

Parent support advisers

Practice and impact – spring 2010

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developing people, improving young lives

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Foreword



In 2005, I chaired the Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline, which recommended that the parent support adviser (PSA) role be developed as part of the extended team that schools would need to deliver extended services. Our vision was that PSAs would work with teachers by bringing new skills and experience and increasing schools' capacity to support children and their families.

The message was as clear then as it is now. To promote high pupil attainment and good standards of behaviour, schools need to engage better with pupils and parents and work to remove any barriers to teaching and learning. Thanks to PSAs, this is now happening. The idea of hard-to-reach parents and hard-to-reach schools is becoming a thing of the past.

PSAs are generally drawn from the community and have real credibility with parents. In their non-authoritarian role, PSAs can act as champions for children and families. Flexible, skilled and widely trusted, PSAs have received universally positive feedback and are making a huge impact on the lives of children, young people and their families.

PSAs help schools and parents to understand each other better and to work together in children's best interests. They support parents who may be struggling with the challenge of bringing up their children. Through their work, schools are gaining an insight into the barriers some parents face and, by tackling these, they are starting to improve poor relationships. PSAs can help the whole family to develop and stop problems from escalating.

Children who are focused on learning and behaving well have a big impact on their teachers. Stress levels are reduced and the benefit is felt by the whole school. PSAs represent an intelligent and cost-effective investment.

Autonomy for schools is increasing, as is the need for them to rely more on their own resources. Staff capacity also needs to increase. This can take place within individual schools or within partnerships of schools. When the PSA role is seen to be a dedicated resource, staffed by skilled professionals with proper training and support, the results are profound.

Since 2005, I have continued to work on the issue of behaviour. I have never wavered in my belief in the importance of the work of PSAs and in its potential to enrich the lives of children and parents. I am delighted to see the success of this initiative and am confident that this will continue and grow.

Sir Alan Steer

Adviser to the Department for Children, Schools and Families
Pro-Director, Institute of Education, London

Section 1: making the case for PSAs

Policy context and aims

Delivering effective early intervention is at the heart of many Government policies and priorities. It is central to the Every Child Matters agenda and to the 2007 Children's Plan. Early intervention also underpins the setting up of children's trust partnerships, the establishment of children's centres and the development of extended services and has led to the creation of new roles in the workforce – including PSAs.

The impact of intervening effectively at an early stage in a child's life can be enormous. PSAs' unparalleled access to the wider family means they are perfectly placed to spot potential problems early and to identify and facilitate the right intervention at the right time. As a result, PSAs are transforming the lives of vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Equally, the cost of failing to intervene can be massive. A child's early development has a huge impact on their outcomes later in life and their ability to contribute to society. Recognising and supporting the parental role in children's emotional development is fundamental to the PSA role, and their work in helping parents who are struggling to cope is key to successful interventions with children.

PSAs are held in high regard by professionals, parents and fellow practitioners alike. The role has continued to expand rapidly since the end of the national PSA pilot in 2008 – a testament to how well it has been received. In February 2010, there were more than 4,000 PSA or equivalent roles supporting 14,749 schools across England. All 152 English local authorities see the importance of this workforce, with three at the planning and recruiting stage and 149 delivering PSA or PSA-equivalent services.

The initial benefits of the role – such as engaging parents, tackling underachievement and removing barriers to learning – are the minimum now expected. Now, more and more people are recognising and tapping into the huge potential benefits PSAs can offer. These benefits include freeing up specialist services and enhancing safeguarding through early intervention and prevention; joining up parenting support at a local authority level; improving attendance, attainment and behaviour in schools and building parenting capability. All of these are leading to improved outcomes for many families.

About this publication

Parent Support Advisers: Practice and Impact – Spring 2010 builds on the work described in the PSA Resource Kits 1 and 2, Parent Support Advisers: Practice and Impact – Spring 2009 and Parent Support Advisers: Practice and Impact – Summer 2009, produced by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). It sets out the rationale for the PSA role, the many benefits it brings and why it should be sustained.

Section 1: making the case for PSAs turns the spotlight on a director of children's services and what she thinks about the role and the benefits it brings to her borough. It also provides a brief outline of the policy context underlying the PSA initiative and its aims.

Section 2: PSAs – the benefits looks at the impact of the PSA role on communities, local authorities, schools, families, parents and children, and at why the role should be sustained.

Section 3: making the most of PSAs explores ways of evaluating the PSA role and considers how PSAs can contribute to the evidence needed to obtain an 'outstanding' grade for specific outcomes in Ofsted's new school self-evaluation form (SEF).

Section 4: what's in it for you? An inside pocket in the back of this report contains six case studies that look at how the work of PSAs aligns with and can support other roles in achieving key challenges and targets within the community, local authority, school and classroom.

Definitions

The term 'parent' is used throughout this publication to mean mother, father, grandparent, carer or any other individual with responsibility for a child. The term 'PSA' refers not only to parent support advisers but to other professionals who may have different job titles – such as family support worker or family liaison officer – whose main focus is on supporting parents within a school context. A functional map laying out the key functions of the PSA role and the principles and values that underpin them is available at www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/f/functional_map_april_09.pdf

Adding it up

By averting negative outcomes, early intervention and prevention can deliver tangible cost savings. According to research carried out for the Think Family initiative from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), an anti-social behaviour order costs £5,768, a parenting order £781, a police arrest £1,930 and a vehicle theft £5,376. It costs £36,653 a year to keep a child in care and the lifetime cost of dealing with truancy can reach £44,468. There are also other, non-quantifiable costs associated with wasted potential and the negative impact that the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour can have on communities.

View from the top – the perspective of a director of children’s services



PSAs are helping to build a community of parents with greater confidence than ever before; parents who, along with their children, form part of our sustainable future.

In the past, our community of Barking and Dagenham, with its high unemployment and low household income, has lacked the ambition and confidence needed to challenge providers to improve service provision. Now, rather than parents being 'done to', PSAs are working with them – and the resilience and independence of the community is growing as a result. PSAs are empowering parents, giving them the confidence to engage in a meaningful dialogue with schools and service providers.

Barking and Dagenham is also a place of opportunity. PSAs help families seize these opportunities by using their excellent multi-agency links to give families access to the help and support they need to break out of the poverty cycle. This will help the regeneration of the area by rebuilding a sense of place and community.

As a borough, we are starting to 'think family'. We know that when a family thinks and acts together, it is a powerful and self-supportive motivator for change. When work is well coordinated, it can make a simultaneous impact on all family members by helping them change and move together.

PSAs build capacity in schools. They link extended services into multi-agency locality teams and act as a conduit for a range of interventions. Thanks to PSAs, schools now have the knowledge and ability to tap in to a huge range of services. Without them, schools are more likely to go down the social care route, running the risk of making inappropriate referrals and potentially stigmatising and disengaging families.

We know parental engagement has an impact on educational attainment and building these relationships with parents is an important skill that PSAs bring to the workforce. PSAs are often local people who are respected by the local community and this gives schools a real opportunity to engage parents as partners in shaping their children's learning.

PSAs, by delivering courses such as Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities, give parents and carers from different faiths, ethnicities and backgrounds the chance to come together and learn about parenting. This is enhancing community cohesion and cultural tolerance.

PSAs provide value for money. While difficult to quantify, we know parental engagement improves educational outcomes and early intervention reduces the need for more expensive specialist interventions. Stakeholders, such as headteachers, also tell us that PSAs make a real difference to the lives of children, young people and their families.

To assess the impact PSAs are making, listen to the parents they work with talk about the difference it has made to them and to their children's attendance, attainment and well-being. Through their interventions, PSAs are helping to turn problems into opportunities.

Helen Jenner
Director of Children's Services, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Section 2: PSAs – the benefits

Benefits for the community

Building communities in County Durham

In November 2009, County Durham and Darlington Primary Care Trust gave £1.2m to Durham County Council to fund the work of additional PSAs for two years.

“One of our strategic aims is to support the improvement of children’s mental health and well-being,” explains Ian Williams, the primary care trust’s Children’s Joint Commissioning Manager. “Often the first point of contact for children and families who are having difficulties is with schools, and PSAs can provide on-the-spot support on a range of issues within this environment. Early intervention at this stage prevents problems from escalating. We also hope that, by putting these resources in schools, we can free up school nursing time to focus on families with higher levels of need.”

The NHS funding enabled the council to employ an additional 18 PSAs, six of whom work in special schools and in the county’s pupil referral unit. In total, the county has 66 full-time-equivalent PSAs working in a cluster model across 287 schools.

Improving life chances

The NHS is not alone in recognising the benefits PSAs can bring to the wider community. “PSAs can help to remove barriers to learning that may prevent a young person from achieving five GCSEs, including English and maths,” says Amanda Johnson, Parenting Commissioner and Head of Extended Services. “Without these qualifications, a young person’s life chances decrease along with the positive contribution they can make to their community.”

The negative consequences of a young person failing to achieve can be very significant, as Janice Bray, County Durham’s Head of Connexions, explains. “Young people who play truant often are more likely to end up not in education, employment or training [NEET] and, therefore, to take from rather than contribute to the local economy,” she says. “By working with families to engage them in their own and their children’s learning, PSAs are giving families a positive alternative.”

Raising community aspirations

Frank Firth, Nominated Strategic Lead Officer for Sure Start County Durham, agrees. “We’ve had generations of people writing themselves off and whole communities where unemployment is the norm. PSAs are helping to break the negative cycle that drags communities down, working in schools and children’s centres to put in place the building blocks for effective early intervention and prevention. Research shows that the sooner you intervene, the more likely that intervention is to succeed and PSAs give us the capacity to provide seamless service provision from pre-birth onwards.”

PSAs’ non-judgmental and non-threatening approach is resulting in more parents engaging in further learning. In an area of high inter-generational unemployment and where people generally have few qualifications, getting people back into education and into jobs will help to regenerate whole communities. “When we are growing up we perpetuate what we see in our homes and communities, which is why it is so important for children to see their parents learning,” says Karen Davison, the county’s Strategic Parenting Coordinator. “PSAs are incredibly successful at building up parents’ trust and self-esteem through non-threatening activities until they feel confident enough to engage in formal learning.”

Enhancing cohesion

PSAs also make a positive impact on the area’s community cohesion, as Amanda Johnson explains. “PSAs have a huge impact on our success in engaging traditionally hard-to-reach groups, such as young offenders and their parents,” she says. “All our PSAs are trained in using the common assessment framework [CAF] and those who work closely with the youth offending service have been trained in specific parenting programme support to address anti-social behaviour. PSAs have a valuable role to play in early intervention, which reduces the need for specialist services, and in helping families who are making the transition out of specialist provision get the ongoing support they need.”

Gill Eshelby, Head of County Durham Youth Offending Services, agrees: “PSAs are vital in helping us to manage young people back down the intervention ladder. Their work with us and their extensive community networks have enabled us to offer a consistent service throughout the county and this is improving outcomes for young people and the community.”

Part of an integrated team

PSAs work with a range of other services, including Family Intervention Programmes (FIPs) such as the Anti-Social Behaviour FIP, the Youth Crime Action Plan and the Family Pathfinder, a project that works with families to tackle issues relating to family breakdown, substance misuse and domestic violence. PSAs have been key to the development of integrated teams across the county and, through these multi-agency links, are helping to ensure that targeted and specialist services are used more effectively. This is resulting in more appropriate referrals and in more parents understanding and engaging with the CAF process.

The PSA role also strengthens the place of schools in the local community. “PSAs are helping to make schools into community hubs as parents see that school is the best place to access support,” says Amanda Johnson. “PSAs – along with family workers in children’s centres – are our front-line universal service providers. Together they are bringing schools closer to their communities and encouraging school clusters to work together for the benefit of those communities.”

A catalyst for change

PSAs have been a major catalyst for change in the way schools approach parents. Schools now also have a legal obligation to promote community cohesion – and PSAs are ideally placed to help them meet this obligation as well as other responsibilities relating to integrated working and extended services.

Amanda Johnson believes that, without PSAs, the county would struggle to provide universal parenting support and that fewer children and young people would have their needs identified and met. She says: “With PSAs’ help, my hope is that in 10 years’ time, far more of our families will just need universal input rather than more intensive support. That will help to create safer, higher-achieving, more positive communities and make the county a more economically vibrant place to be.”

Find out more

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Enhancing safeguarding in Bracknell Forest

“Intervening early and working with families to prevent problems from escalating is fundamental to improving the outcomes and life chances of children and young people and reducing the need for safeguarding. This underpins the work of our Local Safeguarding Children’s Board [LSCB].”

Martin Gocke, Acting Director of Children, Young People and Learning at Bracknell Forest Council and member of the LSCB.

“In Bracknell Forest, the flexible approach of our family support advisers [FSAs] and their remit to work with the whole family enable them to play a key role in the early identification of risk factors in areas like risky behaviour and bullying. FSAs can then work with the whole family to address these issues before they escalate,” Martin Gocke adds.

There are 28 FSAs (PSA equivalents) in Bracknell Forest, serving 34 of the borough’s 37 schools. They have been in post for nearly two years and are funded jointly by the schools and the local authority. FSAs work in schools and provide a service at both a universal and targeted level.

Easing transition between services

FSAs also work with social care and other more specialist services to support transition up and down the intervention scale. They support families who fall below the statutory thresholds, as well as those leaving specialist care, to ensure that a child or parent does not bounce back up the intervention ladder. FSAs can make referrals to the borough’s youth crime-focused FIP as well as to the Parenting Early Intervention Project and other parenting programmes.

The FSAs are coordinated and supported by Graham Symonds, the Extended Services Manager and Parenting Commissioner. Graham also sits on the LSCB which, in Bracknell Forest, is made up of 37 representatives from different organisations and partnerships.

To ensure an appropriate level of clinical and managerial support, FSAs have three points of contact. First, support, development and networking opportunities are provided by the FSA lead in Graham’s team. Second, FSAs are employed by schools and are usually line managed by the headteacher (or assistant headteacher in secondary schools). Third, clinical supervision is available from the local authority’s principal parenting practitioner, who sits outside Graham’s team. FSAs are also part of the wider network of parenting workers that includes colleagues from specialist, targeted and universal services.

All FSAs have child protection training and, while any child protection issues are reported immediately to social services, the FSA often remains involved with the family and offers support.

Relieving the pressure on specialist services

“FSAs’ early intervention role is helping to relieve the pressure on specialist services in the borough,” says Graham Symonds. “By working with families who would benefit from help and support but do not meet statutory thresholds, FSAs enable other services to concentrate on their specialist roles, which is a more effective use of resources.

“There are many issues that may trigger safeguarding concerns, such as risky behaviour, accident prevention, e-safety, bullying, housing, gambling, sexual exploitation and domestic abuse. FSAs have a role to play in identifying and addressing all of these and the benefits of their early intervention approach are huge. Supporting parents underpins many of the interventions that we make through our Children and Young People’s Trust. If we get this right, we have a real chance to improve the life chances of children and young people and help them achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes.”

While it is too early to provide robust quantitative evidence of the impact of FSAs’ work, anecdotally at least the impact is positive with, for example, education welfare officers reporting fewer exclusions thanks to the extra support on offer. Graham also believes that, without FSAs, there would be a significant increase in referrals to specialist services that are already working to capacity.

Focus on outcomes

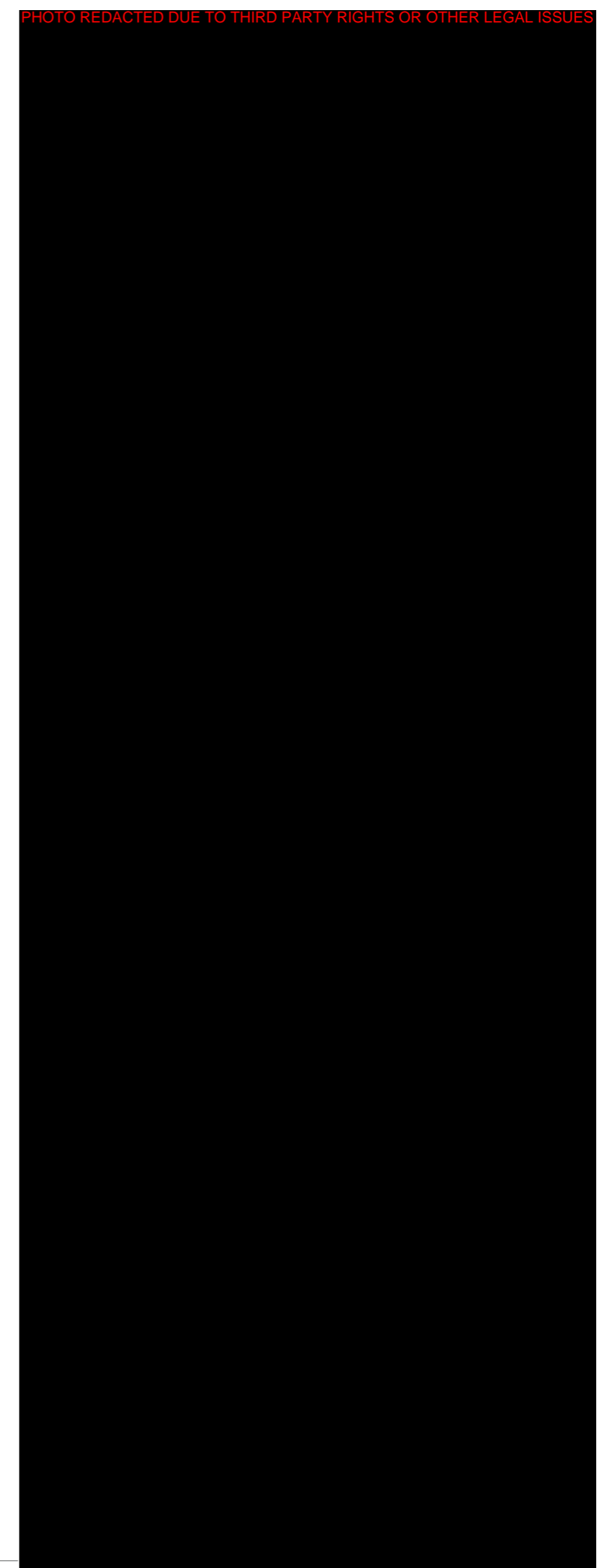
FSAs in Bracknell Forest are working to achieve five main outcomes: to improve parenting knowledge and skills; increase parental engagement with schools; improve school attendance; improve the quality of family life and improve multi-agency partnership work.

Evidence of impact is collected through evaluation forms and case studies. Following an intervention by one FSA, a parent commented: “I found the whole situation very reassuring. I feel like finally someone is going to help me and my child. I have been looking for help for more than two years.” The child said: “It made me feel like I didn’t have to worry so much.”

“Many of the priorities for our children and young people are underpinned by successful parenting,” Graham Symonds points out. “FSAs have a key role to play in helping us to make these priorities a reality. What sets FSAs apart is their ability to engage with parents informally and offer them broad, holistic support. Through this approach, they build up real trust in the families they work with. That trust is invaluable if we are to intervene early and work with families to get them the help and support they need, when they need it. By doing this, we can stop situations from escalating to a point where safeguarding becomes an issue.”

Find out more

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Benefits for local authorities

Helping Barking and Dagenham achieve its local and national targets

The PSA role is now well established in Barking and Dagenham in east London, with PSAs making a significant impact on a number of the borough's targets and national indicators.

Where PSAs are embedded in schools, attendance is up and communication and referrals between schools, children's centres and other local government departments are more effective, ensuring resources are used more efficiently. PSAs are also having a positive impact on community cohesion by, for example, effectively engaging traditionally hard-to-reach families.

Outsourcing PSA provision

Barking and Dagenham outsourced its PSA provision to a voluntary sector provider, School Home Support. Two different models were tested, both supported by matched school and local authority funding. Initially, 13 full-time and three part-time PSAs were deployed across 30 schools, with a further three schools having their own PSA. Since then, the number of PSAs has been rising steadily. In 2010, Barking and Dagenham will employ 32 PSAs across 34 of its 57 schools. Of these, nine schools plan to employ their PSAs directly, up from six in 2008/09.

"We've found that the PSA role works best when you have one PSA per site or school – this gives complete flexibility to determine the key priorities and focus for each area," says Erik Stein, Group Manager for Extended Schools. "Every year, more and more schools are buying into the PSA service or employing PSAs directly. In these tough financial times, I think that speaks for itself when it comes to demonstrating the impact of this role."

Those schools that employ their own PSAs have found some inventive ways to generate funding, as Erik explains: "One special school attracted funding from the Government's D Catch scheme, which aims to get parents of disabled children into work, while another secured Inspiring Communities funding, tweaking the PSA role to fit the criteria."

A positive impact on school improvement

Jane Hargreaves, the borough's Head of Service Quality and School Improvement, agrees that the PSA role is having a positive impact on school improvement. "The flexibility and support PSAs offer make an impact on a range of outcomes, including improving school attendance and classroom behaviour," she says.

This is backed up by figures showing that, in Barking and Dagenham, primary schools with PSAs have reduced persistent absenteeism from 4.87 per cent in 2008 to 3.95 per cent in 2009. In secondary schools the decrease is even greater, from 6.79 per cent to 5.74 per cent. In both cases, the figures are significantly better than in non-PSA schools. Jay Devereux is the borough's Attendance Team Manager.

"PSAs are having a huge impact on school attendance," he says. "Thanks to PSAs, we now have an informal communication channel with parents, which is invaluable. Parents who before might have ended up in court due to attendance issues now talk to their PSA instead. We can now reach families and work through issues together."

For individual children, contact with a PSA can be life changing. For example, one child's attendance at a primary school in the borough fell to 37 per cent in 2008. While the child's family had been known to the attendance team for many years, their refusal to engage had made it impossible to find a solution. The PSA was able to gain the trust of the family and work with them to tackle some of the barriers they faced and help reduce their resistance to authority. The child's attendance is now more than 98 per cent.

"The majority of truancy is condoned absence," says Jay Devereux. "The role of the parent is paramount in getting children into school. Children whose parents let them get away with not going to school aren't just missing lessons; they're left feeling as if they don't matter. This has major implications not just for their education but their self-esteem and ability to succeed in life. PSAs work to improve parents' confidence and, as a result, they start to want their child to succeed."

Improving parents' and children's self-esteem

Improving self-esteem has a knock-on effect on a range of targets, such as reducing childhood obesity, teenage pregnancy and levels of drug and alcohol abuse, and lowering the number of young people who are NEET. PSAs either deliver or facilitate a number of programmes in the borough. The Speakeasy programme helps parents talk to their children about sexual relationships, while MEND provides targeted support for obese children. In addition, PSAs act as advocates for parents dealing with issues such as domestic violence and housing problems.

Joining up service provision

Shaun Childs, one of the borough's six Strategic Leads for Integrated Family Services, is responsible for, among other things, managing two children's centres. "PSAs have really brought everyone together, linking up children's centres with primary and secondary schools," he says. "Children's centre staff now have someone to talk to who acts as a single point of contact. The efficiency savings alone – for example, in terms of staff time – justify the role but with PSAs it's not just about money. It's about what they've brought to the table by way of support for the school and for the community."

The links into secondary schools developed by PSAs have been particularly important when working with teenage parents in the children's centre. And, as PSAs work 52 weeks a year, they have a key role to play in holiday schemes, which further promote cohesion within the local community.

"Before PSAs, secondary schools saw no reason to engage with children's centres," says Shaun Childs. "Now these relationships are much stronger. PSAs save us an enormous amount of time and are excellent value for money. Thanks to PSAs, people are finding it easier to access services and are getting more out of them, which impacts on many of the things we are trying to achieve. Without them we would lose that community emphasis, the links with external providers and the trust parents now have in us."

Find out more

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Value for money

"For every pound spent on School Home Support, Barking and Dagenham's voluntary sector PSA provider, the Exchequer saves £3.35 and the rest of society saves £21.14. Exchequer savings include the reduced cost of dealing with unemployment, crime and exclusion plus the benefits of higher attainment. Non-Exchequer benefits include the value of increased income as a result of higher attainment and the reduced cost to society as a whole as a result of fewer crimes." An Economic Analysis of School Home Support, Matrix Evidence Ltd, October 2007

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Providing enhanced family support in Wakefield

The delivery of effective support to parents underpins many local authority strategic and operational priorities. National drivers such as the Every Child Matters framework and the extended services agenda have changed the way services are delivered, ensuring the issues that affect children's and young people's well-being are no longer considered in isolation from their families and communities.

PSAs play a key role in helping local authorities, schools and multi-agency teams deliver on these priorities. In Wakefield, PSAs are making a significant contribution to the successful delivery of the council's Think Family approach.

Linking services together

Wakefield's 23 PSAs are located in 18 'pyramids', each comprising a secondary school and its feeder primaries. PSAs work alongside schools and operate mainly at the preventative intervention level, working closely with universal and specialist services. Clinical supervision is provided by three CAF coordinators, fully qualified and experienced social workers with a locality remit, whose role includes ensuring high-quality CAF delivery by the local authority and partner agencies. This ensures that PSA work is aligned closely to the CAF.

Rosie Faulkner has lead responsibility for the CAF at operational level, manages the CAF coordinators and runs a range of early years services. This creates a strong link, through the PSAs, between early years and schools.

"Before PSAs, CAF provision was strong in some schools but not in others," says Rosie. "PSAs are now starting to make a difference in schools that previously lacked confidence in using the CAF. We now have a more consistent model and feel confident that we are taking a coordinated approach to supporting those families on the cusp of social care."

As PSAs are school based, their links with other preventative services are crucial. "PSAs ensure tight links between schools and other multi-agency services," explains Karron Zelei, Wakefield's Acting Team Manager for Education Welfare. "They greatly increase our capacity to work with families and take on a lot of the work previously done by education welfare officers and other specialist services, freeing them up to get more involved with families higher up the intervention scale."

An integrated framework

Elizabeth Stanley, Wakefield's Parenting Commissioner and Programme Manager for Safeguarding, Parenting and Family Support, highlights the importance of a clear strategic framework for PSAs. "When we got our PSA funding, we did a gap analysis to determine where the biggest need was," she explains. "As we already had an excellent universal family learning service operating in schools and delivering activities such as parenting classes, the real need was at a preventative level, below safeguarding but above universal."

Elizabeth continues: "There were particular gaps for children aged six to seven years. Previously, children and families who were not considered at risk of significant harm but who had unmet needs would receive strong support in early years settings but would then have to compete for scarce family support resources once they started school. There were effective specialist services working with families with high levels of need, including the Intensive Support Team, which works with young people aged 11 to 17 on the margins of the care system. Following the needs analysis, the team was expanded to cover all children and young people and our family intervention projects have also been expanded. The PSA role fits well into the reconfigured support framework."

Ensuring effective outcomes

Outcomes from PSA work are monitored through Wakefield's Family Support and Parenting Strategy. Children's trust arrangements in Wakefield include partnerships at senior management level, which are working to deliver the Every Child Matters outcomes through three multi-agency groups – Safe and Healthy, Supported and Fulfilled. A good outcome is one that prevents family difficulties from escalating, thereby relieving the pressure on more specialist services. PSAs also work with families to ensure their smooth transition out of specialist and into preventative and universal services.

Allan Jonas, Service Manager for Family Support, chairs the Family Support and Parenting Strategy Group, which reports to both the Safe and Healthy and Supported groups. They, in turn, report to the Children and Young People's Management Group and the overarching Children and Young People's Partnership Board (Wakefield's children's trust body). He believes that these arrangements provide PSAs with a robust framework for demonstrating the impact of their work.

"The children's trust arrangements provide oversight for the Family Support and Parenting Strategy, including the effectiveness of PSAs in contributing to our overall strategic objectives," he says.

Those strategic objectives include embedding the Think Family approach across all partner agencies. The philosophy is that children do best when the needs of the whole family are being met. Partner agencies, including local health services, have embraced the approach and it is now a feature of all services delivered in Wakefield.

Getting the right support

Effective interventions mean matching the level of support to the needs of the family. "Our PSAs are trained to deliver individual and group programmes as part of early support to families," says Allan Jonas. "In addition, we have specialist programmes for those families with the highest level of need. Clear pathways are important so that access to the various forms of support at differing levels of need is as simple as it can be. Working this way makes good economic sense because specialist services do not have the spare capacity to work with families who don't actually need that level of intervention."

PSAs in Wakefield are making a real and lasting impact on the lives of the families with whom they work, improving children's behaviour, school attendance and overall well-being. Key success factors include a strong strategic framework, appropriate supervision and links and the use of the Think Family approach to meet the needs of children and young people.

Allan Jonas is convinced of the benefits: "If the PSA role ceased to exist, we would lose a key early intervention resource and a valuable means by which families can navigate the family support on offer to find the service that is appropriate to their needs."

Find out more

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Benefits for schools and clusters

Improving school standards in Solihull

Outstanding Ofsted ratings and improved attendance and attainment are just some of the positive outcomes being attributed to the work of child and family support workers (CFSWs), North Solihull's equivalent to PSAs.

At Coleshill Heath Primary School, attendance has increased from just less than 93 per cent in 2003/04 to 95 per cent in 2008/09 and is now the highest in the borough. Over the same period, attainment has also improved significantly. In English, key stage 2 level 4+ results have risen from 58 to 81 per cent while level 5 results have gone up from 5 to 23 per cent. In maths, level 4+ has gone from 48 to 86 per cent and level 5 from 10 to 35 per cent. In science, level 4+ has increased from 80 to 91 per cent and level 5 from 20 to 44 per cent.

Getting children into school

For CFSW Sharon Owen, who joined Coleshill in January 2005, ensuring good attendance is a top priority for two very good reasons: "First, children don't learn if they're not in school. I monitor attendance daily and call families immediately if a child is absent to find out why and to see what we can do to help. Second, following up attendance issues is usually my first way into a family and, once through the door, I can help them with the many things – such as domestic violence or poor housing – that might be behind their child's absence from school."

When informal interventions are not enough, Sharon and the school's education welfare officer will invite parents into school for a more formal interview. The first interviews are held in November and target parents whose children's attendance is under 85 per cent so far that term plus parents whose children's attendance was a concern at the end of the previous year. If the parents do not come to the interview, they receive a home visit to go through their child's attendance record and see what support they need. All low attendees are carefully monitored and further interviews and home visits take place if needed, although attendance usually improves dramatically following the first meeting or visit.

Improving attainment through attendance

The links between improved attendance and attainment are clear. For example, comparing two year 6 Coleshill pupils with attendance rates of 100 per cent and 84 per cent respectively, the pupil with the 100 per cent record finished school an average of one academic year ahead of the other pupil. The pupil with full attendance scored 4b for writing, 4a for reading and 4b for maths whereas the pupil with the lower attendance record scored 3b for writing, 3b for reading and 3a for maths.

Coleshill Heath's Executive Headteacher Dave Dunkley believes that CFSWs are making a major contribution in this area.

"The links Sharon forges with the community are vital to getting families to engage with us and get their kids to school," he says. "This is particularly important at the moment as virtually every school in the area either is being or will be rebuilt as part of a major regeneration project. Communities are shifting. Without Sharon, these links would be lost, as would our ability to work with children in the context of their family."

Managing behaviour

Dave Dunkley works closely with Deb Wilson, Headteacher at nearby Yorkswood Primary School. At Yorkswood, the focus is always on how to affect pupil outcomes positively. "We believe that if you crack behaviour management in school first, this will roll out to the playground and then to the community," explains Deb Wilson. "By working closely with children and families to address the factors that influence their readiness and ability to learn, our CFSW and wider inclusion team have given us the capacity to do this."

The school's Lead Learning Mentor Susan Bowers agrees, citing a specific example: "Two neighbouring families on the estate, which both had children at the school, were constantly fighting with each other. Not surprisingly, the children were carrying this on at school. It was very disruptive for them and for everyone else. I worked with our CFSW to get both families into school to help them resolve their differences. The fighting has now stopped."

Jude Leonard, Inclusion Manager at Yorkswood, points out that this kind of intervention benefits the whole school:

"In the past, parents have been very aggressive in their dealings with the school. Our CFSW and learning mentors work with families to diffuse this aggression and this has a positive impact on our teachers, who now feel safer and more able to teach."

Yorkswood is committed to providing every child with a high level of personalised support and, in return, the pupils must agree to meet certain standards. "Each child has an individual education plan setting out what they need to achieve by when and how they're going to do it, so they know what's expected of them," explains Chair of Governors Julie Cobley. "The CFSW and others in the inclusion team give us the capacity to provide this support, which is helping to raise standards and improve the well-being of all children at the school."

Better Ofsted ratings

Yorkswood's CFSW sits within the inclusion team headed by Jude Leonard. The work of the team, which was set up after the school went into special measures in June 2005, has contributed significantly to the 'outstanding' Ofsted rating for care, guidance and support and overall 'good' rating it received in June 2009.

The inspection report said: "The school provides excellent care, support and guidance for its pupils with the result that children feel safe and secure and are able to learn

successfully." The inspectors also commented specifically on the role of the inclusion team, saying: "The work of the inclusion team is paramount in ensuring that the many difficulties faced by pupils are overcome."

Find out more

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Putting schools at the heart of the community in East Sussex

Expectations of schools are changing. The Children's Plan and the 21st Century Schools white paper call on schools to give every child in every school a great start in life and to put children, young people and families at the heart of all they do. PSAs are key to helping schools fulfil these expectations.

In Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, PSAs work in a consortium of eight primary schools, two secondary schools, a special school and a college. To involve statutory and voluntary agencies in the consortium's work, the PSA team holds monthly network meetings. At least eight to 10 different agencies attend each month to identify available help and support. Consortium members are committed to supporting every child collectively and prevention is a priority.

All schools fund the work of the consortium, including the PSA roles, at a rate of £12.50 per child. In return for this, schools can make six referrals to the PSA service at any one time as well as making use of universal service provision, such as parenting courses. The consortium also receives funds from other services and it is a real indication of the strength of the team's multi-agency links that services such as the primary care trust and housing are now contributing.

An essential link to services and agencies

These multi-agency links are also invaluable in helping schools deliver integrated service provision. David Haddow, Headteacher at All Saints Primary School in Bexhill, says: "There are so many agencies we could work with and funding streams we could attract that we don't have the time to identify them, let alone develop relationships with them. The PSAs are our essential link to services and agencies."

PSAs are CAF trained, act as lead professionals and participate in 'team around the family' meetings. Their strong multi-agency links and knowledge of each child and their family environment mean that they are ideally placed to take on this role and, according to David Haddow, in doing so they significantly relieve the pressure on schools. Governor Mary Collins agrees: "Schools can't function properly if they don't know the issues their pupils are experiencing outside the school gate. PSAs work to get parents more engaged, get them the support they need and help to break the poverty cycle."

Transforming schools

So valued is the PSA service that when Pat Strickson was asked to take over as Acting Headteacher at Sidley Primary School just outside Bexhill, a school at risk of failing its Ofsted inspection, one of the first things she asked for was additional PSA support. It is testament to the strength of the consortium and the belief in the town that 'these are all our children' that another school volunteered to give up half its PSA time for one year to help Sidley turn itself around. The impact has been significant, with Sidley's Ofsted rating improving from the threat of special measures to satisfactory in just one term.

"As a new head, my PSA's support in helping me understand the issues affecting families and the help they need has been invaluable," says Pat Strickson. "We are determined to turn this school around, improve its reputation and make people proud of it. My PSA is out there talking to parents and helping to break down long-established barriers. The difference is remarkable. Last year we had one of the area's highest rates of exclusion; this year, there have been no exclusions to date."

It is not surprising, then, that Bexhill High School's Acting Headteacher Di Hawksby is so committed to maintaining and sustaining PSA support. "It's important to continue the support post primary," she says. "PSAs have unbelievable connections with parents, the community and the many different agencies we work with."

Effective referrals

The partnerships PSAs develop bring value in many ways. "At Bexhill High, PSAs are involved in weekly referral meetings with a range of professionals, including special needs, youth development and support and mental health," explains Tina Frost, Bexhill's PSA Team Manager. "We hear about 20 cases a week and work together to ensure the right intervention is found. This is particularly important now that statutory intervention thresholds are so high and we all need to be more creative about how we support families."

Where there is a need for specialist intervention, referrals are now being managed more effectively. And at the 'softer' end of the spectrum, parents and children are getting more opportunities to learn new skills together. This will have a positive impact on their aspirations and, in time, those of the whole community.

Getting parents into schools

Bexhill schools have recognised the importance of breaking down the barriers between parents and schools. "We want parents to read with their youngsters. They can't do this if they have problems with literacy themselves," Di Hawksby points out. "So we set up a project with parents and children in the school together. Bexhill High's PSA, Steve, worked with our additional needs staff to develop the idea and, thanks to Tina's strong community links, a local creative partnership that does outreach work in schools came on board to run a seven-week course. Course places for eligible children were funded through the disadvantage subsidy and the local authority funded the adult places.

"We targeted parents identified through the referral system as having low literacy levels and low engagement. The course is going fantastically, with parents and students really enjoying it. When it ends,

Dave Sugg, East Sussex County Council's Strategy Manager for Extended Schools, sums up the benefits PSAs can bring:

"PSAs take away the silo of education and enable schools to see more of the child's social needs and the factors that affect their willingness to learn. Their positive relationships with families enable them to provide help and support where they can or to identify and facilitate the relationship with other professionals if needed. It is an excellent service."

Find out more

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Improving young lives in Sheffield

“Parents and carers are the biggest influence in a child’s life. By engaging them in their children’s learning and encouraging a supportive and nurturing environment for them and their children, PSAs are helping to create a positive ethos in schools where children are encouraged to do well.”

Mark Heaton, Behaviour and Attendance Consultant at Sheffield City Council.

This positive ethos is vital, explains Mark Heaton, because in a negative environment the disruptive behaviour of a minority of pupils can and does have a huge impact on the outcomes of the majority. “When children feel good about their school, they’re more likely to engage and associate with the children that do well, often achieving more themselves,” he says. “In a school with a negative ethos, the opposite happens. Children are less engaged and more likely to associate with the more vulnerable or disruptive children in their class and, as a result, they do less well.”

Focus on attendance and punctuality

Helen Stokes, Headteacher at Waterthorpe Nursery and Infants School, recognises the value of working with parents to develop a positive ethos and tackle issues relating to negative behaviour, attendance and punctuality. “Non-attendance and lateness have a massive impact on an individual child and their class,” she says. “Children who are late feel bad walking into the classroom and, in time, this wrecks their self-esteem. The way lessons are timetabled means they often miss the same lesson and they lose out on building a routine, something they will need when they try to get a job. It is disruptive for the rest of the class as the teacher has to break off to repeat instructions and settle the class again.”

Katie Hobson, the school’s PSA, is taking the lead in work aimed at tackling non-attendance and lateness. Katie works part-time at Waterthorpe and also at the junior school into which it feeds. Her in-depth understanding of the school and its staff creates a valuable bridge between them, families and the community.

According to Helen Stokes, Katie’s input is essential. “Lateness or non-attendance is usually a symptom of some other underlying problem. As a small school with limited staff, we would struggle to have the time to work with families and talk through their fears and

anxieties if it wasn’t for Katie. She enables us to work in a supportive rather than a punitive way and to help families resolve whatever issue is affecting their child’s education,” she says.

Preventing relationship breakdown

By working informally through a PSA, schools like Waterthorpe can avoid using more formal interventions straight away. This is important because such interventions can risk alienating families and breaking down the relationship between them and the school.

To ensure that her work is effective, and that it complements what is being done elsewhere in the school, Katie Hobson has developed good links with the teaching staff. For example, when working to resolve behaviour issues for a young boy in nursery school, Katie worked closely with nursery teacher Helen Towers. Helen explains how the partnership worked:

“Katie was a good focal point for mum and that saved me having to take time out of the classroom. Katie, mum and I worked together to resolve issues relating to the pupil’s behaviour, with Katie adapting the behaviour management strategies I was using in class so that they could be used appropriately at home. This, combined with the additional knowledge that Katie had gained from visiting the boy at home, was very useful when managing his behaviour in school.”

Better-informed decisions

Headteacher Helen Stokes agrees that the PSA’s insight into families’ circumstances and needs is helping the school to target its efforts effectively. “Katie’s knowledge helps me to make more informed and better decisions,” she says. “A lot of our families have problems and, as a headteacher, it can be lonely at times having to take it all on. I can talk things through with Katie, get the families’ perspective and that helps me to get the right support to families at the right time.”

That support includes identifying and helping vulnerable pupils through transitions, particularly from infant to junior school. If such transitions are not managed well, children can, according to Helen Stokes, feel so stressed and insecure that they do not settle for half a term and lose that learning time. Other support offered by Katie includes one-to-one interventions, Family SEAL and the Triple P parenting course.

Building capacity

Katie Hobson also acts as a link between school and the wider multi-agency support team (MAST). PSAs in Sheffield are based in the MAST and locality teams. They spend two days each week in each of their two allocated schools and one day providing a district-wide service. Being part of the MAST means they can easily draw on the support of other team members as needed.

The presence of the PSAs is also helping to strengthen the teams themselves. Parenting Strategy Manager Tracy Watson explains: “When we developed the PSA role, we wanted to make sure it added real value to the school workforce. This was reflected in the extensive training all PSAs have been through. We wanted this investment to benefit the wider multi-agency workforce as well as schools, so PSAs also work to build capacity within our locality teams.”

PSAs’ high level of training and strong multi-agency links are appreciated by headteachers. “Knowing that, once we’ve completed a CAF with a family, Katie can work with us to support them makes a big difference,” says Helen Stokes. “I have confidence that things will be dealt with quickly and appropriately and won’t escalate unnecessarily. Katie gives us the capacity and skills we need to work with parents and engage them so that together we can create a positive ethos that will benefit all our children.”

Find out more

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PSAs help to create a positive ethos in schools that encourages children to do well

Benefits for families

Engaging hard-to-reach families in Sandwell

After 16 years in an abusive relationship – and with no qualifications, low self-esteem and three children to look after – getting qualifications and a job seemed like an impossible dream for Lisa* from North Tipton, Sandwell.

“I didn’t know how to approach people for help to get back on the right track,” she says. “Then I met Chris. She gave me a gentle push in the right direction and got me involved in the art club, which then gave me the confidence to join other clubs. Now I’m attending Tipton College, I’ve passed my level one in both English and maths and am studying for my level two so I can become a teaching assistant.”

Chris Wyer, Co-op Coordinator for Tipton North Cluster, works daily with traditionally hard-to-reach parents like Lisa. The role of co-op coordinator is broadly equivalent to that of a PSA, focusing on parental engagement, family and adult learning. North Tipton has a predominantly poor white population with a large proportion of lone parents with dependent children. There is a high youth offending rate, a high number of recorded crimes per household, high rates of teenage pregnancy, drug addiction and long-term unemployment.

Taking time to build trust

One thing Chris Wyer has learned is that there are no quick wins. “Many of the parents I work with lack confidence. They feel worthless and they may be suffering from abuse at home,” she says. “It takes time to break down the barriers and to give them hope and a way to get qualifications and a job.”

What works best is taking things one step at a time. “First, you’ve got to get people through the door. That’s why I offer a number of ‘soft option’ courses like art, flower arranging and aromatherapy,” Chris explains. “If you approach someone in the playground, who’s had a hard time at school themselves and doesn’t trust authority, and ask them if they want to do a maths or a literacy course, they’ll run a mile. But by getting them doing something that they’re interested in, you can start to make education fun and relevant to them.”

It is a testament to the success of Chris’s approach that many parents, who previously would have shunned any attempt to engage them in their own or their children’s learning, are now at college. These parents are also enjoying better relationships with their children and, in some cases, are looking for or have found work. Sarah* is one such parent. Since meeting Chris, she has attended maths and English courses and now has a job as a teaching assistant at a local school. “Meeting Chris has really boosted my confidence and helped me work better with my own children and other people,” she says.

Life-changing interventions

Chris Wyer’s ultimate aim is to improve outcomes for children as well as parents. She has found that the two often go hand in hand. “One parent, Amy,* has dyslexia. Because it was never identified when she was at school, the school wrote her off and put her in a corner, giving her a piece of paper to draw pictures on. From a young age she been made to feel worthless, a failure. Just imagine how she felt when she was told her son was the same. She felt she had passed it on to him and had ruined his life.” For Amy, working with Chris has been nothing short of life changing.

“I have dyslexia and suffer with asthma,” says Amy. “Chris introduced me to an art course and that gave me the confidence to start a numeracy course at Tipton College. My son has dyslexia too and I now feel I can help him with his school work. I’m now going to start courses in car body spraying, designing, arts and crafts. It’s opened doors to things I never would have believed I could do.”

His mother’s relationship with Chris has also made a massive difference to Amy’s son. “I love doing art with my mum and she helps me with my homework now as well,” he says. “Thanks to Chris and everything she has done for my mum, we now actually sit down together in the evening. We get on so much better. It’s great.”

Breaking the cycle

Without Chris Wyer and people like her, parents like Amy would still be standing at the school gates, fearful of engaging and worrying that their children would also fall into the cycle of failure at school and long-term unemployment. Chris is helping to break that cycle.

“I didn’t want to talk to my son’s teachers,” says Amy. “I had a bad time at school myself and I don’t trust them. Chris is different, though, she’s like a friend. She always has time to listen, she always has a laugh. Often she would be the only person I would have a laugh with. She never makes you feel stupid and she always finds out what you need to know.”

For Chris, the rules are simple. “I never give up on anyone,” she explains. “Half the time that’s what they’re expecting because that’s what they’re used to. You need to make people feel special, that they’re worth something, that they’re important. Adapt what you do to fit them. Don’t expect people who find it hard to read to respond to flyers. Get out in the playground, go to the local shops, go and talk to them, wherever

“Once you’ve got them through the door, don’t drop them and go on to the next person. Keep moving them along and signposting them to the next thing – whatever it is that they need to build up their self-esteem. By helping parents get into training and even into work, you don’t just improve their future; you improve their family’s future. And through that you start raising aspirations in the whole community.”

Find out more

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* Names have been changed.

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Helping to improve parenting skills in Hartlepool

Life has been much better for 10-year-old Brittany since her mother, Julie, started attending a nurturing group set up and run by Margaret Hutchinson from Lynnfield Primary School in Hartlepool. "There's less fighting at home now and less noise and that makes me feel good," she says. "I get on better with my mum and we sit and talk more. If I'm a little bit naughty, we sit and talk about it and about how I can stop being naughty. I think my mum is happier, she smiles more, watches TV and plays games with us."

The nurturing group aims to develop successful parenting through raising self-awareness, self-esteem and an understanding of appropriate expectations, empathy and positive discipline. It has been a lifeline for Julie, a single mother with five children aged between one and 10. "I feel like I can handle the kids better than I did before," she says. "Before, when they were fighting, I'd shout at them and things would get worse. Now I take time for myself, I don't shout and I've noticed a real change in them. They don't fight as much as they used to, they share their toys better, tidy up after themselves more and the older ones help out more with the little ones. I feel happier and more confident."

Julie is one of the many parents with whom Margaret Hutchinson works daily at the school. Margaret first joined Lynnfield Primary nine years ago – she started out as a social exclusion assistant, paid for by New Deal for the Communities funding, before taking on the PSA role.

A trusted source of help and advice

As well as running the nurturing group, Margaret works closely with teachers and the headteacher to act as a bridge between the school, parents and wider community. She helps families with a variety of issues, from getting children to school on time to health and child protection, which may mean putting them in touch with the school nurse or signposting to other agencies. Low-key, informal contact is at the heart of Margaret's approach.

"I'm always in reception and out in the playground meeting people," she says. "Every day is different because you always have to react to immediate challenges. I think people really appreciate the fact that there's someone to talk to. Even if an issue seems quite small, by tackling it straight away I can stop things from getting bigger."

Making a difference

Margaret is a valuable sounding board and a source of advice and support on a range of parenting issues for Claire, a single mother of four. "If I have a problem, I can talk to Margaret," says Claire. "She listens to me and respects what I say. I was having real problems getting one of my children to go to bed and Margaret suggested I come to her nurturing group. It's helped me a lot. We now have house rules and a sticker chart and all the kids are much better behaved. I can see a change in all of them and in me. We take it in turns to talk now, rather than talking over each other, and we play games together rather than bickering all the time."

Claire's 10-year-old daughter, Bethany, has also noticed the change. "It's been good," she says. "My mum is happier now, she smiles more and is calmer and that makes me feel good. I get on better with my brothers and sister now as they let me play with them more."

Linking home and school

Such changes have a positive knock-on effect in school as well as at home. "Margaret is an invaluable link between home and school and her work really impacts on our children's education and the quality of their lives," says Lynnfield's Headteacher Joy Lowe. "Her work and the support she gives me helps the school run more smoothly and this also helps to raise standards. Margaret gives us the capacity to build real relationships with our parents and work with them so together we can help all our children achieve."

Helping children get to school on time and ready to learn is a key aim for Margaret and one that is supported by the work of the nurture group. Tammy, a single mother of five, says: "Before I went to the group, we had no rules in the house and the kids just did whatever they wanted to do so they often didn't get to school on time. Now I'm much more in control and if I don't want them to do things, they don't. It's so much better now we have rules – and the kids like it, too."

Margaret believes you do not have to make dramatic changes to see a big impact. "A lot of parents have all sorts of problems. If I can help them or find out about other support available and get them the help they need, it can make a real difference. Sometimes just a small thing can mean a big change for them and for their children. It's great to be able to achieve that."

Find out more

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Sustaining the PSA role



We know that one of the most important factors influencing children's progress at school is the extent to which parents are engaged with the process. If we want to improve children's and young people's outcomes and well-being, we need to focus on the whole child and that means seeing them in the context of their family and community.

PSAs enable us to do that. They can bridge the gap between parents and schools and have the capacity and skills to break down the significant barriers that can exist between the two. PSAs help to promote education to families as an acceptable offer as opposed to an imposition, helping to build community resilience and break inter-generational cycles of disengagement.

Thanks to PSAs, more parents are now engaged in their children's and their own learning. Through this, and by helping parents and carers to access wider services, PSAs are making a positive impact on social inclusion. Recognising the importance of this, we have trained PSAs in the specialist skills needed to work with asylum-seeking families to help them access council services.

It is essential that we address the training and development needs of PSAs. We must also ensure that their role forms an integral part of our overall parenting service and that it is strongly linked to all extended services. As well as training in courses such as Webster Stratton and Surviving Teenagers, our PSAs have a grounding in safeguarding, which enables them to work appropriately at lower levels of risk.

Where PSAs contribute to a 'team around the child' meeting, they add a layer of understanding that would not otherwise be there, particularly in smaller schools that may not have the capacity and flexibility to free up staff to contribute to these important conversations with other professionals. But it is not just the PSAs' time; it is their skills and energy that are making the difference in so many cases.

PSAs fill a gap between universal and targeted service provision and investment here can relieve the pressure on specialist services. Headteachers who have worked with PSAs are overwhelmingly positive about the experience. PSAs are also pivotal to initiatives such as Think Family. Without PSAs, the system would be less effective, less focused on the whole child and fewer problems would be resolved at school level – which is usually where they are best kept. PSAs have proved to be a great investment and I recommend that all children's trusts should see them as an essential part of the workforce.

Andrew Webb

Director of Children's Services, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Section 3: making the most of PSAs

This section suggests two approaches to maximising the value of the PSA role. The first approach looks at evaluation while the second explores some of the wider benefits PSAs can bring, for example, by helping to generate evidence for the SEF.

Evaluating the impact of PSAs

Demonstrating the impact of the PSA role is key to its sustainability and to justifying continued funding. The TDA has developed an impact evaluation model for frontline practitioners and their managers, which is now being used by local authorities around the country to help plan and evaluate a wide range of projects, initiatives and services.

One such local authority is Sheffield City Council. Sheffield hopes that the impact evaluation model will provide a structured process by which to:

- plan and review its PSA programme against a set of agreed objectives
- help PSAs work together as a team and develop a shared understanding of their goals and the best way to achieve them
- help it to clearly communicate the benefits of the PSA role to stakeholders and partners, and

- help it gather and analyse evidence, drawing meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness of the PSA role.

Evaluating the whole and component parts

Sheffield is using the model to analyse both the parenting support service as a whole and its component parts, such as holiday activities, one-to-one parenting support, transition programmes, family learning activities and Family SEAL. Figure 1 on page 34 sets out the overall outcomes model for parenting support in Sheffield. The model aims to help practitioners construct a logical flow through a project, initiative or service by describing the sequence of activities that will bring about the planned outcomes. It helps to show the links between activities and expected results and identifies the evidence sources needed to demonstrate impact.

The model divides projects into the following elements:

- **Inputs** – what the project, initiative or service is, the resources involved, the planned activities and the intended audience

- **Outputs** – direct products of the input stage relating to the actual quality of delivery, with a particular emphasis on how users have engaged with, and immediately responded to, input activities
- **Intermediate outcomes** – how users should be influenced by the project, initiative or service in terms of changes to their knowledge/skills, attitudes or behaviour. An intermediate outcome might be to engage parents more fully in their children's learning
- **Final outcomes** – how the project, initiative or service should affect the key issues it set out to address. A final outcome might be narrowing the achievement gap

You do not always need to prove the links between intermediate and final outcomes (the dotted arrow on figure 1) as these may have been established already through external research. Where this is the case, the main focus should be on the extent to which the intermediate outcomes have been achieved.

More clarity, less risk

The impact evaluation model can be used effectively at all stages of planning and delivering projects, initiatives or services, but it is most effective when used towards the end of the planning process but before delivery actually begins. In this way, evidence collection will form part of the delivery process, saving practitioners from having to search for evidence at a later stage. Completing the model at this stage can also highlight any gaps or false assumptions in the plans so these can be rectified before they can affect implementation.

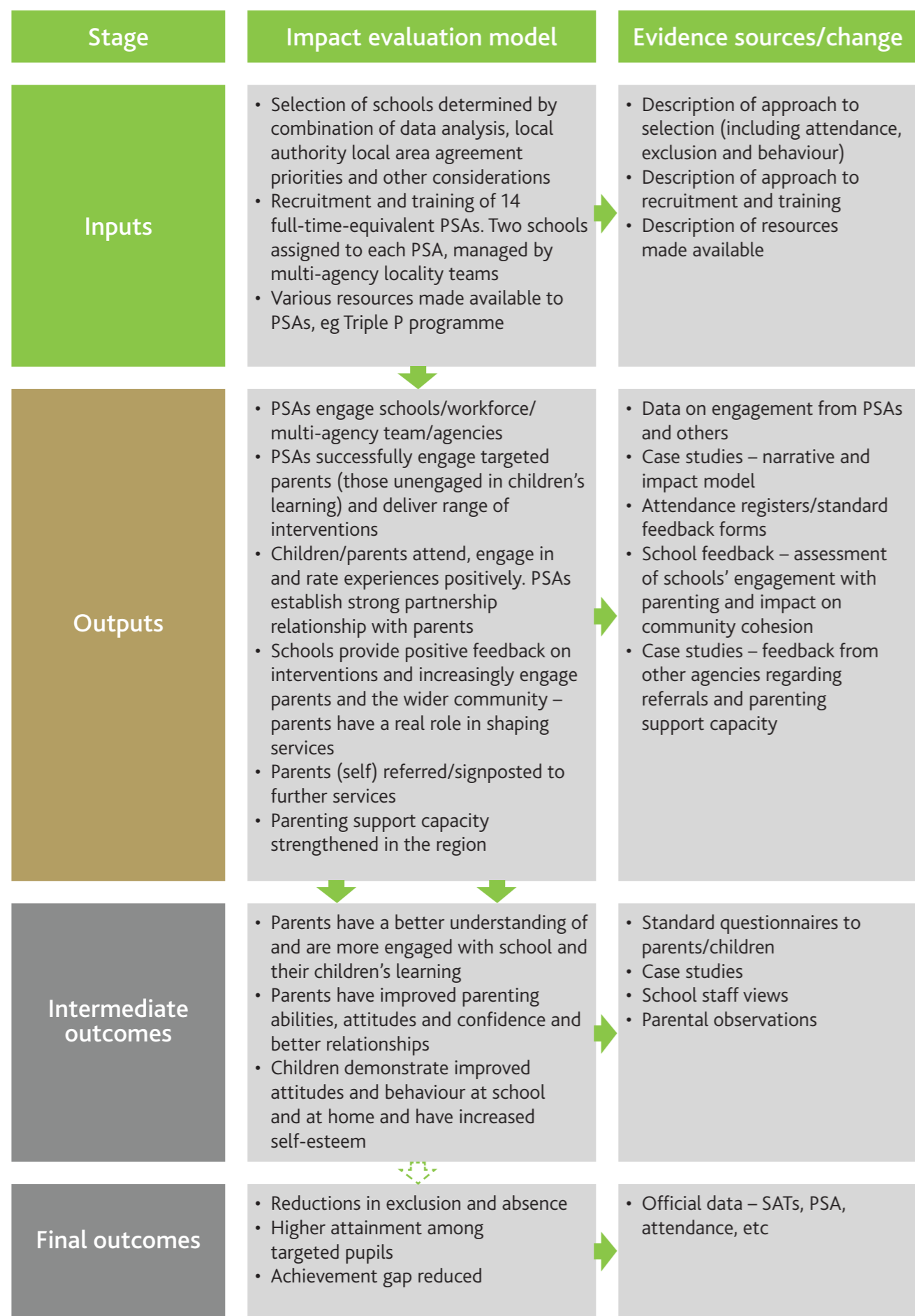
For Mandy Kirkpatrick, Sheffield's Senior Parenting Practitioner, the model has provided a structured way of involving stakeholders at an early stage. "One of the things we found particularly useful was the ability to involve stakeholders in devising the evaluation framework," she says. "This helped us to facilitate ownership in the evaluation process so that it was seen as supportive, not punitive. The model is simple and straightforward to use and gives us a real opportunity to demonstrate the value of the PSA role."

For more information about the impact evaluation model, visit www.tda.gov.uk/impacetevaluation

Find out more

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Figure 1: outcomes model for parenting support in Sheffield



PSAs and the new school self-evaluation form

Ofsted's revised school inspection framework came into force in September 2009. Under the new arrangements, inspectors must give particular priority to a number of areas, including:

- evaluating the achievement and wider well-being of pupils as a whole and of specific groups of pupils
- assessing the extent to which schools ensure that all pupils, including those most at risk, succeed, and
- assessing how effectively schools work in partnership with other providers to promote better outcomes for pupils.

PSAs can make a significant impact on a school's performance in these areas by, for example, working with parents to help them identify, understand and meet their children's needs and overcome barriers to learning.

The information overleaf shows some of the ways in which PSAs can contribute to the evidence needed to support an 'outstanding' grade for specific outcomes within the new school SEF.

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SEF outcome – pupils' learning

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding'* descriptor

Their keenness and commitment to succeed in all aspects of school life and ability to grasp opportunities to extend and improve their learning are exceptional

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Work with parents to develop effective techniques to support and encourage their children's learning
 - Help parents to provide environments and experiences that will support their children's development
 - Contribute to the development and delivery of interventions that encourage pupil motivation, self-esteem and educational achievement
-

SEF outcome – attendance

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

Attendance is consistently high for all groups of pupils

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Target specific individuals and families (especially where persistent absence is an issue) to achieve improvements in attendance and engagement through various programmes and tailored interventions
 - Support parents to encourage and facilitate their children's full attendance in school
 - Give parents information, explanations, advice and guidance on the legal requirements regarding education and school attendance
-

SEF outcome – behaviour

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

Behaviour for all groups around the school is exemplary and pupils encourage others to conduct themselves well

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Target interventions to help parents encourage and increase their children's positive behaviour and reduce their negative behaviour
 - Help parents to develop their communication skills
 - Encourage parents to have a warm and supportive relationship with their children
-

SEF outcome – attainment

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

Pupils' attainment in key subjects and the attainment of sizeable groups of pupils are significantly above average

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Work with parents and children to increase levels of attendance and engagement, thereby making a positive impact on attainment and quality of work
 - Help parents to support their children's learning, thereby helping their children to reach their full potential. This includes facilitating family learning opportunities
 - Offer support to parents and children to enable teaching staff to focus more of their time and energy on teaching and learning
-

SEF outcome – healthy lifestyles

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

Many groups, including those most at risk, are very keen to take action to improve their health and enthusiastically take up activities to do so

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Support parents in relation to family well-being and health issues
 - Help parents to access environments and experiences that will support their personal well-being as parents
-

SEF outcome – effectiveness of care, guidance and support

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

The school's work with families, children and a range of agencies to sustain the learning, development and well-being of individual pupils facing challenging circumstances is deeply embedded at all levels

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Operate as an integrated part of the continuum of support for parents and their families
 - Support parents and their children through transitions to ensure continual engagement with school and learning
 - Provide access to appropriate parenting programmes and other structured support for parenting
 - Work to ensure parents participate in shaping and developing services that are responsive to need
 - Liaise actively between school and other agencies. Align work to that of other professionals in the locality to ensure effective service delivery
-

SEF outcome – engagement with parents and carers

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

The school has a highly positive relationship with all groups of parents and carers, particularly those groups of parents and carers who might traditionally find working with the school difficult

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Develop and use a range of approaches to establish initial engagement with parents
 - Develop a partnership approach to sharing information and decision making with parents
 - Use a collaborative model of helping that acknowledges a parent's skills and expertise
 - Acknowledge, respect and promote the rights and responsibilities of parents, children and young people
 - Work with parents to overcome personal barriers to, and anxieties around, education and schools
 - Work to ensure parents participate in shaping and developing services
 - Support school staff in developing their understanding of parents' and children's personal and social contexts, rights and responsibilities
-

SEF outcome – partnerships in promoting learning and well-being

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

The school is highly committed to working in partnership and participates fully and actively in developing, implementing and taking a leading role in a range of significant activities

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Provide information, explanation, support and signposting relating to family well-being
 - Provide information, explanation, advice and guidance to parents about learning and development opportunities available to them
 - Work with parents and school staff to facilitate school/parent relationships
 - Establish and maintain effective working partnerships with agencies and individuals in addressing need and overcoming parents' and children's barriers to learning
 - Work with partner organisations and individuals in brokering support for parents
 - Maintain professional networks and relationships as part of integrated children's services provision
-

SEF outcome – safeguarding procedures

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

The school has excellent quality assurance and risk assessment systems that are routinely informed by pupils' and parents' views, including those who may have barriers to communication

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Encourage and support parents and children to report any concerns or complaints, including concerns about poor or abusive practices
 - Identify concerns about possible abuse and/or neglect and/or pupils who may have gone missing and refer such concerns promptly to the relevant agencies
 - Work with parents and children to encourage safe and responsible practices
 - Demonstrate excellent case management and risk assessment through access to effective supervision and line management
 - Engage fully in CAF processes and support family participation
-

SEF outcome – promoting community cohesion

Extract from Ofsted's 'outstanding' descriptor

The school's actions have a markedly beneficial impact on community cohesion within its local community and beyond

How the work of PSAs can help provide evidence

- Gather, collate and share information about community and agency support provision
 - Facilitate parent networks
 - Signpost/enable adult learning opportunities
 - Engage with and support groups that may be isolated in a community
 - Promote equality of opportunity and respect for diversity
-

* The top Ofsted rating is 'outstanding' for all outcomes except attainment and attendance, for which the top rating is 'high'.

What's in it for you?
Role-specific information

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developing people, improving young lives

Community leaders – what’s in it for you?

How do PSAs help build more cohesive, empowered and active communities?

“By working with parents and children to improve their self-esteem and to give them access to new training and job opportunities, PSAs help parents to lift themselves and their families out of the long-term poverty cycle that inter-generational unemployment brings. This will bring major benefits to them and the community.”

Janet Donaldson, Chair of Calderdale Children’s Trust and Director of Children’s Services, Calderdale Metropolitan District Council

The PSA role

PSAs work in a school context to increase schools’ capacity to engage parents in their children’s learning. They offer early intervention, preventative support, advice and guidance to parents and carers to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. With their strong community links, PSAs have a key role to play in identifying and engaging families who need support and in signposting individuals to local agencies. This makes PSAs integral to effective multi-agency working.

PSAs tackling negative behaviour

The work of one PSA in Calderdale is helping Helen*, an unemployed lone parent, to turn her life around. Helen has low self-esteem and was abused by her ex-partner for a number of years. Initially, the PSA became involved with Helen to help her manage the behaviour of her 10-year-old son more effectively.

The PSA then encouraged Helen to enrol on a seven-week confidence-building course at the Women’s Centre in Halifax. This was so successful that Helen, with the PSA’s help, has now enrolled in a further three courses, Coping with Stress, Helping with Homework and Next Steps. The last course is designed to help her apply for jobs, something Helen would never have considered before.

* Name has been changed.

“PSAs provide additional capacity, enabling schools to engage in issues that, while they may occur outside the school gate, nevertheless affect children’s learning,” says Janet Donaldson.

“Previously, due to lack of time, the temptation was to see these issues as someone else’s problem. Now schools have the capacity to focus on the needs of the child at the same time as helping to improve outcomes for the family and the wider community. In this way, PSAs are helping schools to fulfil their responsibilities regarding integrated working and to fully engage in the broader children’s services agenda.”

Impact on attendance

PSAs’ work with nine families in one Calderdale secondary school has helped increase attendance by an average of nine per cent per child, with one child improving their overall attendance by nearly 38 per cent. Improved attendance not only increases a young person’s ability to learn and attain, they cannot learn if they are not in school, it also reduces the risk of them getting involved in risky behaviour such as substance misuse.

Find out more

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Local authority leaders – what’s in it for you?

How do PSAs help to deliver our local area agreement targets?

“PSAs help to transform the lives of children, enabling them to succeed in all five Every Child Matters outcomes. By supporting them and their families, PSAs help children achieve at school, contribute to society and not become NEET, a teenage mum or get involved in crime. Their local knowledge enables them to map all services on offer, identify duplications and gaps and signpost families to those services most relevant to them.”

Alison Jeffery, Children’s Trust Manager, East Sussex County Council

The PSA role

PSAs work in a school context to increase schools’ capacity to engage parents in their children’s learning. They offer early intervention, preventative support, advice and guidance to parents and carers to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. They identify, engage and signpost individuals to local agencies and their cross-cutting work makes a positive impact on a number of key local authority targets, including those around risky behaviour, community cohesion and attainment.

Supporting families through integrated working

Family breakdown and a history of extreme antagonism between her parents had led one 10-year-old girl to have violent fits of temper. She frequently wet the bed and would threaten to self-harm and run away. Her mother was struggling to stay calm and implement effective parenting strategies.

The PSA completed a CAF and put together an action plan, which included one-to-one support for the girl in school, focusing specifically on appropriate behaviour and anger management. Her mother was given parenting support and advice and referrals were made to the school nurse, the enuresis clinic and the family health support team. The PSA also helped the mother contact the local council about their overcrowded living conditions. They were subsequently re-housed.

As a result of these interventions, the mother and daughter are getting on better, the daughter’s behaviour has improved and she is wetting the bed less. Being re-housed has also had a major impact. With more space, the whole family – and the mother in particular – is finding life less stressful.

“PSAs are hugely helpful in areas of integrated working,” says Alison Jeffery. “Their knowledge and ability to keep things simple and family focused enables them to build appropriate packages of support around children and their families while helping them to make the best use of the support on offer. This early intervention approach makes a positive impact on all their outcomes.”

Measuring PSA impact

When surveyed, the following percentage of line managers believed that PSAs’ work has:

- improved parents’ engagement with their children’s learning (88.5 per cent)
- improved pupil attendance (84.9 per cent)
- improved relationships between parents and the school (90.3 per cent), and
- made effective referrals to specialist services as appropriate (89 per cent).

Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, University of Warwick (2009)

Find out more

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School leaders – what’s in it for you?

How do PSAs help us engage with our community and contribute to our school improvement agenda?

“Our PSAs access the hard-to-reach families when everything else has usually failed. They ask the difficult questions and chip away at the barriers that stop families engaging with us. Working with a parent to tackle the roots of a child’s problem can have a huge knock-on effect on the behaviour, attendance and attainment of that child and their siblings.”

Pat Towey, Principal, Unity City Academy, Middlesbrough

The PSA role

PSAs work in a school context to increase schools’ capacity to engage parents in their children’s learning. They offer early intervention, preventative support, advice and guidance to parents and carers to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. They identify and engage individuals and signpost them to local agencies.

Community engagement benefits young runaways

With the help and support of Unity City Academy’s PSAs (the academy has two part-time PSAs based on site), negative experiences have turned into positive actions for five of the most challenging female students. All five girls had a history of running away from home.

The PSAs worked with the girls and their families to identify the reasons why they were running away and to help them face up to their problems. The PSAs, in partnership with the student support manager, got the girls, the police and Barnardos to work together to create a poster campaign highlighting the dangers of running away. The posters, based on the girls’ own personal experiences, include a helpline number and are now being displayed across the borough.

“The girls got a real buzz out of seeing their ideas and work being promoted across the whole of Middlesbrough,” says Pat Towey. “The fact that

they knew they were helping others in similar situations has really improved their self-confidence and self-esteem and they’re now happier at home and more able to learn. Our PSAs have superb multi-agency links, enabling them to bring in a whole range of support for our pupils and their parents and carers, which allows us to play a key role in reaching out to and helping the community we serve.”

Impact on attendance

The attendance rate for one girl in year 9 at Unity improved from 20 per cent between April and July 2007 to 96 per cent in December 2009, thanks to PSA interventions. These included arranging alcohol counselling for the girl’s mother, who eventually went into long-term care, and working with the girl and her father to help them take care of younger siblings. Previously, the girl had been shouldering the burden of caring for the whole family. While she has a lot of catching up to do academically, the student is now reintegrated into the school and her life chances have improved significantly.

Find out more

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Classroom teachers – what’s in it for you?

How will a PSA support my work as a teacher?

“The work of my PSA enhances and improves the experience children have in my class and makes me more effective as a teacher and better able to meet their needs. It gives me a different perspective and enables me to see the bigger picture with regard to individual children.”

Rebecca Nash, Year 4 Teacher, Milton Park Primary School, North Somerset

The PSA role

PSAs work in a school context to increase schools’ capacity to engage parents in their children’s learning. Much of their work is carried out in the school playground, meeting parents informally or formally and offering support and advice. A PSA is a familiar face and a trusted individual, whose work includes providing one-to-one support, meeting parents in groups for social or personal learning purposes, visiting families at home and signposting them to other services as relevant.

Freeing up teachers to teach

A pupil arrived at Milton Park Primary following a managed transfer from another school. She was experiencing a number of problems at home. Her mother was misusing alcohol and her home life was generally very erratic and unstable.

Sarah Mellor, the school’s PSA, made a home visit before the girl started at her new school to see what additional support she would need and how she could support the girl’s mother. As a result of Sarah’s input, a learning support assistant was attached to the girl’s class to help her settle in. Sarah also started to develop a relationship with the girl’s mother, who is now more open with the school about her daughter’s learning and behaviour.

“Sarah has been there throughout, helping the girl settle in and dealing with ongoing behavioural issues and challenges,” says Rebecca Nash. “If Sarah wasn’t there, I’m not sure we would have

managed to keep the girl in school and, even if we had, her often challenging behaviour would have impacted negatively on the learning experience of the other children in the class. It would have been very difficult to communicate with her mother and work in partnership with her.

“Thanks to Sarah, the girl is settling in and we’re able to provide a consistent and supportive environment for her. Sarah can do things I can’t, such as home visits, and this allows me to understand the children I work with better while enabling me to focus on teaching.”

Dedicated parental support

Unlike school leaders, many classroom teachers are unaware of the dedicated parental support available in schools. According to the National Foundation for Educational Research’s Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey (November 2009), only 33 per cent of classroom teachers reported that their school had a non-teaching member of staff dedicated to supporting parents, despite the fact that 61 per cent of schools now have access to a PSA. See the full results at www.nfer.ac.uk/teachervoic

Find out more

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Behaviour practitioners – what’s in it for you?

What impact do PSAs have on behaviour in schools?

“The engagement of parents in the education of their child is of fundamental importance. It is particularly important when the child is experiencing or causing problems in school... parenting programmes have been shown to influence parents and to help them to improve the behaviour of their children in school.”

Sir Alan Steer, Learning Behaviour: Lessons Learned (2009)

The PSA role

PSAs work in a school context to increase schools’ capacity to engage parents in their children’s learning. They offer early intervention, preventative support, advice and guidance to parents and carers to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Their work includes one-to-one support, drop-in and outreach work, liaising with other multi-agency workers, such as social workers and therapy services, and signposting to other services as needed.

Tackling negative behaviour

A seven-year-old boy with dyspraxia was displaying very disruptive and aggressive behaviour in the classroom and at home. He was violent to his mother and other pupils. Jacqui Nesbitt, South Tyneside’s Parent Carer Support Adviser, intervened at home. She worked with the boy’s mother to help her find ways to discipline her son appropriately and display her authority consistently and calmly while teaching him the consequences of his actions.

Jacqui helped the mother identify and implement strategies for dealing with peak stress times, such as getting the boy to school, and taught her some techniques for managing her own anger and boosting her son’s self-esteem. Jacqui also encouraged the boy’s mother to let him return to his karate and swimming clubs. These had been withheld as punishment for bad behaviour but were, in fact, very good for his social interaction skills.

After just four home visits – during which Jacqui had no contact with the child – the boy’s mother reported a marked change in her ability to deal with her son constructively and, consequently, she saw a marked change in his behaviour. Where previously he had been getting three or four reports home a week about his bad behaviour, he has now settled down and is behaving much better.

“By working with parents to give them the skills and confidence to manage their children’s behaviour better and to engage in their learning, we can make a real impact on children’s behaviour in the classroom,” says Jacqui. “This improved behaviour has a positive impact not just on the individual but on the class and school community as well.”

“By working with the young boy and his mother, Jacqui was able to help the boy arrive at school on time, ready to learn. This meant that his behaviour no longer disrupted the rest of his class and we did not lose valuable teaching time by having to work with him separately.”

Ann Bell, Headteacher, Marsden Primary School, South Tyneside

Find out more

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Funders and commissioners – what’s in it for you?

Why should we invest in PSAs?

“We decided to fully fund our PSA because of the many benefits he brings to our school and the community. Thanks to him, attendance is up, persistent absenteeism is down and parents, including the hard to reach, are less anxious and more engaged with their children’s learning. Teachers are free to teach and I’ve had the time to develop our curriculum while engaging parents in what we are trying to achieve.”

Carole Kirkman, Headteacher, Wellgate Primary School, Barnsley

The PSA role

PSAs work in a school context to increase schools’ capacity to engage parents in their children’s learning. They offer early intervention, preventative support, advice and guidance to parents and carers to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Their work includes one-to-one support, parenting courses, drop-in and outreach work and signposting to other services as needed.

Adding value

When PSAs first came to Barnsley in June 2007, they were fully funded by the local authority. This funding was subsequently reduced to 67 per cent of the total cost from 2008 until March 2010.

Wellgate Primary School has decided to fully fund the PSA role itself from March 2010, despite the difficult economic climate and a significant loss of income due to the school having 30 fewer children this year than last.

A two-form entry school, Wellgate Primary serves a socio-economically diverse part of Barnsley with differing needs. Headteacher Carole Kirkman was concerned that she and her teachers did not have time to engage properly with parents and work through their various concerns about learning.

“With our PSA, we can be very client focused and get to know what motivates and engages individuals and small groups,” she explains. “For example, we had some parents who had been quite aggressive in school. Now, thanks to our PSA building and maintaining relationships with those

parents, we’re seeing fewer such incidents and the school has a more relaxed and family feel. This has reduced staff stress levels and absenteeism and created a better learning environment.

“Our PSA’s early intervention and preventative work helping children and families settle and engage with learning has also helped reduce additional teaching support costs. In addition, we now use fewer local authority resources, such as education welfare officers, because there is less absenteeism.”

All-round contribution

At Wellgate Primary, the PSA has made a significant contribution to many aspects of school life:

- All Ofsted inspection categories have improved (November 2009). For example, curriculum has gone from ‘satisfactory’ to ‘good with outstanding features’, and 90 per cent of parents agree or strongly agree that the school takes account of their concerns
- There is a parent teacher association and 98 per cent of parents now attend open evenings, compared with 85 per cent three years ago
- Volunteer numbers at the school have increased six-fold to 30
- Short-term staff absenteeism has decreased

Find out more

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