



## Parent Champions in action

# Brent case study

Educating local parents to access the right childcare and healthcare services

The Brent Parent Champions scheme is run by the local authority from within the early years team. The project has diversified the Parent Champions model by introducing a focus on parents' access to local health services. Brent is a very diverse borough, with almost 200 languages spoken. It also has the highest rate of child tooth decay in the country, so a project that had a focus on oral health was seen to be hugely beneficial for families.

## Reasons for implementing a Parent Champions scheme

With the recent rise in birth rates, particularly from parents of non-English speaking backgrounds, there was confusion around what services were available locally for families to access. This was particularly relevant to childcare and children's services, but also for healthcare services, and there was a general lack of awareness about local dental services. The aim of the Parent Champions project was to find a way of getting gentle health messages out to parents.





## Recruitment, outreach and support

Andrea, a public health specialist, is the project coordinator in Brent. She worked with the Employment Enterprise Team and the Jobcentre in order to find and recruit the Parent Champion volunteers. There were five parents in total, with four languages spoken between them – Somali, Tamo, Arabic and Portuguese – which are representative of the languages spoken in the borough. They were also looking to recruit a Polish speaker.

Many of the Parent Champions in Brent wanted to take on the role as a route to employment, or to help them improve their chances. This was particularly true of the parents that were recruited through the job centre. They wanted to show real life experience of being active within the community and include this on their CV. For all the volunteers the role was really helpful in boosting their confidence, linking with other parents, meeting new people, getting them out of the house, and trying something new.

For many of the local community in Brent, especially for those families who have recently arrived in the country, isolation and confusion about the correct procedures to follow and services to utilise, can be an issue. Volunteering as a Parent Champion has presented an opportunity for those parents to increase their knowledge and supported them to feel more confident and more active in their community. However, language could still be a barrier.

Training was provided to volunteers by Family and Childcare Trust, but Andrea also gave training in oral and nutritional health. There was a significant amount of information provided through training, perhaps too much, which was a slight barrier for those volunteers who had English as a second language. A lesson that they would take through to subsequent training would be to make it a lot simpler and the sessions shorter.

The parent volunteers attended the new birth appointments at the Centre for Health in Wembley, where they were able to talk to other parents and let them know about the local children's centres and services provided by them. They also offered key tips on health and wellbeing, which included asking whether the parents or children were registered with a dentist.





## Project impact

The project in Brent has had a significant impact on the Parent Champions, specifically improving the volunteers' self-esteem, as well as many other beneficial outcomes. From the five volunteers that were recruited, three have gone on to find work as a result of volunteering on the Parent Champions scheme.

The majority of the work for this project has been focussed on a specific area within the borough, in Wembley. Local parents have become familiar with the Parent Champions and have accepted them as a trusted source of support – over 200 parents have been engaged with since January 2015. Many of these parents did not have prior knowledge of their local health services, or of how to access dental care. They were not aware of what was on offer at children's centres, or even what a children's centre was.

There has been a general increase in awareness of the work of the scheme amongst families and two parents who were engaged with have now volunteered as Parent Champions in the new Brent scheme.

***"The scheme has benefited the local authority in many ways. It has been hugely beneficial to have been able to tailor the programme to meet the local needs. We have been able to develop the Parent Champion model so that volunteers can be trained to give messages about health services. Parents speak to other parents about health issues, and often need advice about what to do and where to go. One of the priorities for the council is to work with the local community and volunteers to build resilience and knowledge and help them to make informed choices that will improve the health and wellbeing of their families."***



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## Tips for other projects

In planning a Parent Champions scheme, Brent would recommend you:

- Allow enough time to run the project, as often this work needs to be done alongside all your other work. ***"One of the real challenges has been trying to juggle this with my usual job and making it a success."***
- Be mindful of the people who you might be working alongside and be respectful of the services that are already in place. ***"When you go into children's centres, the staff might be sensitive – you're doing work they're already doing."***
- Keep your monitoring procedures as simple and easy to use as possible. ***"Due to time restrictions I would prefer something like a Word or Excel document that is easy and quick to use."***

## The future

*The new Parent Champions project in Brent will continue with a focus on family health, but this time will look at how families access the right health service for their needs.*

There are many families in the borough who, due to language barriers and other issues, do not have a good understanding about what service they should be accessing and when. Some parents do not know the difference between the services provided by GPs and what the hospital's accident and emergency department is used for. So a project that looks to demystify this for local families was seen to have a huge potential benefit for both the local community, but also to alleviate the strain on services.

