



## Parent Champions in action

# Torbay case study

Supporting isolated families in a coastal community

The Torbay region of Devon is a very popular holiday destination, however, as with many coastal holiday areas, the towns, villages and coastal ports can be very isolated and employment for some local residents is seasonal. The reality for permanent residents is often a different experience to that of the holiday makers.

Setting up a Parent Champions scheme within children's centres run by Action for Children that would cover the whole of Torbay, was seen as a way of reaching families who are isolated, who may not have access to information and who are unaware of local services.



## Recruitment, training and support

Since embarking on the Parent Champions scheme, ten volunteers have been recruited and trained. Several of these volunteers are based within the children's centres and go into their local community passing on information about activities for families and local childcare. They have also been actively involved in organising fun days and Christmas parties.

The other Parent Champion volunteers are out in the community and regularly attend local libraries and toddler groups.

All reach out to parents who are unfamiliar with local services and can support families to make the most of what is on offer, as well as informing them about entitlements such as free childcare for two-year-olds.

Like many Parent Champions schemes, the role of the scheme coordinator is pivotal to its effectiveness. Many of the volunteers when first recruited, whilst keen, were lacking in confidence. Through thorough training at the outset, delivered by a Family and Childcare Trust consultant and the children centre core volunteer training, the initial anxiety of going out into the community was reduced. Volunteers were encouraged to undertake activities in areas that they felt comfortable with and others preferred to begin their outreach in pairs.

All volunteers are offered regular one-to-one supervision with the scheme coordinator, as well as group meetings to discuss issues that have arisen, themes that are emerging from their outreach activities, and ideas to enhance the project. The volunteer group are also being encouraged to use each other more for support and to use their project phones to share information.



## Reaching isolated families

Already the scheme has seen results in more new parents attending activities within the children's centres, where Parent Champions are able to make further contact with parents they have spoken to out in the community. One of the greatest effects has been that information is getting out to families who are unaware of the Family Information Service and about the free places for two-year-olds, which is one of the key aims of the scheme. Facebook has also been an integral part of reaching families. Parent Champions have been actively reaching more parents through other groups on the Facebook page.

## Project impact

It is early days for the Torbay scheme, but volunteers speak of an increase in confidence and of parents welcoming the contact they have with volunteers.

To date, 76 parents have been met by the Parent Champions. Of those, 25 were met via the children's centres, 15 at the home of the parent, 3 at a community group or place of worship and the others at the library, schools, and other community places. Popular information given to parents has been about children's centres, Family Information Services, free childcare for two-year-olds, health services and nursery information. A significant number of those parents spoken to have gone on to use the services at the children's centre and Family Information Services and have taken up the free offer of childcare for two-year-olds.

## What the volunteers say

**“** I used the children's centre services with my own children and now want to give something back. I'm also gaining useful skills to help me get back to work, including being more confident and having more knowledge in people skills.

Parent Champion



**“** Parents listen to other parents. We're not in uniform, we're using our own experiences and we're a familiar face in the community.

Parent Champion



**“** We've received thorough volunteer training as well as the Parent Champion training. We're supported by the scheme coordinator and through other volunteers and it's given me more confidence. It's a very effective scheme. We're a positive role for new families as we're not official sounding or scary!

Parent Champion

