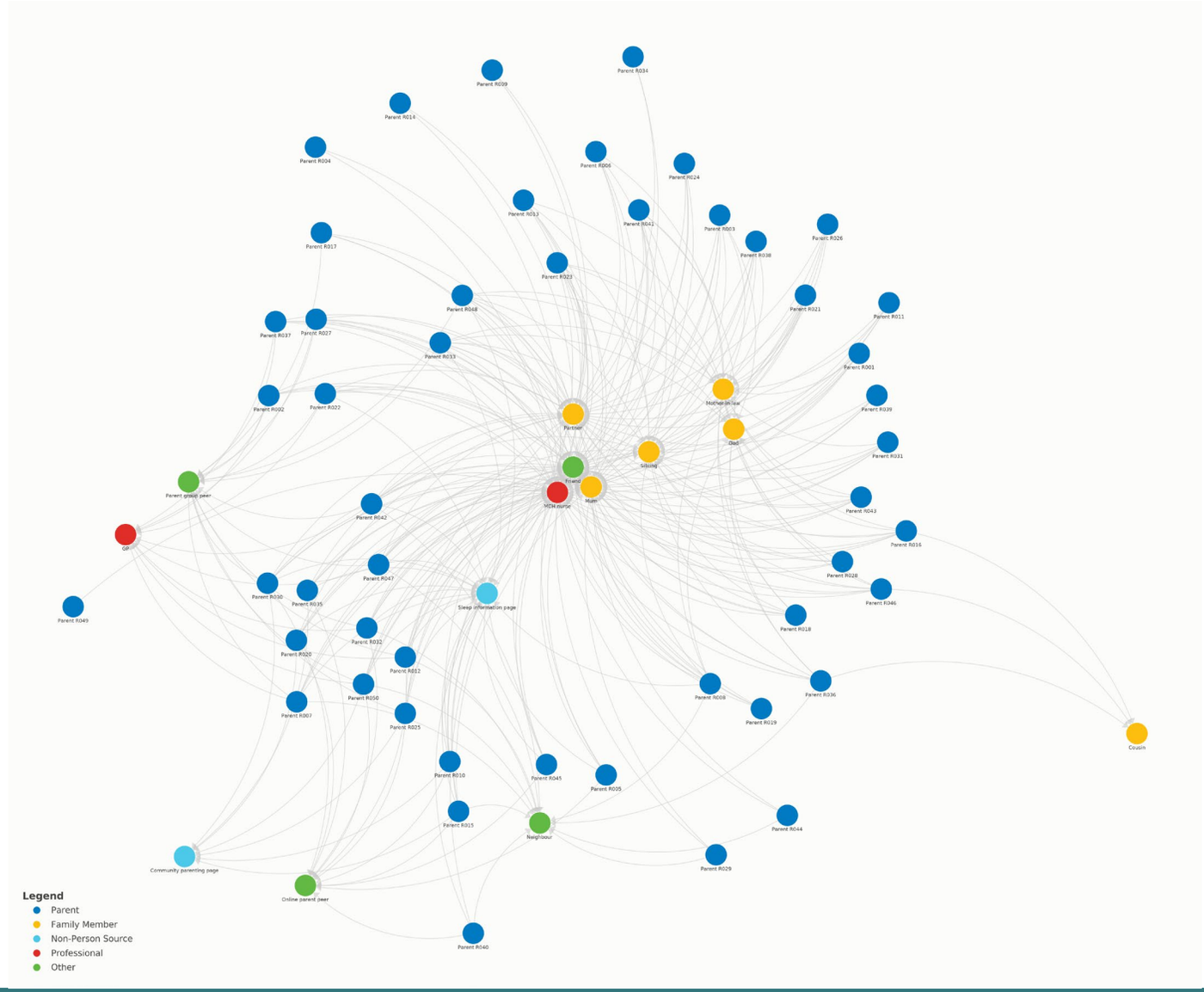
How we are approaching the project

Question area	What we ask	What it helps describe
Parent and baby	Background, children and baby age	Context for comparing personal networks
Names and relationships	Up to 10 contacts and their roles	Who is part of the parent's sleep network
Context and contact	Location, shared culture and communication	How the parent relates to each source
Advice and support	Discussion, advice type and support roles	What each contact contributes
Influence and relevance	Advice weight, strongest influence and top five contacts	Whose views matter and in what way



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Using and interpreting network maps

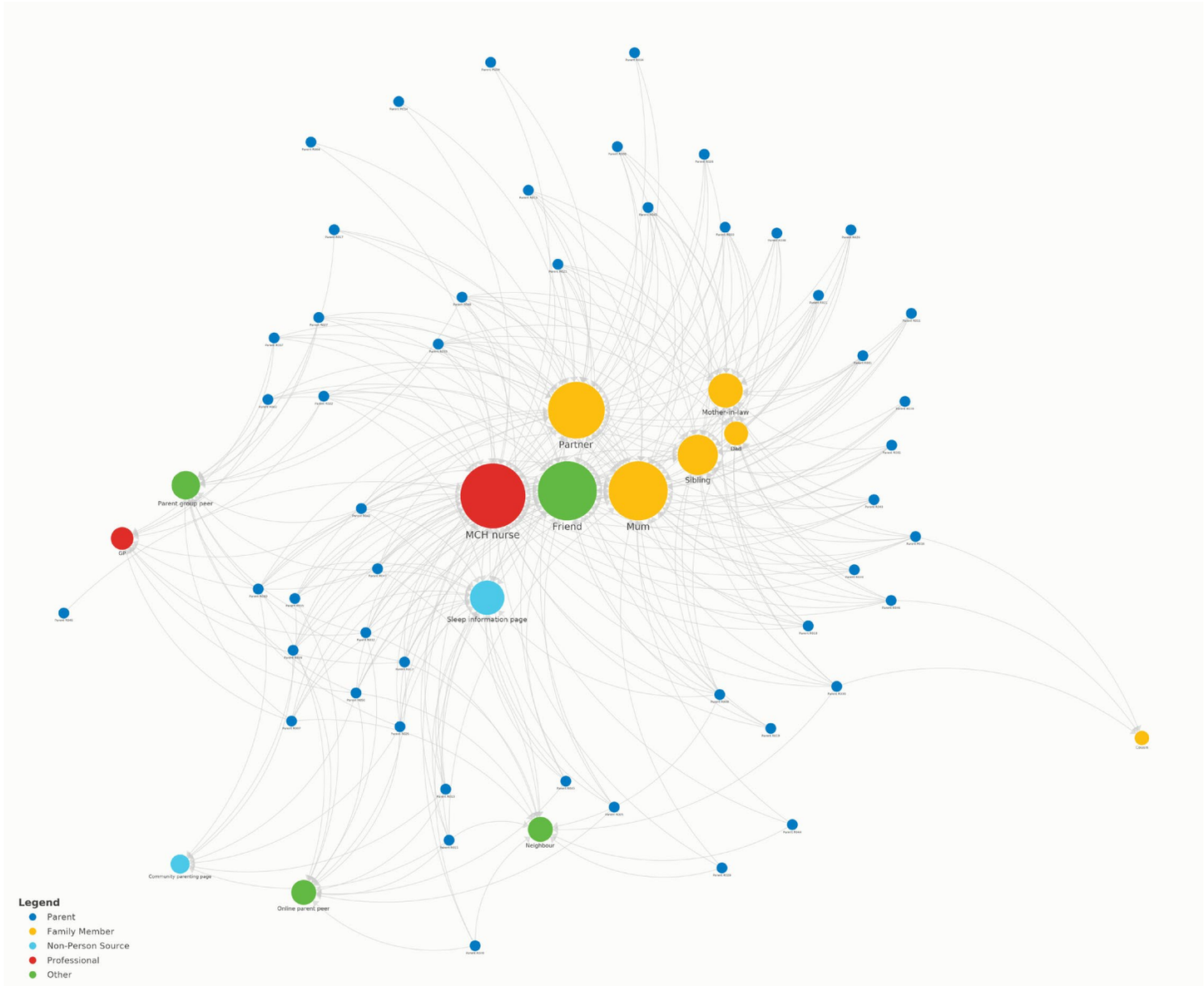


Network structure:

- 50 parents
- 14 sources of information
- 302 relationships between 50 parents and those sources of information

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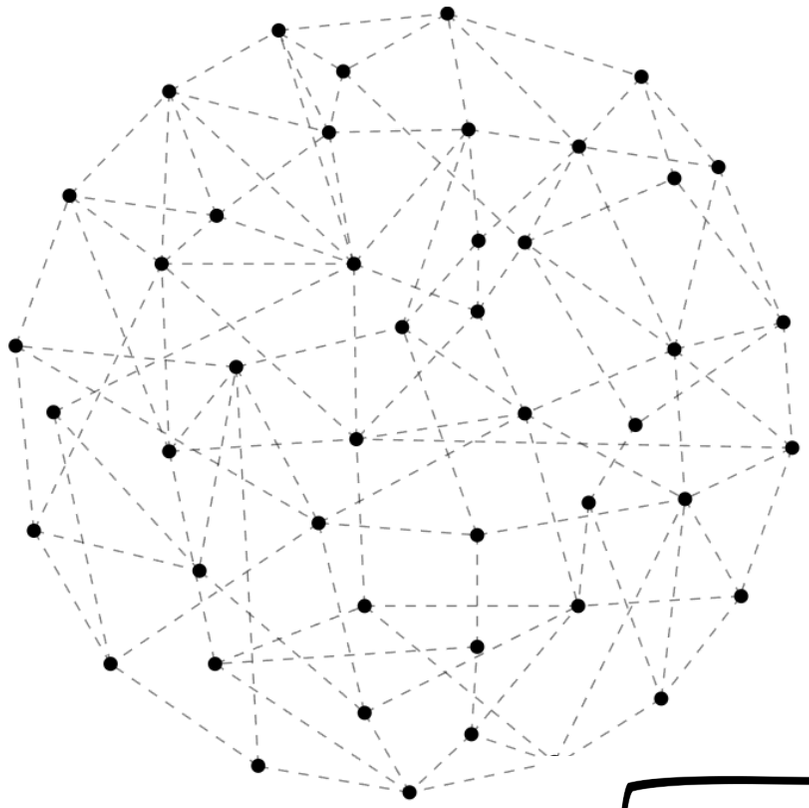
Using and interpreting network maps



- MCH nurse has the most incoming connections (46/50 parents), followed by Mum and Friend (41/50), and then Partner (39)
- It then drops to Sibling (25/50) and Mother-in-Law / Sleep Information Page (20/50)
- But also, there were six parents that only nominated 3 or less sources

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Using what we learn



You Mapped Me!

- SNA allows us to ask and answer questions at a network or system level
- Results can test assumptions about who/what is more or less central
- We can then find gaps to fill, risks to mitigate, or elements to strengthen

Most important: it can apply to **any form of network structure.**

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