

CHAMPION CHATTER

Welcome to Champion Chatter



Hopefully it is not too late to wish you a very happy New Year and I hope that 2015 has begun well for you all!

The beginning of the year has found us focused on preparations for our second Parent Champions Conference and of course, our very first Awards. I would like to take the time again

to congratulate all those who were entered into the contest and naturally, an especially large congratulations to the winners. The standard was extremely high.

We have also been busy using the additional funding given by the Department for Education to support the ever increasing number of new schemes wanting to set up. We were extremely proud to welcome Sam Gyimah MP, the Childcare and Education Minister, to launch the Awards at the Wandsworth Parent Champions scheme. It is important to see such vital work getting the attention that it deserves.

Deborah Brodie
Project Manager, Family and Childcare Trust

Parent Champions Conference - 11 March

Registration now open

This is a free event and open to all active and developing schemes. You can register on the link below:
www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parent-champions-conference-2015

Parent Champions Awards winners!



We are very pleased to announce the results of the first ever Parent Champions Awards! The standard was very high and it was enormously inspiring for the Awards panel to read all the entries - thank you to all those who took the time to nominate.

Parent Champion volunteer

Winner: Katie Finnegan, Liverpool (Fountain Children's Centre)

Runner Up: Sharon Redsull, Hampshire (Action for Children)

Co-ordinator

Winner: Alison Pywell, Oldham (Action for Children)

Runner Up: Adele Scotton/Jackie Edwards, Liverpool (Fountain Children's Centre)

Parent Champions scheme

Winner: Liverpool (Fountain Children's Centre)

Runner Up: Oldham (Action for Children)



A big congratulations to the winners! The prizes will be presented at our Parent Champions Conference on 11 March 2015.

The Awards were launched by Sam Gyimah, MP, Minister for Childcare and Education, when he visited the Wandsworth Parent Champions scheme, to mark the Family and Childcare Trust Family Friendly Week in October 2014.



The Wandsworth scheme targets families who have not signed up to the Disabled Children's Register which would allow them to access the borough's WAND ID card. The register and card create an ease of access to services in the borough by rendering it unnecessary to carry additional documentation. It also gives the holders concessions or free entry to facilities within the borough.

The scheme has already had fantastic success surpassing its target number of new Disabled Children's Register members. The Minister was able to meet the project coordinators, Parent Champion volunteers and parents using the enhanced children's centre.

"Parent Champion volunteers provide a valuable and essential support service. They help families, particularly those hardest to reach, to understand what local services are available and how they can access them. It was great to visit the centre in Wandsworth and launch the Parent Champion Awards - a great way of recognising the hard work these special individuals do."

Sam Gyimah MP

Sheffield Parent Champions case study

The project

Parent Champions in Sheffield are co-ordinated by the local authority's Parental Engagement Team (PE Team) and currently deliver outreach activities from two schools in the city. The focus has been on raising awareness among Slovak Roma and other BME families of services available, encouraging learning in the home and information on the Free Early Learning (FEL) entitlement.

Advice and information is also being given about the Government's changes to the system for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND reforms).

The team is involved in a wide range of initiatives to reach families including consultations, cultural diversity events and information services. Developing a Parent Champions scheme was seen as an extension to the ongoing engagement work and would enable the PE Team to reach parents and families who were not in contact with services. In particular they were aware of different BME communities and those with children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) who would benefit from services but who would need to be reached through a more localised approach to communications.

Recruitment and training

After gathering community insight, the team narrowed their focus to two areas of the city which have very mixed communities and a large proportion of new arrivals. Project Manager Noreen Gallagher and Project Co-ordinator Laurie Haynes, approached schools and met with the Head Teachers to discuss whether they would be interested in working with the PE Team to develop a Parent Champions project.



The schools, Owl Brook and Whiteways, both already held regular coffee mornings for parents which were popular and well attended. The PE Team used these coffee mornings as an opportunity to introduce the idea of Parent Champions and recruit parent volunteers.

The Head Teacher of Owl Brook assigned a Slovakian speaking Teaching Assistant who already worked closely with Slovak Roma families to assist the PE Team with the cascading of information to families with limited English. This Teaching Assistant identified three Roma parents who were interested in hearing more about becoming a Parent Champion. The standard recruitment process was tailored to suit the language level of the parents, following which the parents were successfully recruited to the scheme. The school now has these three Slovak Roma volunteers supported by James (a parent who co-ordinates the PTA and is very involved in other community projects) in the role of Parent Champion.



"The Parent Champions at Owler Brook have been instrumental in further developing links with our Slovak Roma community. They have received high quality training which has greatly increased their confidence to support others in a very positive and proactive way. They have encouraged other parents to engage in school activities and supported them to do so. We are very proud of the work they are doing in our school community."

Sue Bridges, Head, Owler Brook Primary School

At Whiteways, the Head Teacher assigned the school's part-time Family Development Worker, Usha, to work in conjunction with parents and the PE Team. Usha is multi-lingual. Her first language is Gujarati. She also speaks Swahili, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and English, which aids her role at Whiteways and as an Adult Learning Co-ordinator at the Yemeni Community Association. Usha has enabled the PE Team to make valuable links with the Yemeni Community Association as well as the school. Usha identified Shahida, a midday supervisor at Whiteways for a potential Parent Champion role which she is now undertaking. Shahida also has a child at Owler Brook and is involved in the PTA there. This has been beneficial in terms of creating links between the two schools, as well as with the PE Team.



As well as the initial training delivered by Family and Childcare Trust, the Parent Champions also received training in how Multi-Agency Support Teams operate, Domestic Abuse Awareness and Multi-Cultural Diversity.

Impact

Parent Champions in Sheffield have reached at least 1000 families over six months. Primary activities have been sign-posting to services, and passing on information about the SEND reforms, the new assessment process and where to go to access the city's Local Offer.

In addition to passing on information about services and childcare, the Parent Champions support families in filling out forms, accessing ESOL classes and adult learning as well as engaging with local community organisations. They have also been able to encourage parents to sign up to The Parents' Assembly network which, through its weekly newsletter, provides information on family activities, community services and consultations.



Parent Champions have reported increased feelings of confidence, of being recognised within the schools as people to go to for information and for helping to break down barriers to families accessing support.

As several of the Parent Champions are actively involved in a diverse range of community groups, strong links have been made with grass roots organisations such as the Yemeni Association which many families are linked to.

It has also had additional impact across the wider authority, with other Council departments recognising the scheme as an effective mechanism for consulting parents.

During a recent consultation on "The Child and Household Poverty Strategy" development, Parent Champions helped the PE Team to facilitate discussions with non-English speaking parents from the two schools involved in the scheme. These parents may not otherwise have had the opportunity to contribute to such consultations.

Sustainability

The model developed in Sheffield is cost-effective and highly sustainable. Initial relationships had to be developed with schools and children's centres but in doing this, the PE Team have been able to make the most of existing communications structures and make use of resources to their best advantage. By using existing resources effectively the scheme has been low cost. Schools have been given a small amount of money to support their activities; community organisations have offered training rooms at very low cost as well as expertise on community issues to develop further training opportunities.

As both schools already held coffee mornings for parents, the team have been able to join these where they have a captive audience. With a new influx of parents each academic year, the flow of potential volunteers is



continuous. It's also a respected and valued parental engagement activity run by the schools, so barriers often encountered in out-reach are overcome.

By enlisting a member of support staff in each school - Teaching Assistant and Family Development Worker - this has established an effective flow of communications to parents, staff, and the wider community. As both the Teaching Assistant and Family Development Worker are bi-lingual / multi-lingual, they have been able to translate key information into Slovakian and other languages including monitoring forms which enable the Project Co-ordinator to capture the scheme's activities and performance.



Future

The PE Team will be conducting a full evaluation of the success of the scheme. More schools are already interested in being part of the next stage of the project and links have already been established with a faith school within the city. New Parent Champions have been recruited. Some have already undertaken their induction training whilst they were with Action for Children. Further training is also being offered to existing volunteers including the opportunity of an 'exchange programme' in which they can attend a parents' session or activity at a school in a different district.

The invaluable insight Parent Champions have given the PE Team about their community will be built upon further through the expansion of the scheme. The links created through the Parent Champion scheme have greatly increased opportunities for harder to reach communities. The scheme has enabled the establishment of clear channels of communication and feedback in communities who would not ordinarily be able to engage with services.

The Parents' Assembly can be found on Twitter and Facebook. News stories of interest to parents and carers are posted twice a week on our Facebook page. These are insightful and often amusing.

Twitter: @SheffParents

Facebook: www.facebook.com/parentsassembly

Contact: laurie.haynes@sheffield.gov.uk

Resources

'Parent Champions - Helping you deliver on the two-year-old offer' - new briefing sheet



This shows how this peer-to-peer model, pioneered by Family and Childcare Trust, can help get key messages out to families; it also includes details on how we can support schemes to set up.

Parent Champion resources summary

We provide a number of free resources to help you set up and run your Parent Champions scheme.

Contact Renata McGrath to order any specific materials.



Family and Childcare Trust news

Finder App

Family and Childcare Trust has just launched an exciting new Childcare and Family Information Services Finder.

www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/finder

Contact



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