

## **Parent Champions case study – Greenwich**

The Greenwich Parent Champions scheme is one of the newer schemes that has set up as part of the National Network. It is run by the Greenwich Inclusion Project (GrIP), an independent charity, based in Woolwich in London, which seeks to develop and promote cross-community inclusion through outreach and innovative activities. The scheme was successfully awarded a small grant from the Family and Childcare Trust to set up and implement the work. It will initially run for one year, after which point it will be evaluated to see if the aims have been achieved and whether further funding can be sought to sustain it into the future.

GrIP was keen to work with local parents and consulted with them about how best to provide support within the community. A strong theme that came out of their consultation was around helping parents who wanted to support their children into education, and it was felt that this was something that could be achieved through the Parent Champions model.

The aim of the Greenwich project is to work with parents to encourage more involvement in their child's education from an early age, in turn helping them to feel empowered and able to play a more proactive role in their development.

GrIP aims to work with parents from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds or refugees (BAMER), as the local community in the borough of Greenwich, and particularly Woolwich and Plumstead where the project is focused, is ethnically diverse with many families who have recently arrived in England. The population of the area is made up by 47 per cent of ethnically diverse families and has the highest percentage of BAMER families in the borough. Families in this urban southeast London area come mainly from African, Asian, Caribbean and migrant European backgrounds. However, more recently there has also been an increase in Nepalese families living in the community.

For a variety of reasons, there are significant numbers of parents from within the community that are not accessing the free places for two-year olds, especially those who have recently arrived in the country. Cultural issues, language barriers, misinformation and lack of information or awareness of available services, are cited as the main reasons for this.

GrIP is already very active in school issues and encourages parents from BAMER backgrounds to become part of their school's governing body, involving them in the educational decision making process. Parent Champions will help parents increase their knowledge of the educational opportunities that exist and understand the importance of early learning; showing the benefits of taking up a free Government-funded place for two-year-olds and how these fit in to and lead on to the future education system for their children. They will focus on informing parents about the children's and family services that are available locally. Parent Champions will signpost parents to the free places offered at the Homestart-run Brookmill Children's Centre in Woolwich, who they are working in partnership with, as a starting point. They will also inform parents about services in the wider community, by linking with, for example, the Family Information Service, local schools, Jobcentre Plus and other family support organisations.

As GrIP is recognised in the local community for other aspects of its work in community cohesion, it already has established links with other services and organisations, which it will utilise throughout the project.

There are nine volunteers working with the Greenwich scheme, all women and mums of varying ages, with one grandparent in the group. The Parent Champions are representative of the community that they are trying to reach, which has previously proved to be key success

factor for schemes, with volunteers coming from varying backgrounds. They are fortunate to have recruited a Nepalese mother - representative of the growing Nepalese community in the area.

The recruitment process started in November 2014, with the two-day training provided by Family and Childcare Trust taking place in December and the Parent Champions are now active. The volunteers were recruited through existing contacts with networks of parents within the community, some of which were either were already familiar with the work of GrIP or were known residents who were seen as good potential volunteers for this project.

As a very new project, they are still developing their outreach techniques and planning their activities to engage with parents. As a starting point, Parent Champions will target families who visit Brookmill Children's Centre, but as the project progresses, and the confidence and recognition of the project builds, they will venture out into their community to communicate with parents more widely. They are already a fairly confident group of individuals, so they feel reaching out into the community to engage with other parents, encouraging them to use services, is something that will naturally happen quite soon.

The project encourages Parent Champions to develop relationships amongst the group and provide support for one another. Weekly supervision and support is also provided from the base provided at the GrIP offices, through group and individual meetings arranged by the project coordinator - who herself is a volunteer.

As a very new project, it is too early to detect the impact that the scheme has made on the community or the volunteers themselves, however, once it is more established, they are positive that an evaluation will have identified an increase in awareness and take up of services and that local parents will feel better informed; this will be key to the project seeking further funding to sustain beyond the initial year.

***"This is a fantastic model, as it makes information become human. People can find it difficult to access information, especially if language or cultural issues are a barrier. The human contact provided through the supportive person-to-person Parent Champions approach, enables parents to really find out what help they can get and what opportunities are available for their families."***

Setting up the scheme in Greenwich has been a fairly rapid learning process for GrIP. They feel well supported by Family and Childcare Trust – ***"the individual support provided by FCT has been excellent. The team is very knowledgeable and supportive in getting the scheme off the ground and taking the project from the idea stage through to being operational."***

If Greenwich were to pass tips on to others thinking of setting up a scheme, they would advocate for:

- Work out exactly where you want to make an impact in the neighbourhood.
- Consult with others, especially those who you are trying to engage with.
- Start and work with existing services who already have contact with families, for example, the children's centres in the area.