

**Parent Champions Case study: Leeds City**

**Working in partnership with local support services to reach isolated tenants.**

Parent champions in Leeds emerged following a pilot of a parenting programme run in partnership with Together Women, targeting the Burmantofts area of the city. The Tenant and Community Involvement Officer, Lalinca Lunga, identified a number of parents who would benefit from the support of a parenting programme and subsequently from becoming Parent Champion volunteers. Through the training, mentoring and activities of the Parent Champions scheme, the aim was to build the women's confidence and empower them to go out into their communities and reach other families, specifically isolated tenants.

**Reasons for implementing a Parent Champions scheme**

Many families in the area are new arrivals to the UK and a high proportion were experiencing similar issues around family life; lack of information about services and feeling isolated. The Parent Champions scheme was identified as an effective mechanism for addressing some of these issues and the Leeds project had its own clear set of priorities:

- Increase awareness and information to parents about the benefits of childcare, early learning activities, parental involvement, and to increase the take-up of formal childcare.
- Ensure that disadvantaged families will get support, information and access to use childcare services, and to be able to make informed choices.
- Improve parenting skills and social inclusion between families and work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination within the community by encouraging parents of usually excluded, isolated groups to engage in the group.
- Promote the interests of all parents in the area, and to assist in gaining good relations between Children Centres, Family Information Service, Schools, GP's and other local agencies of the community.
- Promote and raise awareness about the benefits of early education for two, three and four year olds.
- Inform parents about where to get advice and information about childcare and getting involved in their child's early learning and wider services.
- Raise cultural awareness; improve families' relationships within the Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and wider community.
- It was also decided that the Leeds Parent Champion will reach out to young parents so that they can access services and parenting courses suitable for their needs.

## **Recruitment**

Working in partnership with Together Women, parents who had participated on the parenting programme, were encouraged to become a Parent Champion. They now have 14 active parent champion volunteers who, after training and support, are making a huge impact into their local community. They have been able to overcome significant barriers in promoting local services because they are parents and don't use jargon when speaking to other parents. Support they have offered includes: sign posting to other organisations, encouraging parents to access other services, help in developing their CVs and addressing parenting issues in the community.

## **Impact**

Overall there has been a significant increase in take up of childcare and other services. Parent Champions have also expressed feelings of greater confidence and of being respected within the community. From their report in 2014;

- In 57% of cases, parents used the referral given by the Parent Champion with 43% of referrals leading to regular use of the service or activity recommended.
- 44% of contacts with parents led to a general impact on the parent e.g. parenting confidence. (Parent Champion Final Report, March 2014)

The Family and Childcare Trust consultant supporting the project has commented:

"The volunteers have flourished from being very quiet and lacking in confidence to being able to talk at national events.

Because the volunteers use the same terminology as other parents they speak to, they're not using jargon and have respect from the people they meet"

"Like other successful Parent champions schemes, its success is largely due to:

- buy in from the local authority, to ensure sustainability and for a multi-agency approach; and
- the passion of a coordinator who has direct involvement with the volunteers to ensure they are retained and that their needs are met."

## **The future**

Leeds City Council are now hoping to expand the scheme to other areas in the city and a number of different local authority and community services are keen to look at how the scheme can be developed to meet their needs.