



# Parent Champions

## Helping you deliver on the two-year-old offer

### Meeting challenging statutory targets

40 per cent of 2-year-olds are now entitled to 15 hours a week of free early education. Local authorities have a duty to secure these places for income disadvantaged two-year-olds, as well as those who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or who are looked after by the local authority. This policy is central to the Government's ambition to narrow the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, with strong evidence of the long-term benefits of high quality early education.

Experience from the Parent Champions pilot projects shows that certain low income families are less likely to take up free early education. Many local authorities have done well to find provision and to get families to take up their places, but some are falling behind. There is significant variation in uptake across different areas. The numbers are increasing, but they still fall short of the 40 per cent target.

To help get the message out to families, the Department for Education has been funding Family and Childcare Trust to support local authorities and other partners to set up peer-to-peer Parent Champions schemes across England.

**“** Parents typically found out about the early learning programme from friends, Jobcentre Plus, nurseries and children's centres. Word of mouth is central to building trust and should not be underestimated.

Source: Department for Education (June 2013)  
Early learning for two-year-olds: trials - Learning and case studies



### Who are Parent Champions?

Parent Champions are volunteers who spend a few hours a week linking with local parents to tell them about, and encourage them to use, services like children's centres and free early years places for two-, three- and four-year-olds.

Being local parents, they can chat informally, drawing on their own positive experiences. In this way, they can build parents' confidence and overcome language, cultural and other barriers to service use.

Parent Champions is an effective peer-to-peer model for targeting communities where participation in early learning and childcare may not be the norm, and is increasingly used by local authorities specifically to promote the two-year-old offer.

### Using Parent Champions to help deliver the two-year-old offer

#### 1. Proven impact

A recent evaluation\* provides evidence of the value of this peer-to-peer approach, with the majority of parents taking up services recommended to them.

#### 2. Cost effective

An assessment of the Liverpool scheme demonstrated a significant return on the funding invested, including increased access to childcare and children's centre services, more parental involvement in services, and Parent Champion volunteers going on to find work.

#### 3. Evidence-based model

The model was pioneered by Family and Childcare Trust in 2007. Successive stages have included six pathfinder projects, a partnership with Action for Children, to pilot the model in children's centres, and the launch of the Parent Champions National Network in 2012. Practical tools, resources and training are provided to schemes to support implementation and learning is shared across the Network – providing a wealth of experience to draw on.

\* Parent Champions: final evaluation report 2013/14, Coram



## Parent Champions evaluation 2014

*"Within this trusting environment created by Parent Champions, parents were able to listen to advice and take on new ideas and suggestions, in a way that may not have occurred had the parent received the same information through other channels."*

- In 57 per cent of cases, recommendations made by Parent Champions were used by parents, 43 per cent of recommendations led to regular service use.
- 44 per cent of contacts had a broader positive impact on parents, including improved parenting confidence and awareness of local services.
- There were significant gains for volunteers in terms of personal development, soft skills and employability.

Source: Marden R (2014), Parent Champions: final evaluation report (2013/14), London: Coram, available at [www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parentchampions](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parentchampions)

**“** *The Parent Champions project has become a real asset to the city of Liverpool and has shown outstanding contribution to the development of the two-year-old offer and services in Liverpool as a whole*  
**”**  
Liverpool Parent Champions project coordinator



## What is involved in running a Parent Champions scheme?

Schemes do not need to be costly or time-consuming. Key to success is the project coordinator (a part-time role), responsible for day-to-day management of volunteers, including recruitment, training and supervision. Most schemes run for a minimum of six months, with six to eight volunteers, who typically spend around five hours a week meeting parents out and about in their local community. The local authority can choose to deliver the scheme itself (often through the Family Information Service or Early Years team) or identify a delivery partner, such as a children's centre or a community organisation.

## Using Parent Champions to help meet local authority targets

A number of local authorities are building on the success of the Parent Champions model to combine local early education messages with information on, for example, obesity, oral health and the SEND reforms. One has used it to great effect to recruit parents onto their Disabled Children's Register. Parent Champions have also become involved, and helped to involve other parents in, 'co-producing' local services.

## Further information and support

Our free support includes advice on how to plan your scheme, volunteer training, exchange events and resources. These include a practical toolkit, bespoke monitoring system, and leaflets to promote the two-year-old offer.

Visit our website:  
[www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parentchampions](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parentchampions)

Contact us to discuss your project and find out how we can help you:

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