

Northumberland Parent Champions case study – Sarah: Parent Champion

Sarah is a Parent Champion for Action for Children at Ashington Children's Centre in Northumberland. She has three boys aged 9, 7 and 2 and has accessed a variety of childcare provision including crèches and nurseries. Her youngest son is currently accessing a free two-year-old entitlement early years place. She also uses her local children's centre services.

Since becoming a Parent Champion, Sarah is studying for an NVQ in Business Administration and was also volunteering doing some admin work at Ashington Children's Centre. Before having children she had worked full time in the catering industry.

Sarah has been using her local children's centre for nine years, since her eldest son was born. She found out about the Parent Champion role from the children's centre and decided to become a Parent Champion to increase her skills and career opportunities. She wants to familiarise herself with the work that happens in a children's centre environment and hopes that her volunteering may lead to paid employment within the centre.

After completing the training provided by Family and Childcare Trust and Action for Children, which included safeguarding, looking at confidentiality and health and safety, she started her outreach activities.

Sarah tries a variety of different methods of engaging parents and finds them in different places in her local community. As a starting point, she goes along to the groups held at the children's centre that parents attend, but she will also visit the Salvation Army playgroup, GP surgeries (the waiting room), baby weighing clinics and to local supermarkets, where they plan to have a stand where they can speak to passing shoppers. She will also speak to parents within her local area, sometimes with her own children present, which can help to break the ice.

Although she and the other Parent Champions wear specially designed Parent Champions hoodies and have ID badges, the local parents do not see them as professionals. Although it can be difficult to get everyone's attention, parents do usually engage with Sarah because they understand that she is a parent too and she can share personal experiences and relate to them.

“Some people are a bit wary of us, but once you get speaking to them and they realise that I am a parent too, just like them, they feel more relaxed as they know that I'm there to help and not judge them.”

Sarah, like all of her peers, is supported by the volunteer coordinator. She has regular 1-2-1 meetings, usually on a monthly basis, and attends group meetings, which are held as and when they are needed to include all the Parent Champions. She gets on well with the other volunteers, they have similar aged children some of whom attend the same schools, and they have formed good friendships through supporting each other. Sarah enjoys meeting new people and feels that this and building her confidence have been key success factors of her volunteering. Her ultimate aim, however, is to find paid work after her Parent Champions role.