

Liverpool Parent Champions Project

**An evaluation report for the
Department for Education**

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1. Introduction

Parent Champions for Childcare are parents who have positive experiences of using childcare and/or supporting their child's early learning, who act as advocates and peer advisers to other parents in their community.

Daycare Trust has developed this model to reach parents who are missing out on information about childcare and early learning activities because they do not know where to find it and are not engaged with local services or networks.

In 2007 the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) funded Daycare Trust to manage 3 pilot Parent Champions projects in London to increase awareness of formal childcare. Following the success of these pilot projects, Daycare Trust was funded by the DCSF to develop a toolkit for local authorities to set up their own Parent Champions schemes.

In 2011, Daycare Trust received funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to develop a sustainable national Parent Champions network of parents who inform other parents about early learning and childcare options.

The overall aim of the funding is to promote and encourage the contribution of family members and the wider community to early learning and childcare to improve child outcomes.

1.1 Targets

There were 6 pathfinder projects funded in 2011-12, including 1 in Liverpool. Each project was expected to reach at least 400 parents by the end of their 6-month delivery period, with 33 per cent (132) of these contacts being referred to local services (for example, FIS/children's centres) and 8.25 per cent (33) taking up services as a result of contact with a Parent Champion.

Monthly monitoring information about the number of parents that Parent Champions engaged with, referrals to the Family Information Service and parents taking up local services was collected by the project and shared with Daycare Trust.

1.2 National Network

An important element of the Parent Champions programme was to develop models of delivery that were found to work well for the 2011–12 projects, establish the learning from these pathfinders and build a National Network of projects across England. The network was launched in February 2012 and all local authorities now have an opportunity to be part of this. Daycare Trust has developed resources, provided through a secure online National Network area, where local authorities can share learning, case studies and support each other nationwide.

1.3 The Liverpool project

Daycare Trust approached Liverpool Childcare and Family Information Service (CAFIS) in July 2011 to discuss the possibility of running a programme in the city. A budget of £12,170 was agreed and the CAFIS invited Vauxhall Children's Centre to take on the role of delivery agent. Vauxhall was selected on the basis of its extensive experience of working with parent volunteers, particularly the Volunteer into Placement (VIP) programme (see Appendix 3 for further detail).

1.4 Priorities for delivery of the project in Liverpool

In addition to the targets set out in section 1.1, the Liverpool project set out its own specific priorities. High unemployment and high levels of deprivation, combined with a low use of formal childcare provision and early years services made encouraging families to use these services a priority.

"[There are] some large families there and very high levels of unemployment and... a lot of the parents and families would have no knowledge of paid for childcare because they don't work and... so have never experienced it and are often suspicious of it. So we knew we wouldn't make a huge impact in increasing the numbers or take up of paid for childcare but what we would focus on was getting the message across about grants and free entitlement – the 2 year old grant and 3 year old offer - and that has been the case... Language is a barrier in Granby which may be why there's not such a high awareness of the 3 year old offer even."

Children Centre stakeholder

Another factor which made take up of these services a focus of the project was the lower than average child learning and development levels in certain parts of Liverpool, evidenced by children's development levels on entering school nursery at three years of age and their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores (taken at age 5). Although daycare attendance was only possible for these families where funding could be obtained, the project was keen to maximise take up of other pre-school play and learning opportunities, including children's centre services. Consequently, there was also a strong focus on encouraging families to register with and use children's centre services.

The project felt it was important to have a holistic approach that maximised the opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and families in the area and enabled early intervention where appropriate.

"Even when a child hasn't taken up a childcare place, but their parents are attending sessions in children's centres, we can measure improvements in the child's and family's health and wellbeing, their learning disposition, readiness to go to school etc – or identify early problems and intervene."

Children's Centre stakeholder

In summary, the principal priorities that were identified for the Parent Champions were to:

- work to build trust among local parents;
- inform them about funded childcare opportunities, such as the free early education entitlement for two, three and four-year-olds;
- encourage parents to register with children's centres and become active users;
- encourage parents to access other services, such as those recommended through the CAFIS and;
- encourage parents to obtain and use home safety equipment and take part in home learning.

It was also decided to extend the service to as many families with children with a disability or additional needs as possible.

2. Background

2.1 Why Parent Champions?

Research conducted by Daycare Trust between 2004 and 2007 found that, despite advances in childcare provision in the UK in that period, disadvantaged groups still remained less likely to take up childcare. In 2010, only 38 per cent of the lowest income families accessed formal childcare versus 65 per cent among the highest income families¹. Lone parents, Asian families, non-working parents and families with three or more children were also found to be less likely to use formal childcare. Additionally, in the same piece of research, 38 per cent of parents felt there was 'too little' information about childcare in the local area in 2010².

It is of particular concern that the lowest income families are less likely to access formal childcare, as the benefit of childcare and early learning provision for the most disadvantaged children, in particular, is well documented. A literature review of international research concluded³:

- High quality childcare for disadvantaged children can produce benefits for cognitive, language and social development.
- Low quality childcare produces either no benefit or negative effects.

¹ Smith, P., Gilby, N., Dobie, S., Hobden, S., Sullivan, L., Williams, M., Littlewood, M., D'Souza, J. and Flore, G. (2012) Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2010 Research Report DFE-RR221, London: Department for Education

² Ibid

³ Melhuish, T. (2003) *A literature review of the impact of early years provision on young children, with emphasis given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds*, Institute for the Study of Children

- High quality childcare accompanied by associated home visits appears to be the most effective package of services.
- Disadvantaged children benefit particularly from high quality pre-school provision.
- Early childhood interventions boost children's confidence and social skills, which provides a better foundation for success at school (and subsequently in the workplace).
- In England, the most effective types of provision are integrated centres (centres which combine education and care) and nursery schools.

Daycare Trust's commitment to promoting the benefits of high quality childcare led it to consider how those families who are least likely to access it can be encouraged to do so. Its own evidence suggested that while parents value formal information sources, they respond equally well, if not better, to informal channels⁴ and that the empathetic voice of another parent can be a powerful tool when trying to engage and disseminate information.

In response to the growing body of evidence that parents could act as a conduit to increasing the take up of childcare, Daycare Trust developed the Parent Champions model.

2.2 What are Parent Champions?

Parent Champions for Childcare are parents who have positive experiences of using childcare and/or supporting their child's early learning, who act as advocates and peer advisers to other parents in their community.

Parent Champions for Childcare can:

- help parents to understand the benefits of quality childcare and early learning for their children;
- encourage parents to participate in early learning activities with their children inside and outside the home;
- help parents to find out about and take up formal childcare places for their children; and
- encourage parents to participate in local childcare and early learning services, for example, by volunteering to help out at play sessions or becoming a parent representative on their children's centre advisory board.

Parent Champions for Childcare are peer outreach workers; their role is to engage with parents in their community to offer information and initial support. This involves using different outreach techniques to engage with parents, which may include:

- drop-in information sessions;
- informal workshops in community locations;
- contact-building at children's activities, such as stay and play and health sessions at children's centres and library reading programmes; and
- targeted door knocking in the community to reach parents that are not already in contact with services.

⁴ Daycare Trust (2008) Parent Champions Project: project highlights, August 2007 – March 2008.

In some areas, they may also be able to liaise with local childcare providers to offer parents childcare-taster sessions.

Essential ingredients in the Parent Champions model are that the Parent Champions are trained before they start work and receive ongoing support and supervision whilst undertaking their engagement with parents/carers.

2.3 Daycare Trust Parent Champions Pilots

Daycare Trust led the delivery of Parent Champions pilot schemes in the London boroughs of Camden, Newham and Tower Hamlets between August 2007 and March 2008. The pilots were designed to test whether, with support and armed with the relevant information, parents with good experiences of childcare could act as advocates in their communities for parents not currently accessing childcare. The project provided an opportunity to test a variety of methods of reaching and engaging with parents about the benefits of childcare and also considered the effectiveness of a Parent Champions model in increasing take up of formal childcare.

Daycare Trust worked in partnership with three organisations to deliver the project locally: Community Links, Women Like Us and Working Links.

Since these pilot projects, Daycare Trust has managed a number of other Parent Champions projects, refining the model to that which is used today for the Parent Champions National Network.

2.4 Models of delivery

The Parent Champions project should be delivered by parents, ideally those who reflect the communities they are trying to reach, with the aim of increasing take up of services and the active engagement of parents in the education of their young children. There is no standard model of delivery and the way in which the programmes have been delivered has varied from project to project. For example, local authorities can choose to deliver a Parent Champions scheme themselves or identify a local partner organisation to manage the day-to-day delivery of the project.

There is evidence that a project works best when there is full engagement from local children's centres and the Family Information Service (FIS), but the nature of how the FIS functions can vary in different localities. In some places, the FIS is now only a call centre, but some still maintain public outlets and some are a combination of a telephone service and outreach sessions. Also, particularly in the case of children's centres, there may be rural factors to consider. For instance, the centres may well be at some distance from parents and lack of transport, especially for those from areas of high deprivation, can be a barrier to participation.

3. Methodology

The evaluation of the project has been conducted largely through semi-structured interviews and group discussions with key stakeholders, including Parent Champions, parents, children's centre and CAFIS staff and Daycare Trust.

A full list of those who took part in interviews and discussions is contained in Appendix 2.

Output data was analysed to permit a comparison between the output target for the project and its achievements against these.

Desk research was also undertaken to provide an evidence-based framework for assessing the outcomes of the project. This involved looking at evaluations of similar projects in order to see what outcomes this project could be expected to achieve. The conclusions from the report on the trialling of the free early education entitlement for two-year olds⁵ was considered particularly relevant in the Liverpool context because of the emphasis on encouraging take up of these places.

The evaluation has assessed the outcomes of the project in respect of the benefits for children and parents and the outcomes for the parents who volunteered as Parent Champions.

Finally, the evaluation also addressed the outcomes for the other stakeholders, including children's centres in Liverpool and Liverpool Childcare and Family Information Service (CAFIS).

3.1 Selecting the areas for delivery

It was decided to focus the Liverpool project on some of the most deprived areas of the city where child poverty levels were highest, there were low levels of employment and low levels of take up of pre-school childcare.

The areas selected to deliver the project were the Princes Park and Speke-Garston wards. The map contained in Appendix 1 shows that the 2 wards house large areas that are in the top 1 per cent of the most deprived wards in England; in fact, almost the whole of Princes Park is in the top 1 per cent. Both wards have high levels of child poverty and worklessness compared to both the Liverpool average and national rates.

Princes Park

Princes Park is 1 of the most deprived wards in Liverpool with 93.6 per cent of the ward falling into the most deprived 5 per cent nationally. This is significantly higher than the city-wide average (36.5 per cent). It means that over 13,000 Princes Park residents are living in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. A high proportion of the ward (60.1 per cent) is in the most deprived 1 per cent of areas nationally, equating to 5 times the Liverpool average⁶.

Worklessness and the number of people in receipt of benefits are a pressing issue for the ward. The Liverpool City Council Ward Profile Report cites the workless rate in Princes Park as 37.6 per cent⁷. This is the second highest ward rate in Liverpool and more than 3 times the February 2011 national rate of 12.3 per cent. This means that nearly two out of every five working age residents of the ward are claiming out-of-work benefits. The area's workless

⁵ C4EO (2012), *Expansion of the entitlement to free education for disadvantaged two-year-olds*

⁶ Liverpool City Council Ward Profile, data source Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010

⁷ This data may not wholly represent the scale of the workless issue in the ward since it is derived from the DWP February 2011 figures and therefore, predates the recent rises in unemployment

population also has a relatively high proportion of lone parents (3.8 per cent of the working age population compared to 2.6 per cent of Liverpool's and more than twice the proportion in Britain at 1.6 per cent)⁸.

Approximately 2,140 children living in Princes Park are in poverty. This equates to three in five children in the ward and is the highest rate of child poverty⁹ of all Liverpool wards. It is considerably higher than the Liverpool average of 34.4 per cent and almost 3 times the national average (21.3 per cent). In large parts of the ward up to 80 per cent of children are classed as living in poverty¹⁰.

Speke-Garston

Whilst not experiencing the same levels as Princes Park, Speke-Garston, nevertheless, has significant areas of deprivation. A large proportion (85.4 per cent) of the ward falls into the most deprived 10 per cent nationally, compared to a Liverpool average of 49.6 per cent¹¹. A significantly high proportion, 81.6 per cent of the ward, is in the most deprived 5 per cent of areas nationally (more than twice the city-wide average) and 14.2 per cent in the most deprived 1 per cent of areas¹².

The Liverpool City Council Ward Profile reports that the workless rate in Speke-Garston is 30.2 per cent¹³ (3,758 people) compared to the Liverpool average at the time of 21.8 per cent and is nearly 3 times the February 2011 national rate (12.3 per cent). In some areas of Speke-Garston half of all working age adults are workless and a high proportion of Speke-Garston's workless population are lone parents (5 per cent)¹⁴.

More than 45.2 per cent of children living in the Speke-Garston ward are in poverty (approximately 2,295 children) and in significant pockets of the ward up to 60 per cent of children are classed as living in poverty¹⁵.

3.2 Selecting parents as Parent Champions

There were six Parent Champions in total in Liverpool and two were based at each of the three different children's centres in the areas selected.

In selecting the parents who would work as Parent Champions, it was felt to be important in Liverpool (as in other Parent Champions projects) that they reflected the demographics of the areas in which they worked and that they had experience of the issues being faced by parents in those communities. The Parent Champions themselves have reflected on how important this empathy was.

⁸ Liverpool City Council Ward Profile, data source DWP February 2011

⁹ The UK government's poverty line is where household income is below 60 per cent of the median UK household income, before and after housing costs have been paid; data from Liverpool City Council Ward Profile

¹⁰ Liverpool City Council Ward Profile, data source Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010

¹¹ Liverpool City Council Ward Profile, data source Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010

¹² Liverpool City Council Ward Profile, data source Index of Multiple D 2010

¹³ This data may not wholly represent the scale of the workless issue in the ward since it is derived from DWP February 2011 figures and, therefore, predates the recent rises in unemployment

¹⁴ Liverpool City Council Ward Profile, data source DWP February 2011

¹⁵ Liverpool City Council Ward Profile, data source Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010

"It's totally different talking to someone who's been through it, rather than just someone on the phone calling you to use a service in children's centres.....They know we are mums and parents ourselves promoting the services and the mums and dads tend to trust us....."

Parent Champion

Another consideration was the ability of the parents to start the Parent Champion work quickly, given that this was only a six-month project and, for this reason, the parents selected had already undergone some level of training and development through the VIP programme. Good interpersonal skills and knowledge of the area where they worked were also considered to be beneficial, although interpersonal skills were a key area of development for the Parent Champions.

In return for their time, the Parents Champions' childcare costs and other expenses, including travel and lunch costs, were met and they received £50 per month each in supermarket vouchers.

3.3 Training the Parent Champions

An important element in the approach to the project was to ensure that Parents Champions were adequately prepared and trained before commencing work in the field. Training was delivered by the Daycare Trust Project Officer, the Vauxhall Children's Centre Coordinator, the day-to-day programme supervisor and the CAFIS team.

The training included:

- the programme's aims and objectives and the role of the Parent Champions;
- the role of the CAFIS;
- the importance of early years childcare and education and the benefits for both children and parents;
- funding sources available for childcare;
- specific training and information on the free early education entitlement for two, three and four-year-olds;
- available sources of support for parents;
- record keeping;
- effective communication and different engagement techniques and their effectiveness; and
- methods to ensure Parent Champion's health and safety.

The training was generally seen to have been beneficial. However, there were a number of observations about it from stakeholders about how, with hindsight, the training could have been improved. Some of the Parent Champions cited the following suggestions for improvement:

- At a minimum, training should take place over two half days (as opposed to having two sessions in the one day). For example, one half day could be allocated to going through the role of a Parent Champion and a second session, explaining how to do

referrals and other practicalities. This would also enable participants to reflect on the first session and come back the following day with further questions.

- The training could benefit from explanations of more of the key demographic terms relevant to the project (for example, some Parent Champions wanted to know what 'Super Output Areas' were).
- It would be helpful to have further explanation of the criteria for the free early education entitlement for two, three and four-year-olds.
- Parent Champions also wanted further information on the children's centre's offer and support services that are available or how to find more information on these and how to use referral forms.

3.4 The Delivery Model

Evaluations of similar projects, the conclusions from the report on the trialling of the free early education entitlement for two-year olds offer¹⁶ in particular, demonstrated some key factors in achieving the best parental and child engagement and optimum outcomes for children:

- Encouragement is needed to convince parents who have a mistrust of formal childcare to access the free early education entitlement.
- Combining additional support to improve the wellbeing of the whole family alongside the two-year-old offer proved beneficial.
- Parents should be encouraged to engage in home learning with their children.
- Children's centres are well placed to identify and target eligible children and parents and have successfully used parent/family support staff to engage with eligible families.
- In addition to providing the offer, to break the cycle of poverty, parents who have been long-term unemployed need to be supported to overcome barriers such as low self-esteem and encouraged to take steps towards training and employment.

The Liverpool project decided on a systematic and very focussed approach to the delivery of the project. Data was gathered from Liverpool City Council about children aged under five living in the areas and from children's centres about families who had registered with them, but who had never or only occasionally used their services. This enabled the project to identify where families who were potential beneficiaries lived. On the basis of this intelligence, the Parent Champions undertook a door knocking exercise to establish contact with the families and offer their services. The Parent Champions report that it often took time from that initial contact to establishing a relationship of trust and parental engagement. Many stakeholders interviewed talked about the high level of debt in the area, which led many families living there to fear answering the door, in case it was debt collectors. This was one of the key reasons why it was difficult for Parent Champions to make initial contact.

*"It can take a lot of time from that first contact. Some people are suspicious when you knock the door the first time. They are wary of you and giving out their information but we keep on and we don't look like bailiffs and have a badge!!
It's easier once we are in that house and we know if there's children that they are safe and sound and if they're not registered, then we can do it for them..."*

Parent Champion

The Parent Champions were given child protection training so they were aware of the issues and how to deal with potentially difficult situations. This has proved very helpful when the Parent Champions come into contact with families where children are at risk. The Parent Champion's ability to read a situation and/or build up a relationship of trust, encouraging disclosure by parents, have been the key to providing practical solutions and initiating early intervention. On occasions the quick actions of Parent Champions have been critical in circumstances where women and children were at risk.

"And there was this other woman we met, five kids almost all under five, and suffering from domestic violence and depression. [She] didn't know about any childcare offers so we got her kids nursery places, got her on some courses like First Aid, Baby Connect and Memory Book. Now she's doing another training course and the difference in her is amazing.

But once we got talking to her, there were others in her family, so like, hang on my sister's here can you help her? It was like Eastenders! And the sister come out the house saying, 'there's me mate as well'. But it was so hard to get a word out of them in the first place..."

Parent Champion

The Parent Champions worked in pairs at all times, in part for health and safety reasons, but also because of the impact on their own confidence and personal development.

Their confidence has gone sky high since beginning the project and I think it's because they are working in a pair and they've bonded in a pair and they bounce off each other... [they're] all totally different now than when they first started on this – and [their] whole attitudes have changed..."

Children's Centre stakeholder

The close bond that grew between the Parents Champions in pairs meant they were able to rely on each other for mutual support and to recognise and bring out each other's strengths. This enabled them to offer parents their combined skills and experience to better effect, thereby bringing added value to the visits.

"..we know who does what better and we do things together...I'll write up the CAF [Common Assessment Framework] and someone else does the talking or questions and then I'll join in with something else...so it works well.. if I am unsure about something then [the other parent champion] can step in and help, so you know you've got back up and can feel more confident in yourself.

Parent Champion

Another important element of the model in Liverpool has been the delivery of, or attendance at, events in local schools and children's centres and targeting parents who are attending

more generic activities at centres, for example, health sessions. The Case Study below illustrates this in further detail.

Case study 1

One of the children's centres participating in this project found that their Parent Champions helped them to engage with parents who were only accessing limited services at the centre. The Parent Champions engaged with these parents when they attended health service sessions. The Parent Champions took this opportunity to encourage parents to participate in other activities targeted at them and their child. As the children's centre worker explains:

'The developmental reviews are done here by the health centre, we have the community midwife here on a Friday, so once a month we want the Parent Champions to sit in there and talk to the parents when they are waiting to go in because we know that these parents are not necessarily using our services and they are here just for that purpose.'

3.5 Building trust in the community

All the stakeholders interviewed for the purposes of the evaluation reported that, prior to the project, there had been a breakdown of trust between professionals and the people living in the communities where Parent Champions worked. This resulted in social isolation, disengagement from services and lack of knowledge of available help and support, including the free early education entitlement for two, three and four-year olds. It was recognised that a critical part of the work of the Parent Champions has been a rebuilding of trust with parents in order to improve knowledge and access to services. The case study below provides further illustration of this point.

Case Study 2

One Parent Champion explains how they found it hard to get parents in Garston to trust them at first. However, their experiences taught them getting to know the parents they were trying to help, bit by bit, helped them to build their trust. They persisted by visiting the local hospital regularly on the same days every week, which enabled them to begin to engage with parents. As the Parent Champion explains:

'We refer people into FIS and we explain the wraparound and after school clubs – half the people didn't know. It's good feedback when you find a nursery place for a family and they thank you for it. Garston is a real mix – big houses then estates – and a hard community for people to trust you, but they know our faces and we get trust and [the other Parent Champion] knows the area well. And when we do hospital visits on Thursdays or Fridays it's like we practically work there now!'

3.6 Partners in delivering the project

The project was built on a partnership between children's centres, the CAFIS and Daycare Trust.

Each partner had their own distinct role, but also worked closely together to plan and monitor the progress of the programme. The children's centres had a key role in the day-to-day operation of the project and supervision of the work of the Parent Champions. The CAFIS

role was to receive referrals and act on these to ensure that parents were provided with appropriate information, advice and assistance that was accurate, timely and relevant. Daycare Trust assisted with the overall direction of the project, training of the Parent Champions and provided support to the project team as and when it was required.

The evaluation has found that there could have been some improvements in the way in which children's centres were involved and that there was a varying level of understanding of the project and, therefore, engagement of the different centres.

Three key factors have been highlighted in the evaluation that could, in the view of stakeholders, bring even greater success to similar projects:

- The development of a better understanding by the children's centres of the Parent Champions model and how the Parent Champions work.
- Increased integration of the Parent Champions in the children's centres so that they can fully understand how they operate and the services to which they could refer parents.
- Improved data from the children's centres about outcomes for parents and children who are referred to their services, so that the impact of the work can be better measured.

"I think we have to go along and meet the children's centres first and get to know a bit about the centre... and to hit the ground running you have to have that bit of background knowledge. And the staff need to know what you're doing – if they can give you links in to different services that you need to get into, then that's a good thing..."

Parent Champion

"[We] definitely [need an induction with the children's centres]. We need to take them to the [centres], meet the managers and get them to give the Parent Champions the tour and the talk, introduce them to staff so they know who they are – and all this before they come on to work..."

Project team member

The partnership with the CAFIS is reported as having gone well, particularly because of good communication between the Parent Champions and the named staff member in the CAFIS. The CAFIS were found to have been quick and efficient in their follow up on referrals as well as being available to answer direct queries from the Parent Champions themselves.

Having a named person is good, even emailing them and [the CAFIS named person] always makes time for [the parents]. She speaks to them on the phone or rings them back and she has loads of information, for us too. We get a lot from her. If we are unsure we ring her and that's fine. She's there when you need her and having that person in a FIS who does make time for the parent and they do have that information there and then – so on the ball and fast..."

Parent Champion

4. Outputs, outcomes and key success factors in the Liverpool Project

This section sets out the outputs, outcomes and key successes of the project. It is helpful to define the difference between outputs and outcomes from the outset: an output is the direct product of any activity delivered, for example, the number of callers to a FIS, number of referrals to a children's centre. An outcome is different in that it is the benefit or change (the difference made) for participants after the activity, for example, new knowledge, increased skills.

4.1 Target Outputs

As noted in Section 1.1 of this report, the target outputs for the project were:

- to reach at least 400 parents by the end of the 6-month delivery period;
- that 33 per cent (132) of these contacts be referred to local services (for example, Family Information Service and children's centres); and
- that 8.25 per cent (33) take up services as a result of contact with a Parent Champion.

4.2 Outputs achieved

Table 1 below shows the actual outputs of the Liverpool project. As can be seen, the number of parents contacted considerably exceeded the target, as did the referrals to local services. In fact, all parents who had been contacted by Parent Champions were provided with information that would give them a route to other services and nearly 37 per cent of parents contacted were referred to the CAFIS.

Table 1 Outputs Achieved by Liverpool Parent Champion Project

Activities	Volume
New children's centre registrations	56
Referrals to free entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds (grant programme)	32
Information provided on local children's centre services	89
Information provided about three-year-old offer	28
Referrals to the CAFIS	217
Parents contacted during events and provided with information about childcare and children's centre services	167
Total number of parents contacted	589

The active registration levels of the children's centres rose by 12 per cent during the period of the project, with 56 new families registering, these having 92 children between them.

The 217 referrals to the CAFIS equate to around 16 per cent of its total referrals for 2011/12 and during the 6 months of the programme 33.3 per cent of referrals came via the Parent Champions.

The CAFIS data only captures the geographical location of the childcare requested and, therefore, does not indicate where the parent lives. Hence, it is not possible to be wholly accurate about the increase in enquiries by area of residence. Nonetheless, the data indicates that there was a significant increase in enquiries from Speke-Garston. Just under 10 per cent of enquiries during the 6 months of the project came from the area, whereas on average enquiries from that area represent approximately 4.8 per cent of enquiries annually.

In addition, the project reports that more than 70 per cent of the parents contacted classified themselves as lone parents.

4.3 Outcomes for parents, children and young people

Given the short time span of the project and the number of interviews conducted for the purposes of the evaluation (it was only feasible to talk to a small number of parents), it has been challenging to obtain an accurate view of the extent of the impact on parents, children and young people. The outcomes of interventions with families who have a limited history of contact with services often take time to become apparent. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of the impact that has already been obtained through the work of the Parents Champions in Liverpool.

The team running the project from Vauxhall Children's Centre was certainly clear about the types of outcomes they set out to achieve and are confident that they can measure these in the future. The projected outcomes for parents, children and young people include:

- increased access to childcare and early learning;
- increased access to children's centres services;
- improvements in parenting skills;
- increased engagement in home learning and home safety;
- increased engagement in volunteering opportunities;
- decreased social isolation of parents and children;
- improved communication skills and personal, social and emotional skills in children;
- increased school readiness for children; and
- long-term reduction in child poverty levels by preventing poor children from becoming poor adults.

Parents already report progress in relation to a number of these factors:

- attendance at childcare resulting improved child behaviour, language development and access to healthy eating options;
- improved relations between child and parent resulting from a parent acquiring tips on behaviour management;

- development of friendships for parents, thereby decreasing social isolation;
- increase in parental access to services, especially children's centres; and
- parents considering new education/training/employment opportunities.

"Some Parent Champions on the VIP programme couldn't make eye contact first of all and now they will engage a complete stranger in a detailed conversation."

Children Centre stakeholder

The case studies below illustrate the outcomes for parents and children in further detail.

Case Study 3

One of the parents in the Speke-Garston area said that her child now has a nursery place because of the help of a Parent Champion. She values this place as she feels her child's speech has now improved, as she explains:

'The children now have nursery places and I thought the Parent Champions were very, very helpful... My little girl's speech is loads better. She had problems with her speech but she is coming on a treat, it is much better.'

In addition to this, because she now goes to mother and toddler groups, as recommended by the Parent Champion, she has improved the quality of her own life by making friends at these groups:

'I go to mother and toddler groups too and I've made loads of new friends in the groups and my life has changed considerably...'

Case Study 4

Outcomes such as noticeable improvements in her parenting skills, her child's behaviour, and the overall quality of her relationship with her child were reported by one parent. Describing the effect of the parenting classes in particular (which used a method called 'positive parenting'), the parent says:

'I can engage more with my daughter and I have a lot more of an understanding of what her needs are... Before the positive parenting she was getting a bit unruly because I didn't know how to deal with the bad behaviour, like in the shops she used to create something terrible but now I just ignore it. Now we can have a good day and I am not shouting at her.'

The parent also appreciated the fact that at the free childcare she has since received, her daughter is receiving healthy snacks, which she was not getting at home:

'She is three now and she has started school as well. They take her to school and they pick her up and she is getting healthy snacks whereas sometimes when I get her home it is just easier to get something out of the freezer. They have loads of fruit and the kids can just help themselves.'

Finally, the parent also notes how she has benefited personally as she has been able to socialise with other parents:

'We have been invited to loads of parties, so I meet some of the other mums and we have a chat and there is now a room we can use when we drop with kids off – if we are not going to work or anything, we can just use the room and have a chat, so that's quite nice.'

Accessing services at the children's centre has opened up new social circles for her, giving her the opportunity to engage in informal discussion with other parents.

Case Study 5

Parent Champions have also reflected on the significant changes they are bringing to the parents they have engaged with. One Parent Champion highlights how important it is that they can pass on essential information about services that would be beneficial to parents, as she explains:

'I have learned about what [CAFIS] is and what you're entitled to. It is too late for me though, but I can give the information to others now... I now understand that information and knowledge is very important and since I am more part of a community, the women come to me for help, mostly asylum seekers or those whose status is challenged, and then I give them the Parent Champion information.'

'[I] definitely [see the importance] of being in the community and seeing the changes that you can do for them. Even sitting with someone for half an hour can change their day. I know that from my experience and then going back another time and if I can help one person the way I've been helped then it's been worth it'

Case Study 6

Parent Champions have become recognised role models in their local communities inspiring other parents to seek volunteering, and other opportunities, which has turned their lives around. As a Parent Champion explains:

'There are parents who see what we do and come up to us and say I could do that, give us a job! When firstly they thought we were from the Social until we told them what we were really doing and we told them how we had achieved something and that they could too, even getting them on a little course they'd achieve something too. It boosts their confidence and their children's confidence and their children's learning – so it feels like it's a whole family approach.'

4.4 Outcomes for Parent Champions

Although the Department for Education's requirements of the project were largely output focussed, the evaluation found that the project team at the children's centres and the CAFIS had a clear vision of the outcomes they wanted to achieve for the Parents Champions. These included development of transferable skills, increased confidence, communication and aspirations, improving their job readiness through volunteering and employment outcomes.

The background of the Parents Champions in Liverpool varied considerably from that of Parent Champions in the projects elsewhere in England, in this initial phase of the work. Prior to engaging in the VIP and Parent Champions projects the Parent Champions had all been unemployed, some since leaving school, had little or no experience of skilled employment and few formal post-school qualifications.

The reported outcomes for Parent Champions from the project are:

- Five out of the six Parents Champions have obtained paid skilled employment.
- There have been significant improvements in confidence, work readiness, self-esteem and the acquisition of important skills to enhance their career prospects.
- Volunteering experience and training were critical pathways to paid employment, which has improved the financial and emotional wellbeing of whole family, including the extended family. For example, one parent with a disabled mother has learned to drive which has opened up many new opportunities for her mother and improved the quality of her life.
- The Parent Champions have gained an understanding of the importance of information and knowledge in empowering parents to access services.
- They have been inspired to pursue further educational and training opportunities with one Parent Champion planning to enter higher education.
- They have become recognised role models in the local communities inspiring other parents to seek volunteering opportunities.
- One Parent Champion is considering setting up as a childminder as a result of her training – this will fill a gap in the local community, as there is a particular lack of this form of childcare available.

Five of the Parent Champions were interviewed as part of the evaluation process and, as part of the interview, they were asked to rate themselves on their progress in relation to a series of outcomes arising from their engagement with the VIP programme and the Parent Champions project. For each of the following statements, Parent Champions were asked to rate themselves on a Likert scale of 1–5, 1 being low and 5 being high. The results are detailed below.

- ‘I feel more confident’: 4 out of 5 Parent Champions interviewed returned a score of 5.
- ‘I improved my skills’: three out of five Parent Champions gave a score of 5.
- ‘I am better prepared for work’: all 5 Parent Champions gave a score of 5
- ‘My communication skills improved’: 4 out of 5 Parent Champions gave a score of 5
- ‘I have improved my career prospects’: 4 out of 5 Parent Champions gave a score of 5.
- ‘I feel more positive about the future’: 4 of the 5 Parent Champions gave a score of 5.
- ‘My relationship with friends and family has improved’: all 5 Parent Champions gave a score of 5.

All the Parent Champions interviewed for the purposes of the evaluation reported that the volunteering opportunities had been very important for them, but that ultimately, it was paid employment that they were seeking as an outcome from their involvement.

The case studies below illustrate the outcomes for the Parent Champions in further detail.

Case Study 7

One Parent Champion described how her experience on the project had helped her to make the journey back into paid employment, after three years of being unemployed, as she explains:

'I am a single mum. I've got three children - 8, 4 and 3. Before I had kids, I did some cafe work and then I was a care worker but I didn't work for about three years. I started VIP when my youngest was about 15 months. I done all my sessions and passed Food Hygiene and got loads of certificates. I have done NVQ Level 3 as well in Childcare and Development. Now I do five hours as a Parent Champion and then I have got 16 hours paid work as well.'

This example was fairly typical of the profession of the parents who worked as volunteers on the project – from unemployment or unskilled work, through obtaining a qualification via the VIP and Parent Champions project, to voluntary then paid work.

Case Study 8

Volunteering was more than just about helping Parent Champions back into employment for some of the participants. One Parent Champion explains how the experience has benefited the emotional wellbeing of her who family, including the extended family. For this participant, the experience improved their relationship with their children and their children's father. As the Parent Champion explains:

'[My children] have come so far and it's changed their lives too – I had the Children in Need places but they finished after 6 months and mum is disabled and I had no support. They could have lost their nursery places but... doing the... voluntary [work means] them getting childcare – they love it and their speech and their confidence is much better too...'

The participant also went on to talk about how the experience has enabled her to extend her social support network, which has had a profound effect on her attitude and subsequently she is able to support her mum:

'I met a few girls on the VIP and we go on days out as families. I met another girl whose mum has same problem as mine and we are inseparable and another girl who has twin boys same age as mine so I have got lot of support outside now.'

'I used to feel the unluckiest person in world but I feel the opposite now and it has taken pressure off my Mum cos I feel it's my time to look after her now, she has looked after me! I now drive and it's changed my Mum's life and my sons' lives – and even my sister... looks at me and sees my changes and that has changed her whole attitude – I am so positive and happy now and friends see the changes in me.'

Case Study 9

Parent Champions report significant improvements in confidence, work readiness, self-esteem and the acquisition of important skills to enhance their career prospects. One Parent Champion reported that she felt she had surpassed her own expectations, obtaining qualifications beyond what she believed herself capable of:

'I have learned about EYFS and stuff – and I never really worked – so it has helped with work skills... I didn't think I'd do my Level 3 but I did (and my Level 2) and that gives me more opportunities. My social skills of speaking and listening and my confidence are better. I can now drive and I have the ability to work with kids...I believe in myself now. I am more confidentI can look people in the eye now and couldn't do that before.... I feel happy and proud.'

Case Study 10

The Parent Champions have been inspired to pursue further educational and training opportunities with one planning to enter higher education. Two of the five parents interviewed reported that their next step was to pursue studies to build on the skills and experience they had acquired through the project and to seek careers which would continue their contribution to their communities.

'[The future will] be great I'm sure. I am going to apply to university in September to do an Access Course leading to BA Hons which was something I wanted to do when I was younger but I just lost track. And then I'll do Social Work... Now I understand the importance of people working in the community to help people, I am thinking of going to college to train to be a community support worker.'

4.5 Outcomes for children's centres

The role of the children's centres in the project should be set in the context of their overall objectives of improving opportunities for local children and their parents. The purpose of children's centres is clearly stated by the Department for Education¹⁷:

"The core purpose of Sure Start Children's Centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged, so children are equipped for life and ready for school, no matter what their background or family circumstances."

Department for Education

As a result of the project, the three children's centres involved in this project (Vauxhall, Speke-Garston and Princes Park) have experienced increased registration and active engagement in services. Children and families who had not previously attended have started to access services, including those aimed at improving parenting, health and school readiness. Some vulnerable families are taking up family support services aimed at reducing escalation through the social care system through early intervention. Children who cannot access daycare have the opportunity to benefit from other high quality pre-school services that are considered to have a positive impact on their school readiness.

A true measure of the impact of this increase in activity among families who have a history of disengagement may not become apparent for some time, but the project is committed to measuring progress in partnership with the children's centres.

¹⁷ www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/a00191780/core-purpose-of-sure-start-childrens-centres

4.6 Outcomes for CAFIS

The CAFIS report that this project has been an invaluable opportunity for the local authority to bring information to the doorsteps of parents and look to this way of working as a direction in the future. From their point of view, an important factor in the programme has also been the bringing together various initiatives to make a greater impact, and a real difference for parents and their children, especially for those parents who were unaware of services open to them and their families.

4.7 Outcomes for Daycare Trust

Daycare Trust has a critical role in promoting good practice in service delivery across services for children, young people and their families. It also has campaigning and policy roles and, in the context of these, has an ongoing dialogue with Government about its initiatives. A key activity for Daycare Trust is reporting on the type of interventions that can assist families in obtaining the best outcomes, as well as reflecting back some of the challenges to achieving the optimum results.

The project has provided Daycare Trust with invaluable local information on good practice that can inform its campaigning and policy work.

4.8 Key Liverpool success factors

The key success factors highlighted by all the stakeholders interviewed for the Liverpool project included the following:

- The fact that Parent Champions had accurate data on children and parents who were potential beneficiaries made it easier for them to target them.
- The level of support that was given to the Parent Champions and the experience of the staff in working with volunteers was very beneficial.
- The fact that the Parent Champions reflected the demographics of the areas in which they worked and were able to empathise with the parents they came in contact with (and the parents recognised the Parent Champions as being peers).
- Good communication and teamwork were also perceived as having been important ingredients in the project's achievements.

5. Key lessons for the future

The first six months of the Liverpool Parent Champions project have provided some key lessons about planning and delivery that can assist its own and other projects' future development:

- A targeted approach based on available data on local families, rather than a scattergun approach is particularly effective.
- There is a need to take time to build trust in communities where there is a history of disengagement with services.

- The recruitment of parents who reflect the demography of an area and can speak with the authority of personal experience is important in building trust and breaking down barriers to service access.
- Parents who have already had some training and development experience can become fully operational more quickly.
- The Parent Champions appreciate and benefit from the volunteering experience, but it is ultimately paid employment that they seek as an outcome.
- A full local induction programme with local partners, especially children's centres, would facilitate a more efficient start to a new project; this should include geographical orientation for Parent Champions unfamiliar with the area in which they will be working.
- The current Parent Champions training could be improved on in terms of content and structure, including splitting the sessions over two days.
- The full engagement of children's centres is a critical success factor and the development of a service specification, including a responsibility for data collection and outcome reporting, for each participating centre would be beneficial.
- A strong local partnership that benefits from good communication, clear planning, and leadership and provides good support to the Parent Champions, brings excellent added value to a project.
- The outcomes for Parent Champions can be readily identified after a relatively short participation in a project.
- Outcomes for parents, children and young people may take longer to establish and a robust impact measurement framework needs to be in place with agreements from all key partners to participate in data collection.
- The Liverpool model was appropriate and applicable in the localities where the Parents Champions worked, but should not be considered as a blueprint.

Appendix 2 Stakeholders interviewed

Esther Burridge	Daycare Trust
Roz Hampson	Daycare Trust
Adele Scotton	Vauxhall Children's Centre
Kim Garthwaite	Vauxhall Children's Centre
Jamal Dermott	Speke Children's Centre
Jane McMillian	Granby Children's Centre
Judith Mozier	CAFIS
Belinda Nelson	Parent Champion
Cheryl Mundle	Parent Champion
Joanne Williams	Parent Champion
Beverly Williams	Parent Champion
Lindsay Jones	Parent Champion

Appendix 3 – Volunteer into Placement (VIP) Programme

The Volunteer into Placement programme was developed Vauxhall Children's Centre to support the most vulnerable children's centre parents into training and employment so that they could provide a positive example to their children and communities in terms of the benefits of employment and lift their families out of poverty. The programme focuses on parents with no to low experience, skills and qualifications; those whose children are most at risk of poor outcomes as a result of inter-generational deprivation.

The programme has a set of criteria to ensure that the most vulnerable parents obtain places on the programme and it is able to ensure that project managers can effectively balance and manage the risk this involves. The programme targets those most in need and aims to ensure that the vast majority of participants will complete the programme and move into sustainable employment with opportunity for progression.

The programme has identified several categories of vulnerability including:

- Lone parents with a history of low achievement and limited family support.
- Parents living in the most deprived areas of the city.
- Parents with physical and mental health issues or disabilities that have limited their access to training and employment opportunities.
- Parents for who English is not a first language/who are refugee or asylum seekers.

- Parents who have been involved in the criminal justice system or who are at risk of entering it.
- Parents who are successfully dealing with substance abuse issues.
- BME parents.
- Teenage parents.
- Parents who have experienced domestic abuse or violence.
- Parents where one partner is working but on a low income and who has had limited opportunities to access training/employment.

The programme is delivered across 24 children's centres in Liverpool where levels of deprivation are higher than national averages and the impact of poor outcomes reach across generations.

There is a strict set of criteria for admission onto the programme:

- Liverpool resident.
- Unemployed/on out of work benefits.
- Low to no qualifications.
- Vulnerable family from a deprived area of the city.

Participants are assessed during the induction phase of the programme in terms of their:

- Basic skills (including dyslexia screening).
- Physical and mental health.
- CRB risk.

All participants have to complete CRB paperwork and cannot start their voluntary placements until these have been checked.

Where participants have negative CRB disclosures, permission will be obtained from the Children's Services Executive Director prior to commencement in children's centre placements or partnership placements where they will or could have contact with children or vulnerable adults.

Once participants have commenced in voluntary or paid placements they are supported by the VIP team and their placement mentors. Any problems/risks that are identified during these placements are dealt with as a matter of priority by the VIP team and every attempt is made to maintain their place on the programme as long as there is no risk to children or families using placement services.

Where problems are identified suitable interventions are put in place to support the VIP in placement, including access to counselling, services in children's centres and with partner agencies. Where it is not possible for the VIP to continue in placement an alternative placement is sought or the VIP contract is terminated.

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, campaigning for quality, accessible, affordable childcare for all and raising the voices of children, parents and carers. We advise parents and carers, providers, employers, trade unions and policymakers on childcare issues.

We recognise that everyone is unique and we value difference in our communities. We listen to all views and are committed to act without prejudice. We oppose all discrimination and promote equality in all we do.

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