



Parent Champions Project

August 2007–March 2008

Project Highlights



Background

Despite recent advances in childcare provision in the UK, disadvantaged groups still remain less likely to take-up childcare. For example, in 2004, only 31 per cent of the lowest income families accessed formal childcare versus 52 per cent among the highest income families. 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.

A lack of information and awareness about childcare services and support is one of the barriers to using childcare. Parents agree that information resources that are currently available are helpful, but there are still many parents who are not aware that such resources exist and do not know where to find official information about childcare.

Daycare Trust's research shows that word-of-mouth is seen as the most trusted source of information about childcare for parents, partly because they feel that their personal contacts understand them and have the interests of their children at heart. The fact that many of these contacts have had their own experiences of childcare, which they can share with newer parents, is also seen as a bonus. Ideally parents would like to make decisions about childcare based on advice from family and friends that is backed up by official sources.



The Parent Champions Project

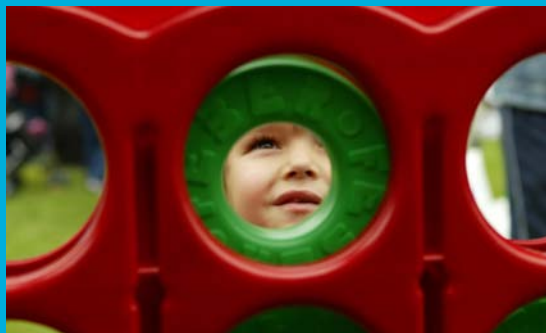
The Parent Champions Project is part of an effort to respond to the ways in which parents use word-of-mouth to obtain information about childcare services. High quality, formal childcare benefits children, their families, and their communities. The project involved testing innovative methods of helping parents, particularly those in disadvantaged groups, to access childcare.



The Parent Champions Project was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and managed by Daycare Trust. During the 6-month trial project a group of 12 parents became Parent Champions. They used outreach skills to engage with other parents and speak about their own positive experiences of childcare and of ways of surmounting barriers to accessing services. They provided trusted information and support to parents in their community. Based on their work, 1809 parents found out more about childcare and at least 75 began using childcare.

Testing the Parent Champions' model

Daycare Trust ran the Parent Champions Project from September 2007–March 2008 in conjunction with local delivery organisations working in three London boroughs.



Newham – Community Links

Community Links works with disadvantaged families and individuals in Newham, one of the poorest boroughs in Europe. They provide advocacy and advice and offer a variety of educational and care programmes for children. Community Links used its own network of childcare provision to recruit Parent Champions. The three Parent Champions set up stalls at the local school and spoke to parents at local job centres. Interested parents were offered an opportunity to have a childcare taster session in one of Community Links' childcare settings.

Tower Hamlets – Working Links

Working Links is a public, private and voluntary partnership working throughout the UK to help people into work. They worked closely with the Head of Early Years and Children's Information Services in Tower Hamlets to identify key children's centres and community groups in the local authority. Following presentations at these centres, 35 parents indicated interest in becoming Parent Champions. Five were selected and trained to become Parent Champions. These Parent Champions used their extensive community networks to set up information stalls at local mosques, make presentations at toy libraries and go door-to-door to talk with parents in their community.

Camden – Women Like Us

Women Like Us helps mothers find flexible work that fits around their families. They outreach to women through an innovative approach of working at school gates across London. This served as the basis for recruiting parent champions for this project in Camden. The four Parent Champions recruited were trained in community engagement and methods of signposting to relevant childcare agencies. After mapping out an outreach strategy, they focused on talking to women at school gates, drop-in groups and health centres. They identified the close connection between childcare and going back to work and were able to provide support and information to women about these issues.

Who are the Parent Champions?

The 12 Parent Champions came from diverse backgrounds. Both mothers and fathers were recruited and most came from black or minority ethnic backgrounds. Some of the Parent Champions worked part time while others were on benefits or were studying. All of the individuals recruited had positive experiences of childcare to share with other parents.

During the project, common attributes between the Parent Champions emerged. Parent Champions:

- had positive experiences using childcare;
- understood barriers to using childcare and many had experience surmounting barriers themselves;
- were passionate and aware of childcare issues;
- were friendly and approachable; and
- had a good knowledge of their community.



“[Being a Parent Champion] appeals because it is meaningful work, in an area that interests me. I have met a lot of great young mums in the area and I am a sociable person so it suits me.”

Michelle – Parent Champion, Camden

Parents' experiences trying to access childcare

Based on their conversations with other parents, Parent Champions identified a number of reasons why families do not currently use formal childcare, which included cost, location, lack of flexibility, lack of knowledge of local services, fears regarding quality of services and views on motherhood and work. These issues parallel findings from Daycare Trust's research into the experiences of disadvantaged families and childcare.

Case study:

"I met four women who would love to have childcare and did not want to stay home with their children (this is often the case with younger mums) but could not afford to go back to work because of the cost of childcare. At the end of a working week they would have been worse off after working all week than if they had stayed home, even taking advantage of the working parent tax credit scheme (this means they have to use registered child care providers which are more expensive). So these mums two of whom had two children felt a little trapped career wise."

Parent Champion, Camden

Case study:

"I met two of the women had serious struggles to find appropriate infant care for their babies, nurseries were full and childminders that they trusted were hard to find. One woman eventually was able to enrol her son in part time nursery care, and the other imported her mother in law from the USA and eventually found a part time nanny. Once the children get too old for childminders there is not a lot of other options for the kids apart from extended day care that is offered at most schools and then that is often quite limited, usually involving sports activities that her children don't care for, this is a major issue in the summer holidays."

Parent Champion, Camden



Support provided by Parent Champions

Parent Champions engaged in a variety of methods to help other parents in their journey to accessing childcare. These included providing information and sign-posting to relevant agencies. As well, Parent Champions provided support and accompaniment as needed.

“I have visited four people in their homes who I know, and they have not gone out of the house since the children were born. They feel isolated and alone and don’t know where to go. I have taken two of these ladies to a toy library to show them there is nothing to fear. I then returned with them and their children. It may be a slow process but they will start to mix more and the kids will learn more skills.”

Shazia – Parent Champion, Tower Hamlets

Case study:

Sophia is a Bengali mother and staff member at the Royal London Hospital. She experienced barriers going back to work after the birth of her first child. *“My in-laws could not understand why they were deemed not good enough to look after grandchildren when they had looked after their children. I know that extended families are used as child minders because it is the thing to do as opposed to what the mother wants. But this was not just about me. I feel strongly that my children’s development has been greatly enhanced by the social interactions they have had through the use of the care facilities. I had to struggle with family feeling in order to get what I wanted for my children. The Parent Champion role has enabled me to promote my experience to a wider group of people. Many women have now made contact with the CIS, and I continue to support them.”*

Parent Champion, Tower Hamlets

Impact of the Parent Champions Project

The Parent Champions Project achieved success in a number of ways:

- The local delivery organisations and Daycare Trust developed their knowledge and ability to support disadvantaged parents in their childcare issues.
- Parent Champions benefited from their recognised leadership role.
- Disadvantaged parents were supported to access childcare.
- Awareness of childcare was increased in hard-to-reach communities.

“I wish I had someone like a Parent Champion around when I was looking for information. I was so confused and was lucky to get information about childcare. There is much confusion about what’s available and where and what it costs. I absolutely believe it is the best thing to do with children. They settle better. They behave better. They learn more, and it is all safe. But people still don’t know what’s there.”

Shazia – Parent Champion, Tower Hamlets

Parent Champions’ experiences

The project demonstrated that Parent Champions benefited from their experience. They found the experience enjoyable and they were excited to talk to other parents about their own positive experiences of childcare.

“I’ve enjoyed seeing results such as the number of children at local after school club has increased because of this project.”

Jackie . Parent Champion, Newham

Parent Champions found that the experience helped to develop their own skills and confidence.

“[Being a Parent Champion] makes me feel much better inside too, and I am becoming more confident.”

Shazia . Parent Champion,
Tower Hamlets

Being a Parent Champion helped parents to make further connections in their communities.

“I have really enjoyed meeting the child care agencies in my area and I feel more connected to the immediate environment than I did before. I enjoy talking about Women Like Us and Daycare Trust to people who do not know much about either place.”

Michelle . Parent Champion. Camden

Parents' experience of the Parent Champions Project

The project demonstrated that parents appreciated the information that Parent Champions provided about finding local childcare and getting help with childcare costs. They trusted the Parent Champions because they were also parents, many of whom had similar experiences. Parents also appreciated the support that Parent Champions provided. They helped other parents to feel confident enough to try local childcare.

Case study:

In a discussion with a Parent Champion, a mother in Camden said that she did not understand why no one had told her there was help available for formal childcare. She said she had had to pay for childcare herself. She has just had her second child and will certainly be calling up to see what can be done for her. She thinks talking about childcare is a good idea because people will open up to other parents with similar experiences who will understand.

Parents' feedback

"I am in uni at the moment and my daughter goes to nursery. She never cries about it and this gives me peace of mind. I do need help to pay so thank you for the information"

"I used to do a lot of sports and since I had my children I have not been able to continue. I would love to go back to that and I think it makes a change talking to another parent about it. Thanks for the information."

"Since starting nursery, my son has become a happier child. He is always singing and doing the actions and I am happy for him to carry on as long as I can get help to pay for it."

"Oh thank you! I feel guilty saying I want to leave my child but I really want to do something and get away from him for a bit. Thank you for the information. I think it is nice to talk to another parent about these things. The job-centre did not help much."

Daycare Trust plans to continue our work with Parent Champions. We would be pleased to hear from anyone who is interested in the Parent Champions Project.

For more information contact Daycare Trust on 020 7840 3350 or email: info@daycaretrust.org.uk

About Daycare Trust

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.

Our childcare information line provides free information for parents and carers and is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 10.00am. 5.00pm, call 020 7840 3350. You can also email your enquiry to info@daycaretrust.org.uk. Information is also available on our website www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Support the National Childcare Campaign by becoming a member of Daycare Trust. This will enable you to keep up-to-date with the fast-moving world of childcare and be part of the organisation at the cutting edge of change.

For information on membership packages including free parent membership, visit www.daycaretrust.org.uk or call the office to speak to our Membership Officer. Alternatively email membership@daycaretrust.org.uk.

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