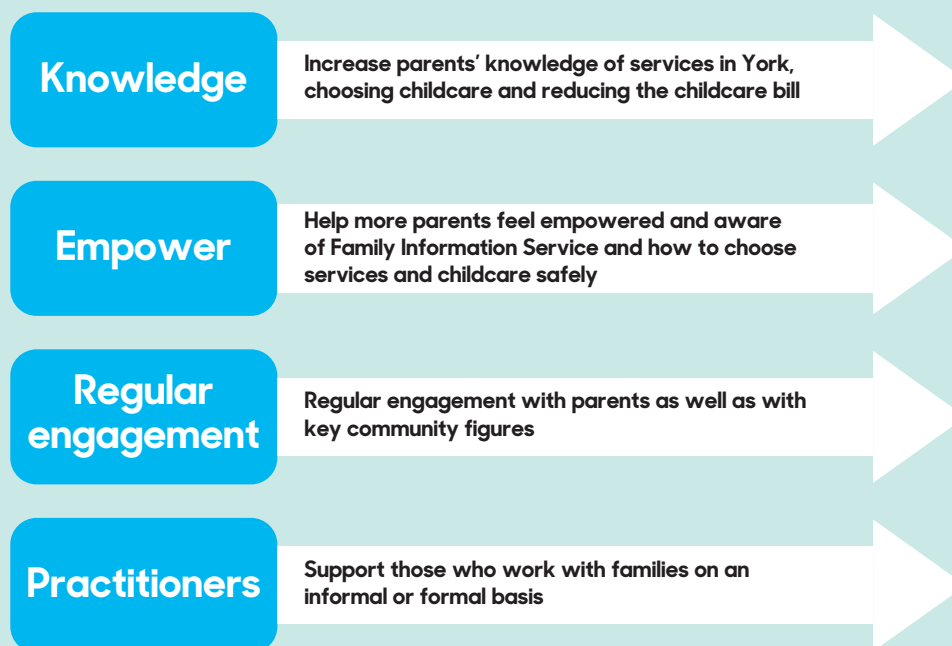


York Case Study

The number of parents using Facebook groups and other parent forums to ask advice or generally seek support from other parents is on the increase. In order to make the most of these informal networks and raise general awareness of the breadth of the Family Information Service the team at York has launched a pilot social media strategy. Research from the Citizens Advice Bureau confirms that parents use a mix of informal and formal advice, i.e. other parents and more official sources such as Family Information Service and Citizens Advice Bureau. York Family Information Service is keen to ensure that the information coming from informal sources is correct and carers know where to go for more complex queries.

It aims to achieve the following by engaging with key parents on social media:



The team felt it was important to approach parents who were proactively engaging the online community of York parents and carers. Therefore, they initially approached the parents who run the key Facebook groups. The following model was used:

1. Identify the group owner and send them a message thanking them for the work they do for families in York. Ask for the parent's address so a few leaflets and freebies can be sent to them.
2. Once initial contact has been established, send a package of Family Information Service leaflets, a trolley keyring, a thank you card and an invitation for coffee and cake.
3. Meet with the parent for coffee and cake and discuss ways that the Family Information Service can help them and their group, get feedback from them about Family Information Service and also look at ways that they can help raise awareness of Family Information Service and what the service offers.
4. Parents will join a 'Family Information Service network'. When there are particular campaigns or there's specific information which needs to reach a large number of people, the network will be emailed and asked to share the information with their group. These would be infrequent, every couple of months or so, to avoid overwhelming the network with information.

This model focuses on harnessing community power online and if successful, will be rolled out to toddler group leaders and other key people within the community. One advantage of this model is its informal nature and ability to reach parents who may not have been aware of Family Information Service or who wouldn't have thought to contact a service regarding their query. Queries can be responded to directly at the point when they are first made, rather than waiting for parents to become aware of our services.

As a result of some virtual outreach, parents and childminders started 'tagging' York Family Information Service in relevant conversations where there was a request for information. This allowed the team to contribute to discussions and provide information directly through Facebook to the family. Overall the Family Information Service is able to be much more responsive and take part in conversations where clarification might be needed or where incorrect information is being given. It has the added benefit that it comes with a recommendation from another group user, thus suggesting to a parent that the sign-poster has had a good experience using Family Information Service.

The YorOK website is another key point of information for families. The website complements the presence on Facebook. The latter is more responsive and allows the team to be more personable and informal than the website. It found that this more informal presence is notable in the responses from parents in Facebook messages compared to responses to emails.

Key lessons from the pilot have been:

- ▶ Make use of existing networks and target key community players and proactive parents to be part of your network of social media contacts.
- ▶ Meeting people face-to-face is very powerful and can really help you build relationships.
- ▶ Saying thank you on behalf of parents in the area is a small thing but means a lot.
- ▶ Set up a personal account in addition to the Facebook page and ensure that this account can be verified with ID e.g. driving licence. This does mean that someone in the team will have to admit to their date of birth!

A network comprising of almost 8000 members has been established across the various groups. As a result of this work, there have been an increased number of enquiries through Facebook. There are future plans to extend the pilot to other Facebook networks, including one aimed at families where a child has a disability or additional needs.