

Report on Parent Champions for Childcare Pilot Schemes

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Background

Parent Champions for childcare pilot schemes

A lack of information and awareness about early years and childcare¹ services still remains a barrier for some parents in using childcare – parents remain confused about the available resources and unsure of the quality and benefits to their children.² The Parent Champions that we consulted with as part of this research confirmed this.³ Daycare Trust welcomes any initiative which encourages the dissemination of useful information among *all* parents, but particularly disadvantaged groups; low uptake of childcare remains an issue among lone parents, certain Black and Minority Ethnic (hereafter BME) groups and disabled children.⁴

Evidence suggests that parents value formal information sources; but they respond equally well, if not better, to informal channels.⁵ The empathetic voice, which speaks directly to the parent, can be a powerful tool when trying to engage and disseminate information.⁶ Our research also confirms that ‘word of mouth’ is valued and trusted among parents.

Parent Champions in existing pilot schemes provide a valuable resource and channel information to parents who may otherwise fail to receive the relevant information; misconceptions surround the availability of childcare and mistrust of formal childcare persists.

What are Parent Champions for childcare?

Parent Champions are appointed to share positive experiences of using formal childcare services themselves and are well placed to encourage the take-up of childcare among other parents and families, particularly in communities where the use of childcare is not widespread. Their overarching objective is to ensure that positive messages and experience around the use of childcare are communicated to parents and communities that may otherwise prove difficult to access. A delivery partner who was instrumental in developing a pilot scheme in London, and

¹ In this report, childcare refers to all formal early years and out-of-school provision.

² HM Government (2009) *Next Steps for Early Learning and Children: Building on the 10-year strategy*.

³ This report will refer to Parent Champions, while National Day Nurseries Association referred to their projects as Community Childcare Champions.

⁴ Daycare Trust (2008) *Findings from Listening to Families research: October 2004 – May 2007* and quantitative commissioned survey from the then DfES (2005).

⁵ Daycare Trust (2008) *Parent Champions Project: project highlights, August 2007 – March 2008*.

⁶ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) *Promoting take-up of Formal Childcare Among Low Income Families*.

interviewed as part of this research, suggests that it is perhaps unrealistic to expect Parent Champions to become the fount of all knowledge, and goes on to say: 'all that we wanted them to do was to be able to pass information on and engage with people'.

What Parent Champion for childcare schemes exist today?

In 2007, Daycare Trust was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (hereafter DCSF) to develop and co-ordinate three six-month Parent Champions for childcare pilot schemes in three London Boroughs: Camden, Newham and Tower Hamlets. DCSF and Daycare Trust effectively pioneered the Parent Champion for childcare pilot schemes, which was a necessary response to how parents value word of mouth to obtain information about childcare services. The project involved using simple yet innovative methods of engaging with parents to offer information, particularly to those in disadvantaged groups, about accessing relevant information regarding childcare. The pilot schemes used three different methods:

- Engaging parents at the school gate.
- Using a community agency with a nursery and out-of-school setting at which taster sessions could be arranged.
- Using a private sector delivery partner with good local connections.

Daycare Trust coordinated the Parent Champion for childcare project during phase 1, which ran from August 2007 until March 2008, in conjunction with local delivery partners working in three London Boroughs. The projects were delivered in two distinctive phases; during phase 1, delivery agents operating on a local level identified by Daycare Trust as appropriate partners recruited three to six Parent Champions in each of the three local authorities. The forms of parent-to-parent outreach developed in phase 1 clearly demonstrated that there was great potential for the Parent Champion model to increase awareness among hard to reach communities. During phase 2, which ran from April 2008 until March 2009, funding was transferred directly to the London local authorities. The distinct objective of this phase was to build on prior successes and further monitor and evaluate childcare take-up in communities where Parent Champions conducted their outreach work.

In February 2008, the National Day Nurseries Association (hereafter NDNA) also developed a multi-agency word-of-mouth approach to increasing take-up of childcare among low-income

families.⁷ Community Childcare Champions⁸ projects were established in collaboration with the following partners: Shropshire County Council; Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council; Newcastle City Council; Peterborough City Council and Leeds City Council.

A summary of outcomes can be found on page 20.

How Parent Champions for childcare schemes developed in each of the areas profiled in this report:

London Borough of Camden

Phase 1

- Appropriate delivery partner identified, as it has an excellent track record of helping mothers find flexible work.
- Daycare Trust and delivery partner meet to review and discuss projects aims, objectives and how monitoring and evaluation is to be conducted.
- Delivery partner recruited Parent Champions via the school gate.
- Four Parent Champions recruited and trained in community engagement and methods of signposting to relevant childcare agencies.
- Parent Champions are paid on an hourly basis.
- Outreach work took place via meetings with existing school-gate representatives, postings on school e-bulletin boards, health centres and newsletters and e-mails to women registered with delivery partner.
- Monthly monitoring reports submitted to Daycare Trust.

Phase 2

- New delivery partner appointed – individual who coordinated the successful pilot in Tower Hamlets during phase 1 is now coordinating the scheme here.
- Five Parent Champions recruited and training delivered by delivery partner.

⁷ NDNA, *Community Childcare Champions: Evaluation report for the Department for Children, Schools and Families* (2008).

⁸ For consistency, this report will refer to Community Childcare Champions as Parent Champions.

Newham Local Authority

Phase 1

- Delivery partner appointed with experience of working with disadvantaged families; they provide advocacy and advice and offer a variety of educational and care programmes for children.
- Delivery partner relied on their network of childcare provisions, local children's centres and the Family Information Services (hereafter FIS) to recruit their Parent Champions; three Parent Champions were recruited.
- Training involved a review of the Parent Champion Handbook produced by Daycare Trust – and discussion of strategies of engaging parents.
- Outreach work took place via local Jobcentre Plus officer, cold-calls and distribution of posters and flyers; interested parents were offered the opportunity to have a childcare taster session at delivery partners' childcare setting.
- Monthly monitoring reports submitted to Daycare Trust.
- Delivery partner withdraws in November 2008 due to lack of communication between stakeholders.

Phase 2

- Local authority is now working with a new delivery partner.
- Three Parent Champions appointed in February 2009.

Tower Hamlets Council

Phase 1

- The delivery partner appointed on the basis of their work throughout the UK, assisting people to get back into work.
- Parent Champions recruited via Children's Information Service (now FIS) and local children's centres.
- Five Parent Champions were recruited and trained; in their first week they spoke to over a 100 parents.
- Parent Champions are paid on an hourly basis.
- Delivery partner withdraws and another partner is identified.
- Daycare Trust collates monthly monitoring reports and a project evaluation meeting held to discuss any issues.

Phase 2

- Tower Hamlets are now considering Parent Champions to promote free places for two-year-olds.

Shropshire County Council

- Local Parent Champions for Childcare Steering Group established with membership including local children's centre coordinator, nursery owners, Jobcentre Plus officer, childminder and FIS staff. The Steering Group took on identification of potential Parent Champions.
- To date, three parents with a range of childcare experience have been identified and trained.
- A programme of activities is being developed by the local authority in conjunction with Steering Group members, with a named local authority officer as the contact point for the Parent Champions. She will provide ongoing support to them and liaise in organising their attendance at relevant events.
- Work continues to identify further parents to achieve a minimum of six active Parent Champions. Recruitment has been problematical in this small town and surrounding rural area. The time taken to train and recruit potential Parent Champions needs to be borne in mind when producing any guidance on extending the Parent Champion approach.
- Parent Champions receive vouchers for use in local shops as recognition of their involvement. These have been set at a value of £20 per month.
- The Steering Group will meet to review progress and plan for the continuing support of the project, with simple monitoring of activity and outcomes put in place.

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

- Local Parent Champion Steering Group was established based at the Darlaston Children's Centre. Membership is similar to Shropshire, with a Family Information Services officer being the Champions' contact point.
- To date, six parents with a range of childcare experience have been identified and trained. A further five Parent Champions have been identified and their training completed.
- The Steering Group developed a programme of activities with the FIS officer taking the lead with initial plans to promote the availability of Parent Champions for childcare at her children's centre sessions.
- The Steering Group meet to review progress and plan for the continuation and monitoring of the project.
- Parents assist the FIS with surgeries and outreach work in their area.

Introduction

This report's objectives are three-fold:

- to report on the views of relevant stakeholders involved in the Parent Champions for childcare pilot schemes;
- to gather evidence of good practice by Parent Champion outreach workers; and
- to assess, as far as possible, the effectiveness of the schemes.

This report provides an additional resource to the accompanying 'toolkit' that Daycare Trust has also been commissioned to produce by DCSF. The 'toolkit', entitled *Parent Champions for Childcare*, aims to support local authorities and delivery agencies working to encourage parents in disadvantaged communities to take up childcare and to enable good practice to be readily disseminated.

While mapping our key stakeholders for our research, we first tried to identify other Parent Champion for childcare schemes. We discovered similar schemes which used parents as outreach workers, but none which specifically encouraged the take-up of childcare. We identified five noteworthy Parent Champion pilot schemes for this project; three Daycare Trust London pilot schemes and two of the five schemes initiated by NDNA. We chose Shropshire County Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council *only* from the NDNA initiatives, as these were their more established schemes, although local steering groups have been established in Newcastle City Council, Peterborough City Council and Leeds City Council and in all these areas Parent Champions have been identified and trained. Both Daycare Trust and NDNA were careful to locate their Parent Champion pilot schemes in areas of socio-economic disadvantage with BME groups that are currently underrepresented in formal childcare.

This report will present our findings and analysis based on interviews with local authorities, delivery partners and Parent Champions, each offering illuminating insights as to why some schemes were more successful than others.

What local authorities, delivery partners and Parent Champions told us

The following section details what various stakeholders and Parent Champions told us in a series of interviews, which allowed them to share their experiences, detailing the successes and potential contentious issues that arose while establishing the pilot scheme. There were clearly varying degrees of success within the schemes and levels of enthusiasm among the interviewees, but they did all agree that Parent Champions are a valuable resource and that Parent Champion schemes, if set up and managed well, can be greatly beneficial both for those who receive the information and the Parent Champions themselves, who grow in confidence and develop core skills.

‘There are a lot of misconceptions among parents about what’s available, or ignorance, so this is useful in those terms. What we’re finding is that a lot of people don’t know about the need to put children onto nursery registers early or about drop-in in children’s centres, or about their free entitlement and how they qualify for that.’

London Borough of Camden

Foundations and sustainability

It became apparent from our interviews that the initial phase of planning the pilot schemes was critical and in many instances determined their success *or otherwise*. Involving the relevant stakeholders from the outset ensures that those who need to be involved can shape and influence the foundations and development of the schemes.

A firm foundation between the relevant stakeholders is imperative for the long-term success of the schemes – see the toolkit for an outline of the stakeholders our interviewees recommend should be involved. This was particularly pertinent to the scheme set up by Shropshire County Council in a local children’s centre, which in the initial phase of their pilot scheme progressed well, but is now not certain to continue. They partly attribute their scheme’s loss of momentum to not clearly establishing their relationship with the FIS from the start; ‘we see the links with the FIS being instrumental in being able to carry the project forward’. The importance of FIS involvement was echoed elsewhere. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, another NDNA-initiated pilot scheme, has successfully involved a Sure Start children’s centre and a FIS officer; ‘We’ve got an excellent FIS officer who’s every good at outreach and community development, so she is, I would say, the linchpin of it in terms of how it worked’. The FIS officer was also cited as a key figure in offering on-going support and guidance for the Parent Champions. Newham’s

delivery agency from phase 1 also cites the importance of engaging with and involving the FIS from the outset of the project. The London Borough of Camden, which is now successfully rolling out phase 2 of their pilot scheme, also has a well-established and collaborative relationship with the FIS.

Within the London pilot schemes there was a noticeable interplay between FIS involvement, an *appropriate* delivery partner and a competent pilot coordinator in the more successful schemes. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets identified the importance of choosing the right delivery agency – one that will remain committed until the project completes and is well placed in the community to recruit efficient Parent Champions. Phase 1 was particularly successful in Tower Hamlets, where the delivery partner worked well to ‘raise awareness’ of formal childcare, and where after three months of service delivery, 51 parents or carers took up formal childcare.⁹ Despite strong early indicators of a successful scheme during phase 1, during the second phase their delivery agency felt they had to withdraw from the project due to internal restructuring, and the subsequent lack of continuity meant that the scheme has lost some momentum and the skilled and innovative parent champions recruited during phase 1 have now been disbanded. However, it was noted by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets that in the initial phase of the project, the delivery agency was well placed to advise on how payment for Parent Champions would ‘affect their benefits’, as they were a public, private and voluntary partnership organisation who help people get back into work. It is worth noting here that it is important to establish benefit implications for potential Parent Champions before they start – possible benefit implications are outlined in the toolkit.

The London Borough of Camden also started with a promising delivery agency during phase 1 which helps mothers find flexible work that fits around their families and conduct their outreach at the school gate. But the agency was then unable to commit to the second phase of the project, saying: ‘we were unable to find suitable parent champions with the relevant social networks’. See page 13 of this report for more about the selection of Parent Champions. Incidentally, the London Borough of Camden went on to briefly work with another delivery agency which also withdrew shortly after, as: ‘they didn’t think it was viable for them’.

During the initial stages of the London pilot schemes, clear lines of communication between stakeholders and central government were necessary to guide the project. The delivery partner working in Newham during phase 1 recognised that their relationship faltered with the local authority due to a lack of communication, and felt that this could have been partly overcome if the local authority had been involved at an earlier stage, possibly during the tendering process; ‘I

⁹ Tower Hamlets and Working Links (2008) *Tower Hamlets Parent Champion Pilot*.

think because from the outset the foundations weren't set, they [local authority] are always playing catch-up'.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets reflects that 'sustainability needs to be considered from the start'. Once an appropriate delivery agency has been identified, a meaningful discussion between them and the local authority is crucial, allowing the relevant stakeholders to firmly establish how the scheme should develop with a clear emphasis on how outcomes and outputs are to be measured –the toolkit offers suggested outcome measurements for Parent Champion schemes. Again, the delivery partner which worked in Newham during phase 1 reflects that outcomes would have been improved if early discussions 'had been more directive about local authority expectations, and what the relationship should look like between the voluntary sector and the local authority'.

Maintaining continuity is also important for the long-term success of the scheme; this is particularly relevant to the London pilot schemes, which were introduced in staggered phases over the financial year.

Insufficient time frames were identified as limiting the development of phase 1 of the pilot schemes, as outreach and recruitment – which in some instances is a lengthy undertaking – and building trust with individuals, the community and the local authority can take time. Sufficient time is needed to ensure that the correct processes are in place and instrumental for the long-term success of the projects. The delivery partner who worked in Camden during phase 1 felt that a longer pilot period may have been beneficial for the scheme, and would be more conducive to sustaining momentum. Another delivery partner suggested that longer pilot periods may be beneficial, as they would allow for 'teething problems to be ironed out'. Newham's delivery partner during phase 1 was also concerned with the short-term nature of the funding and concluded that 'the problem is this: short-term funding'. This resulted in Parent Champions being recruited during their working relationship with the London Borough of Newham, but were later disbanded.

From the outset of phase 2, the London Borough of Camden considered which pockets of their borough would particularly benefit from outreach work and targeted these. It is also important to 'map' the cultural landscape of the area in which Parent Champions are to be rolled out; cultural variations must be considered. For example, in Tower Hamlets, our local authority interviewee cites the cultural typography as an issue, saying: 'There is a lot of unemployment, there's lots of informal working, so people are outside the tax system so they're not going to benefit from tax credits'.

Parent Champions for childcare

'The ones that are involved are seeing great benefits for themselves in terms of increased self-esteem and confidence.'

Shropshire County Council

The pilot schemes that we profiled for this research recruited between three to six Parent Champions with varying experiences and outcomes. The **London** schemes decided to run the pilot period with a dedicated group of up to six Parent Champions in each local authority, rather than a larger network in the first stage. NDNA similarly recruited between three and five Parent Champions in each of their designated areas.

During phase 1 of the Daycare Trust's pilot schemes, 12 parents became Parent Champions. They used outreach skills to engage with other parents, shared their own experiences of childcare and provided information of financial and community resources. Their personal experiences of surmounting barriers to accessing childcare make them engaging and trusted advocates. A Parent Champion we spoke to in Shropshire outlines her motivation: 'because of the situation I am in. I just think it's useful and helpful to tell other parents where to go, and try and help them make decisions. It's easier to talk to a parent rather than some of the other organisations.' Parent Champions cited their main motivation for applying to the scheme as wanting to 'pass on the fantastic information' that they had received prior to them returning to work. An active Parent Champion in Camden told us: 'I found the information that I received before I started work really useful and before then I knew nothing about being able to get back into work, so that information I was given I just wanted to pass it on; so for me it's been really good letting other mothers know about childcare.'

Parent Champions for childcare felt that they provided an invaluable service, as they felt that many parents who may want to go back to work but think they cannot afford childcare 'remain unaware of the schemes such as CAP [Child Affordability Programme] and Child Tax Credit [Childcare element of Working Tax Credit] and are hesitant to make the initial phone call'.

Active Parent Champion in the London Borough of Camden

Parent Champions in Walsall fulfilled a slightly different role to other schemes, as they are 'now assisting the FIS officer with surgeries and outreach work in the area, because the FIS officer goes every two weeks to do outreach; the parents join and go and talk about their experiences'.

Who would make a good Parent Champion for childcare?

The 12 Parent Champions recruited in London's phase 1 came from diverse backgrounds, but all had positive experiences of childcare to share with other parents. A prerequisite for the position is of course someone with experience of using formal childcare, who appreciates the barriers to accessing it, have an understanding of issues surrounding childcare and who are confident enough to approach people (see Appendix 1 for a full job spec used in Camden during phase 1). Parent Champions were recruited on a part-time basis, as this allowed parents to conduct their outreach work around their family, work or training commitments; most schemes opted for between three and a half to five hours per week.¹⁰

All local authorities and delivery partners agreed that it was imperative that Parent Champions could prove that they had good links into the community and could readily rely on established networks, or at least confidently go out and establish new ones. Camden's current delivery partner was keen to highlight the importance of recruiting well-connected Parent Champions: 'The key to making it work is the networks that people have got, so if you've got five Parent Champions who haven't got the networks, it isn't going to work.'

Our London Borough of Tower Hamlets interviewee made a clear 'distinction between outreach work and the dissemination of information among peers' – in his view, Parent Champions are instrumental in conducting informal outreach work and hence it was important to recruit Parent Champions with 'tentacles into their local community'. This worked particularly well in Tower Hamlets, where during phase 1 of their pilot scheme a Muslim man was able to access cohorts who are usually quite hard to reach – the Parent Champion used his connections at the East London Mosque to promote the use of formal childcare at Friday Prayers, which can have anything up to 5000 people in attendance. London Borough of Tower Hamlets adds: 'There's one guy we had who has got very good links with the mosques in Tower Hamlets, so sometimes it's been very good; he is invited into groups with men who often get left out.' Parent Champions we spoke to as part of this research in Camden and Shropshire indicated that they heavily relied on existing contacts, but were also open to creating new networks (see pages 16-17 for more on their outreach activities).

Delivery partners were careful to recruit Parent Champions from diverse backgrounds in areas where this was necessary. For example, in a particular area of Camden with a large population

¹⁰ National Day Nurseries Association (2008) *Community Childcare Champions: Evaluation Report for the Department of Children, Schools and Families*

of Bengalis, a Parent Champion from the Bangladeshi community was recruited. Tower Hamlets recruited five Parent Champions for childcare from the BME community during phase 1.

The ability to collate data efficiently was also important for some pilot schemes, particularly if a scheme wants to accurately measure the outcomes – although it should be noted that the latter requirement will exclude some Parent Champions, as recording the data may require a certain level of English language fluency – which local authorities should be mindful of if they want to target certain BME cohorts. One delivery partner involved in phase 1 comments that: ‘written reporting requirements would have ruled out at least two of our Parent Champions in Tower Hamlets, because they struggled with English’. However, there are possible ways to avoid this: Parent Champions in the London Borough of Camden told us that they would often allow parents to fill out the form themselves, thus avoiding asking possible awkward questions as to whether they were lone parents or their ethnic background.

Recruitment

The delivery partners in the London pilot schemes that were primarily responsible for recruiting Parent Champions used different methods to recruit. For example, the delivery partner working in Tower Hamlets conducted presentations in key children’s centres and community groups. Following presentations at these centres, 35 parents indicated interest in becoming a Parent Champion, and after a series of interviews, five were selected.

Some of the schemes applied innovative methods to recruit their Parent Champions – Shropshire, Camden and Walsall conducted their recruitment from the very same families that they support and ‘recruited from the target group [they] wanted to reach’.

Shropshire County Council

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council worked closely with NDNA, a children’s centre, Sure Start Darlaston centre, and recruited six Parent Champions. Children’s centres were cited by the Walsall pilot scheme as pivotal in providing help when it came to recruiting Parent Champions: ‘they’ve been fantastic in terms of helping to recruit and providing a venue for the training.’

Example questions used during the recruitment process are given in the toolkit.

NDNA recruited their Parent Champions via their corresponding steering groups. Shropshire County Council identified recruitment as problematic and concluded that the time taken to identify and try to recruit Parent Champions needs to be borne in mind when developing a

Parent Champion scheme.¹¹ It is not clear whether this is due to the nature of the organisation's approach or the lack of an *individual* project coordinator both with dedicated time and the appropriate skills, as their development relied on a steering group instead, the rural nature of the area or whether it was due to the fact that Parent Champions for childcare were not being paid in Shropshire, although they did receive a token financial reward in the form of a voucher. This experience was not shared by all the pilot schemes; in some of the London pilot schemes, the recruitment phase took less time than had been expected and Parent Champions were trained and able to begin work in their communities within a couple of months of the delivery partner being appointed.

Training of Parent Champions for childcare

Delivery partners, and in some instances the FIS, were responsible for delivering the training to the Parent Champions. In Daycare Trust-initiated pilots, Daycare Trust was instrumental in training the local delivery partners and deciding what the training requirements should be. Training delivered to the Parent Champions included:

- Purpose of the project.
- Benefits of using formal childcare.
- Types of formal childcare.
- How to find a local childcare provider.
- Choosing a suitable childcare provider.
- Finding help with childcare costs.
- Contacting useful organisations.
- Further relevant Daycare Trust research.

There were also further discussions among the group about strategies for engaging with parents, reviewing types of formal childcare and how to gain help with childcare costs. Parent Champions during phase 2 in Camden, who completed their training in December 2008, described the training received as 'adequate' and cited the role-play exercise as being the most beneficial, as it taught them to be more outgoing and confident. NDNA were also instrumental in delivering training in their projects and produced coherent training manuals for their Parent Champions. Walsall relied on both their central contact at NDNA, FIS and children's centres to deliver their training to Parent Champions; 'the children's centres have been fantastic in terms of helping to recruit and providing a venue for the training'. The Parent Champion we

¹¹ National Day Nurseries Association (2008) *Community Childcare Champions: Evaluation Report for the Department of Children, Schools and Families*.

spoke to in Shropshire said 'I enjoyed the training. I thought it was useful – we all got something out of it'.

The delivery partner and a FIS officer jointly conducted delivery of training in Camden during phase 2. In Camden, the same FIS officer was involved through-out and was deemed to be greatly beneficial to the overall scheme; 'you know, in some ways we probably didn't have to have her as involved as she was, but I think it works better that way.'

Activities

Parent Champions took a different approach to their outreach work; some were structured and event based while others took a more informal approach. Parent Champions engaged in a variety of methods to help other parents in their journey to accessing childcare. These included providing information and signposting parents to relevant agencies and providers. In addition, Parent Champions provided support and accompaniment as needed. Outreach strategies that have been successful for the Parent Champions include:

- Talking about childcare with their existing formal and informal networks and developing new networks.
- Going door-to-door to meet with neighbours.
- Encouraging other people to spread the word, for example, the Imam in Tower Hamlets during phase 1 was an instrumental ally.

Delivery partners in Newham and Camden during phase 1 offered taster sessions, which were effective at countering fears over childcare and encouraged the take-up of childcare in some instances.

The Parent Champions we spoke to all relied on both formal and informal settings to conduct their outreach work. One Parent Champion in Camden echoed this: 'I went to a health clinic the other day and even though there were a lot of mothers who had babies the same age, it's still very lonely, as everyone is in their own world. So I interacted with a lot of them yesterday, and it ended up being more than just 'do you know about services that are available in Camden', but a longer conversation'. This highlights the wider benefits to the community of these schemes, as it promotes interaction among parents, and particularly mothers at a time when they are prone to feeling isolated. Another Parent Champion also working in the London Borough of Camden primarily conducts his outreach work in more formal settings, but also relies on informal settings such as drop-ins and children's centres. Then there's the fathers' group which I attend regularly, so if a new father comes along then I tend to grab them. And then I'll chat to people in a coffee

shop or wherever I am with children around; I'm interested in parents and their children.' A Parent Champion in Shropshire County Council describes her similarly fluid approach in the following way: 'it depends on where I am. I'm involved in a twins-group and I also visit drop-ins and sometimes chat on the street.'

Many delivery partners compliment the resourcefulness of their Parent Champions – the delivery partner currently working in Camden says: 'we've got one lady who is going round to breast-feeding clinics, we've got another lady who is going to antenatal and postnatal clinics. We've also got people going to the drop-ins [children's centres]. We've got one man who has made contact with a local college and now the college is interested in setting up a monthly session where the FIS come in and give information.'

Remunerations

Whether Parent Champions are remunerated, such as through incentives or pay, will affect who will apply for and accept the position. The London Boroughs of Camden and Tower Hamlets paid their Parent Champions for childcare on an hourly basis, while the London Borough of Newham and NDNA-initiated schemes relied on 'volunteers', although their work was rewarded with shopping vouchers.

The London Borough of Camden, who paid their Parent Champions, felt that payment had a positive effect on the overall success of the scheme in comparison to other schemes where they relied on volunteers; 'our community volunteers were given thank-you gift vouchers, but it's very different to actually saying to somebody, if you spend five hours doing this, you'll get paid five hours. Why shouldn't you be paid for what you do?' Their Parent Champions also felt that that the role should be a paid position, saying: 'For me it has to be paid work. I just can't afford it otherwise.' Another Parent Champion goes on to explain that: 'it's a method of work. Sometimes you do it and slot it with things your doing anyway and that's very nice and it doesn't feel like work, but on other occasions you've got to go to drop-ins, make phone calls and ultimately it feels like a job'. However, this was not echoed in Shropshire County Council, where the Parent Champion felt that the shopping vouchers were a 'nice surprise' and payment was not necessary.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets and their delivery partner qualified their decision to pay their Parent Champions as: 'I think we just felt that if we were going to get people committed, dedicated to the role of Parent Champion, it should be a paid job; otherwise you're just asking people to be volunteers.'

The London Borough of Newham's delivery partner during phase 1 decided not to pay their Parent Champions, instead paying their expenses and offering incentives; 'if someone managed to get someone to take up a taster session we gave them a thank-you voucher.' They decided that a 'community development-type approach' was more suited to the project, although it should be noted that in Newham and Shropshire, not as many Parent Champions were recruited as schemes that did pay them. Despite this, Shropshire County Council also felt that their Parent Champions were 'not motivated by financial rewards', although it should be noted that not only did Shropshire County Council recruit fewer Parent Champions but they were less active than those in Camden and Tower Hamlets pilot schemes in phase 1.

Measuring outputs and outcomes

Objectives stipulated for phase 1 of the Daycare Parent Champion for Childcare projects were met; these consisted of short-term pilot schemes that were concerned *only* with recruiting Parent Champions and then beginning to establish themselves in the community. The plan was to use this initial phase to work out how to measure outcomes for phase 2.

The following objectives were met during phase 1:

- Develop 'Parent Childcare Champions' in a number of different communities.
- Establish whether parents acting as outreach workers in this way can be a valuable way of providing information and support to other parents who have not previously used childcare.
- Evaluate the scope and extent of the approach and trial the new methodology.

Therefore, the measures agreed with DCSF reflected this and the data collected by the delivery agencies were:

- number of parents recruited, trained and undertaking activities; and
- number of parents contacted by Parent Champions.

NDNA describe their 'aims' as wanting to promote the value of childcare and the free entitlement to parents who are not currently accessing formal childcare. The project aimed to communicate positive messages of the benefits, how to access childcare and gain financial support.¹²

¹² National Day Nurseries Association (2008) *Community Childcare Champions: Evaluation Report for the Department of Children, Schools and Families*.

Outcomes from each of the pilots

The London Borough of Camden

- Parent Champions spoke to nearly 500 parents; eight taster sessions are undertaken and ten childcare places are undertaken as a direct result of parent champion outreach work during phase 1.
- Phone calls to the FIS have doubled since Parent Champions began their outreach work in December 2008 during phase 2.

Newham Local Authority

- Parent Champions spoke to 112 parents; six taster sessions undertaken and 26 childcare places taken up as a direct result of Parent Champions' contact with parents during phase 1.
- Three Parent Champions recruited in February 2008 – phase 2 – and trained in community engagement and methods of signposting to relevant childcare agencies.

Shropshire County Council

- Parent Champions remain strong advocates for the scheme despite a lack of recent activity. They have attended at local family drop-ins, nursery open days and lone parent surgeries at Jobcentre Plus.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets

- Parent Champions spoke to 1243 parents and 51 childcare places are taken up as a direct result of Parent Champions for childcare contact during phase 2.

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

- Parent Champions recruited and now assist the FIS Officer with surgeries and their outreach work in the area.

Measuring outcomes for phase 2 of the London pilot schemes was less clear cut, as this involved looking at how information dispersed by parents for childcare was acted upon by parents, which in some instances was difficult to measure, especially in cases where there were inevitable time lapses before the child attended a setting – how much of that is as a result of the Parent Champion's input? However, as Daycare Trust no longer coordinated the pilot schemes during phase 2, this left individual schemes to develop their own outcomes and systems for measurement, which varied widely. Our Tower Hamlets interviewee would have appreciated more guidance on the issue of outcomes, as 'we were not clear as to how exactly outcomes were to be measured'. Their partner agency mirrored the same concerns for this pilot scheme: 'What kept cropping up during the course of the first three months was what were the specific outcomes and targets of the project.'

Some local authorities cited 'measuring outcomes' as the most problematic aspect of the Parent Champion schemes; issues ranged from 'what constitutes an outcome', how Parent Champions recorded their conversations, difficulties in capturing accurate data for the people that Parent Champions are engaging with and ensuring consistency in the quality of information that is passed from Parent Champion to parent. It needs to be made clear from the outset how outputs and outcomes will be measured and what emphasis will be placed on this throughout the project.

We came across two examples of pilot schemes with a firm idea of their outputs and proof that Parent Champions were spreading the word about childcare: Tower Hamlets during phase 1 and Camden during phase 2. As a result of the Parent Champions' work in Tower Hamlets, 1243 parents found out more about childcare and at least 51 began using childcare.¹³ And during phase 2 in the London Borough of Camden, the number of phone calls received by the FIS regarding childcare has doubled since Parent Champions began their outreach work; their existing partner claims that an 'outcome is a phone call to the FIS', where they are asked if 'formal childcare has been taken due to engagement of the Parent Champions'. Camden also proposed to follow up with parents six months after their first phone call to the FIS to capture any on-going progress and ensure a more long-term analysis of the project's outcomes. Walsall, who confidently asserted that their pilot scheme was a success, still had no formal assessment system in place to measure outcomes, but felt that their Parent Champions were working well in their capacity of assisting the FIS conduct their outreach work.

Shropshire County Council measured the *activity* of their volunteer Parent Champions by the volume of contacted parents and what the outcomes were, 'whether they'd signposted on to FIS or a particular childcare provider' they were rewarded with vouchers. Despite this, when we spoke to Shropshire they were not confident of their outcomes: 'The returns haven't come in, although the childcare champions are saying that they're very keen, I can't see any action at the moment.'

Conclusion

During our interviews with various stakeholders in both Daycare Trust and NDNA-initiated projects, it was clear that outcomes for each of the schemes varied greatly: while some schemes were able to confidently assert that their Parent Champions were successfully engaging with a wide sector of the community and disseminating information about childcare, others had lost momentum primarily due to a lack of inclusion of appropriate stakeholders in the early stages and insufficient time appropriated to develop projects.

Evidence gathered as part of this research – analysis provided by both Daycare Trust and the NDNA of their projects plus interviews with key stakeholders and Parent Champions – indicates that Parent Champions can be instrumental in disseminating information about childcare. Parent Champions are valuable and can provide local authorities with an additional tool to access hard to reach cohorts. There have been successes to date – particularly during the initial phase in Tower Hamlets – and today both Camden and Walsall have active and enthusiastic Parent Champions who continue to inform parents of the benefits of childcare and how to go about accessing this provision.

These are by no means definitive conclusions about the factors needed for a successful Parent Champion project, but we can say the following elements seem to have made a significant difference:

- Involving the relevant stakeholders is important for the long-term prospects of the schemes.
- Once the relevant stakeholders have been identified, it is important to maintain open dialogue, whereby objectives and outcomes are agreed.
- Sufficient time to properly develop the projects.
- A sustainable delivery partner in place that is able to recruit parent champions with good social networks.
- Parent Champions with good and diverse local connections; using as many local networks as possible for their outreach activities.
- Parent Champions to receive sufficient training and support.
- Parent Champions to be paid on an hourly basis rather than be appointed as volunteers.
- Where possible, taster sessions with nurseries and childminders are an efficient way to counter fears over childcare.

Methods used in this report

The evidence gathered in this report reflects the findings accumulated over a three-month period, (December 2008 – February 2009), consisting of two main types of method: unobtrusive and reactive measures.

1. **Unobtrusive measures/non-interactive methods** use data or evidence that are not affected by the researchers' interventions: These included:
 - *Internet searches* to locate relevant literature and other parent champion schemes.
 - *Analysis of Daycare Trust and NDNA documentation* of parent champion schemes.
 - *Stakeholder mapping* whereby the relevant local authorities, partner agencies and the NDNA were identified as critical to our work
2. **Reactive measures** use evidence that produces responses or judgements to questions asked by the researcher. These included:
 - *Semi-structured interviews* with five relevant contacts within local authorities and corresponding partner agencies. Interviews lasted between 25–35 minutes. We were keen to speak to people directly involved in the projects – those involved in family information within local authorities and project leaders with partner agencies. **Please see Appendix 2 for a discussion guide.**
 - *Semi-structured interview* with two parent champions – Daycare Trust decided to only interview active parent champions, as we felt they could provide useful lessons for future projects. Interviews lasted for one hour and were conducted at Daycare Trust.

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Tower Hamlets

Newham

Shropshire County Council

Camden

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) www.ndna.org.uk

The following Parent Champions: Kim Kellman, Graeme Weston and Teresa Khan

Appendix 1

Provided by London Borough of Camden's delivery partner during phase 1

Parent Champion Vacancy

Job Role: Parent Champion

Location: Camden – to be based locally in one of the following Children's Centres; 1a Children's Centre, Langtry Children's Centre, Kilburn Grange Children's Centre

Salary: £10 per hour

Hours: 6 month contract starting October 2008; 5 hrs per week (can be flexible)

This is a flexible role and would suit someone who could fit this around their existing arrangements. An enhanced CRB check is mandatory for these roles.

Job Purpose:

To be able to engage parents and guardians and highlight the benefits of formal childcare through a variety of methods, using the networks in and around children's centres and extended schools local to their area. To understand the barriers to the use of childcare from a parent or guardian's point of view and record the information manually.

Person Profile:

- Someone who feels confident approaching and speaking with others
- Someone who can get alongside people and understand their world
- Someone who understands the issues surrounding formal childcare
- Someone who knows potential users of childcare as well as areas where they may be actively engaged
- Someone with experience of using formal childcare and the barriers surrounding it

Activities:

- Engaging with parents and guardians using a variety of methods
- Presenting local formal childcare information to individuals and groups
- Signposting parents and guardians to formal childcare providers
- Recording accurate information manually
- Meeting with Project Manager and other Parent Champions regularly
- Sharing good practice across the project with other team members

Appendix 2

Discussion Guide used for local authorities and delivery partners

Project background: We have been commissioned by the DCSF to provide an outline and summary of the Parent Champion style pilots and then to create a 'toolkit' for the purposes of enabling local authorities or other bodies to set up new initiatives using outreach workers and/or to improve existing projects on the ground.

Questions

Can you tell me what Parent Champion structures are in place in **Camden**, i.e. what phase of development?

Working relationship with provider:

Could you briefly outline how you and **Camden Council** worked together in establishing parent champions in your borough?

And how does this working relationship stand today?

Do you think this relationship could have worked better?

The scheme:

Do you think the Parent Champion scheme has been a success?

How has the scheme changed or developed since 2007?

E.g. How many parent champions and how has this affected the uptake of childcare?

Do you have a formal or informal assessment system in place to measure the impact of the scheme?

Who was responsible for the training of parent champions?

Costs:

Would you be able to approximate how much starting up the pilot scheme cost?

Are parent champions paid? If so, how much? How did you decide on this payment?

Finish

Are there any other stakeholders you think we should be speaking to?