

# Transforming Early Years – radical efficiency in practice

## Community Ambassadors in Bradford

### Some background information

The Bradford Transforming Early Years team brings together the Heaton Children’s Centre and the Upper Heaton Working Together Partnership under the leadership of the Lead Director for Heaton Children’s Services.

Upper Heaton Working Together (UHWT) is a partnership involving the local council, churches, mosques, schools, health service, neighbourhood watch, local residents and police. Through collaboration, UHWT is driving forward a locally-led strategy for community cohesion.

Heaton is a culturally, socially and economically diverse area of Bradford. The focus area for the Transforming Early Years project is an estate in Heaton which has recently seen a demographic shift from predominantly white to a mix of white, South Asian and Eastern European families. There are sharply polarised groups on the estate: people involved in crime and those who are ‘scared to go out’.

### Reconceptualising the Challenge

The Bradford team wants to address the fear, social isolation and lack of parental aspiration that they see affecting vulnerable families. Carrying out **Ethnographic Research** with residents gave them vital new insights into the depths of fear, exhaustion and powerlessness as they are felt by parents.

Heaton is currently a fragmented community with weak networks of support within and between families. Services reflect this and are fragmented too. Links between professionals and a significant number of vulnerable families are poor.

The team recognises that services have been uncoordinated and professionals mistrustful of each other, which has prevented them from building a community of support for families. They have also been failing to ask families what services they would value and families felt ‘done to’, which discourages positive engagement with professionals. **Service Blueprinting** has helped the team to rethink their strategy for service provision; to stop rushing to a solution and make sure that they have all the information they need to redesign services that are better, not just different.

They also completed a **Resource Audit** to work out the cost of existing services for each family.

*“When you hear how people close their curtains so they don’t have to see drug deals going on outside their front doors, it gets the fires going and makes you want to work even harder to make a difference”*

### Ethnographic Research

Working with and listening to parents and children in the community offers a fresh perspective and new insights on old problems.

### Service Blueprinting

Using user journeys to map new services highlights strengths and weaknesses in the design.

### Resource Audit

A review of how much is spent, on what, for whose benefit stimulates important conversations about equity and value for money.

## New Solutions

In Bradford's redesigned service for families with young children, parent peer supporters called **Community Ambassadors** will work to build trust and rapport with local families, be trained to offer continuous, low-level support to families and make connections with professionals when needed. Community Ambassadors will not come from 'perfect' families; they'll be real people from the community who have the capacity to manage, who struggle and survive difficult times and who can then share their real life experiences with others.

*"We will be working with parents who have skills to do even better, to influence those who don't see they have the potential. Some families think that that is their lot."*

'Support Ambassadors' (named, professional representatives from all related services from the police to social care) will train and support the Community Ambassadors. They will also work with the Community Ambassadors to reshape their own practice to better support the community, and model new approaches with their professional peers.

Existing professional staff in the children's centre will take on a reduced but more focused role, through the Support Ambassador network, supporting the Community Ambassadors and making targeted family interventions where necessary.

There will be **better use of existing spaces**, schools, children's centre, places of worship, a community café, shops, and people's homes, which will be open at times that suit families. The team has plans to rent an empty house on the estate from the local housing association and set up a 'real-life house'. Inside, Community Ambassadors will share real-life experiences, for example to model playing with children in a less threatening, more realistic environment than the Children's Centre.

*"As well as providing a less threatening environment, the house will provide parents with the chance to see that in real houses you do have toys left out, and help parents to share tips and ideas for times such as bath-time and bed-time in a more real way."*

The team from Bradford are setting out to build continuous, community-based support for families and give community members a sense of power over their own lives. They aim to create new, shared community norms around good parenting and how to create a resilient family life with high aspirations for all.

## Looking to the future...

*"At the moment we have neighbourhoods, in three years we will have communities."*

### Trained and active Community Ambassadors

- There will be a team of Community Ambassadors of varying cultures, ages and genders, who are the hub of an inner support network for parents who live in the community.
- Community Ambassadors will proactively organise community events and recruit further volunteers.
- Community Ambassadors will be trained to provide better services at a lower cost than professionals, e.g. running a session at their own house on how they get the kids to bed, or leading a 'clean up' group to remove rubbish from people's gardens.
- There will be a team of 'Support Ambassadors' made up of staff that are currently based in the Children's Centre and beyond in

## Different...

The fundamental shift here is in the 'front-line' support around families with young children, which will comprise parents who are coping well, recruited and trained to offer different levels of support to other families according to their circumstances. It might be low level contact to help families to feel confident and connected to the community, or more highly trained support to help with particular behaviour issues. Parents offering support will be trained by and connected with professionals to whom they can turn for advice when necessary. Equally importantly, those parents will be training those professionals to reshape their practice based on what they're learning about how to work effectively with families. This turns the current model upside down. Families are in charge of who they work with and how, drawing on professionals when necessary - professionals are no longer the first port of call, and do not direct how support works.

## Better...

This new approach aims to reach all families, including the most vulnerable. Ongoing, consistent support contrasts strongly with one-off interventions, often around crises or problems that are common at the moment.

By providing a common broker - the parent supporters - there is the potential to coordinate and join up the professionals providing background support, as well as making their practice more effective for families.

By empowering and connecting participating families, it should become possible to build the community's resilience and aspirations.

the community (PCSO, Family Support Workers, Neighbourhood Warden, Social Worker, Health Visitor, Midwife, Play Worker).

- Support Ambassadors will provide an initial training programme and ongoing support for Community Ambassadors (for example advising parents on how to brush children's teeth: *"The advice has to be what a dentist would recommend, but a parent who has been taught to do this can pass this on".*)

### Effective deployment of resources

- More of paid staff time will be focused on the most vulnerable families, supporting those with the most challenging issues and preventing crises.
- There will be less duplication of effort and cost. *"We found that one family in one week had 59 hours worth of effort and input. This has to be duplication."*

### Safer, more integrated and better-off communities

- People will be happier, part of the community and less fearful going about their daily business.
- House prices will rise on the estate.
- There will be a greater number of community events that are inclusive in nature.
- They expect a range of improved outcomes for children, from more parents saying that they can get their children to bed, to improved attendance at nurseries, greater numbers of children experiencing a language-rich home environment, being 'school-ready' and better able to separate from their main carers.

The effectiveness of Community Ambassadors will partly be judged in relation to the types of people that they are able to recruit to the role.

### Next steps

Four Community Ambassadors have already shown willingness and enthusiasm to lead the work forward. Together they have designed a community fun event where they will try and recruit more Ambassadors (perhaps six to eight).

Governance arrangements for the Community Ambassador programme will be discussed, with the anticipation that parents will be invited to run the Partnership. This may have a formal link to the Upper Heaton Working Together Partnership.

A Family Support Worker within the core team will soon begin to talk to staff about how their roles could change. At a time when staff are already anxious about job cuts this is an important and difficult part of the project.

*"In the past we've said 'let's work together, understand the issue and come up with a plan'. Now we are getting to a harder part of the process and listing parts of people's jobs which could be integrated into an ambassador role. They are realising what's at stake for their own roles."*

### Interim case study, Spring 2011.

### Lower cost...

In the short term, fewer children's centre professionals will be required as their roles shift to be facilitators and supporters of the peer support team.

As the team reaches more families, the unit cost of each interaction will go down. Fewer highly qualified professionals from other services should also be needed to do the 'low level' front-line work now undertaken by parent supporters.

Perhaps most importantly, over time, if support succeeds in building families' resilience, there should be far less spent on expensive crisis interventions including foster care and family courts.

# Transforming Early Years – radical efficiency in practice

## Parents as agents of change in Corby

### Some background information

The Transforming Early Years team in Corby currently comprises representatives from children's centres, the local authority and parent users, and there is a commitment to embracing all centres and leading an approach that is inclusive and Corby-wide. The team recognises the risks inherent in the slicing or cutting of services to reduce costs and are using the Transforming Early Years project to gain support in managing these risks in a way which can extend reach whilst reducing costs.

There is a history in Corby of working in partnership with parents as policymakers and co-constructors of services in practice and provision. There is a desire to take this further and deeper in order to engage families in some of the most deprived areas of Corby.

Achieving more successful and strategic partnerships across the children's centres in Corby, where services are still largely professionally-led, will involve building on the existing will and resources in the area (Corby Learning Partnership, Safer Community Teams, Homestart, Primary Care Trust) to work collectively, focused on shared ambitions for better outcomes for families.

### Reconceptualising the Challenge

The Corby team want to work more effectively with the most vulnerable families to create services which meet their needs, whilst also reducing costs. They recognise the need to adapt and change how and what resources are used to deliver services as a key lever in service change and improvement – and to do so in ways that create an authentic role in co-design and delivery for parents.

*“We see parents becoming the agents of change and the drivers of transformation.”*

Some of the most vulnerable families in Corby are not engaged in shaping or feeling like partners in services that best meet their needs. Current strategies for engaging parents in service re-design and delivery are uncoordinated and far less effective than is desirable.

The Transforming Early Years work is seen as part of wider strategic developments as opposed to a one-off initiative. The team is focused on the strategic changes necessary to build upon existing work to create parent-driven early years services across Corby.

**Service Blueprinting** for the initiative has helped to find a common language to describe what they wanted to do and achieve and to express the value of their work and enable them to explore that with others.

### Service Blueprinting

Using user journeys to map new services highlights strengths and weaknesses in the design.

### Resource Audit

A review of how much is spent, on what, for whose benefit stimulates important conversations about equity and value for money.

An early **Resource Audit** identified that overall expenditure may be reduced by:

- Delivering more needs-driven early intervention services and so reduce expenditure on high-cost acute intervention.
- Employing fewer professionals.
- Avoiding duplication of services.
- Decommissioning of current activities with marginal impact.
- Effective systematic volunteer training programme.

## New Solutions

*“We will use parents to enhance intelligence gathering and provision of appropriate support.”*

The team’s core idea was originally to develop a team of volunteer parents, grandparents and carers as community or **‘street champions’**, who will work with professionals to shape and deliver a set of services that are community-led and focus on whole families.

This has been expanded as an idea to an ambition that the parent-led provision becomes a constituted parent-owned mutual. Street champions will gather critical information that can be used to target and adapt provision, e.g. about changing demographics, levels of drug and alcohol use. This parent body can be commissioned by the existing children’s centres to develop these new areas of intelligence and provision. In turn, the parent group can ‘commission’ and ‘shape’ activity or service from existing centres based on their field intelligence – perhaps becoming the local commissioner which receives the single budget for Corby’s early years provision.

## Looking to the future...

*“There will be a far more pro-active, strong, decisive parent voice across all children’s services in Corby.”*

### Engaged and empowered communities

- The community will be more empowered and self-determined as parents move from service users to leaders, designers and providers.
- Families that are not currently engaged will be engaged on their own terms and share in decision-making rather than ‘attend’ a service.
- Parents will share budgetary responsibility with the local authority and other agencies in the town.
- Trained volunteers will work more closely with professionals in practical decision-making and activity.

### Clear evidence of impact on outcomes for families

- Impact of the new approaches will be mapped and tracked in detail.
- Effectiveness of the joint use of resources will be judged in relation to participation and improved outcomes for those families.
- Impact indicators will include a reduction in numbers of children on the child protection register, families needing support from social care, and the degree to which volunteer training and support builds community capital.

## Different...

The Corby team wants to move from an existing model of a predominantly centre-based and professionally led service (which involves parents variably) to one with *“parents being the agents of change and drivers of transformation”*.

The new provision will be more targeted to need, will engage current priority localities, and will significantly expand reach and service utilisation rates. The team is determined to create a role for families within the governance structure of children’s centres to ensure they are more involved in strategic decision-making and that they have budget-holding responsibility.

## Better...

The new approach will ensure programmes are more congruent with perceived need in the community and more targeted to the highest value for children.

The approach has a community capacity-building dimension, aiming to unearth community leaders and volunteers who, with peer support, will offer a service with more reach and more sensitivity to users.

It will also bring greater coherence and cohesion, and will involve building on the existing will and resources in the area to work collectively, focused on shared ambitions for better outcomes for families.

## Next steps

*“Which services should be commissioned, do we want to be commissioned, and what are the services and who are responsible for delivering them? Will it be social care, the Children’s Centre or GPs?”*

A key next step is to determine how the professional knowledge, expertise and experience from a range of sectors can be used to develop and support this parent-led body.

*“It’s critical to think through the recognition of professional knowledge and how that works alongside parent volunteers and the decision-making body.”*

The Local Authority will need to be excited by the possibility and willing to create the enabling conditions to make it happen - in particular a willingness to devolve the early years budget to the parent-owned mutual. Active enablement from the LA will be important, but in return Corby sees the model as a potential prototype for wider use within Northamptonshire.

### Interim case study, Spring 2011.

## Lower cost...

The new service will impact on more families, connect with more hard-to-reach families and do so using more volunteer and peer-to-peer approaches.

It will engage and impact on more of those families that create intervention costs for other services down the line.

There will be fewer paid workers and trained volunteers will work more closely with professionals in practical decision-making and activity to tackle specific issues with families.

Being more strategic and more aligned across centres, offers potential for ‘radically efficient’ savings to be realised.

It will decommission current well-used but peripherally effective aspects of provision.

# Transforming Early Years – radical efficiency in practice

## Community Co-production in Knowsley

### Some background information

The team working on Transforming Early Years in Knowsley includes a children's centre manager, teachers, a health visitor leader and a play service manager. Their Transforming Early Years project focuses on children's centres in the Prescot and Whiston area of the town.

The team is building on work started through their social innovation lab to tackle non-engagement in services, particularly by those families the service would most wish to reach.

### Reconceptualising the challenge

The Knowsley team wants to create a new parent-owned and led model for running a children's centre, where the community really takes ownership of support and provision for children and families. They see the core principles of co-production and citizen engagement as a route to behavioural change for families.

In some parts of the community parents are sceptical about the value of services and there is a lack of trust in professionals. These parents are afraid of being judged, and the belief by some that children's centres are for 'bad parents' creates a stigma around accessing children's services. Parents currently serve on the advisory board at Southmead Children's Centre in Whiston. They attend and go through the motions, but don't really challenge existing arrangements.

The Transforming Early Years team knew from the start that they weren't reaching enough families, and so began with the assumption that the service would improve if they provided more and different services. But **Horizon Scanning** carried out through the project helped them gain new insights into their very familiar problems. They realised that their work needed to empower families to support themselves – that this was the key to behaviour change. The exercise also helped them move from the conceptual to the concrete, and to really take ownership of the change they needed to create. The case studies used in Horizon Scanning were taken back to Knowsley as a way of challenging traditional thinking amongst the whole team.

A **Resource Audit** provided fresh insights into the financial overlaps and duplications within and across children's services.

### Horizon Scanning

Exploring research and practice from other contexts sheds new light on existing arrangements and helps providers to see their problem – and possible solutions – from a different angle.

### Resource Audit

A review of how much is spent, on what, for whose benefit stimulates important conversations about equity and value for money.

## New Solutions

The team is working on ideas for transforming early years that are aimed at building social capacity and effecting a radical transformation of the children's centres' role as a hub for community activities. This transformation will include a **parents' social network**, volunteers and a **community fund for social enterprise** but the challenge is to place these within coherent and sustainable parent-led governance.

The ultimate aim is to work earlier and more directly with families to enable the community to own the responsibility for creating parents confident in their roles as first educators of their children. The plan is to build the capacity of parents and the community so that they could take over the two Children's Centres, which would become a hub for community activities, whether physically or virtually.

Special activities and events aimed at new parents will be introduced as a way of engaging families in services at the earliest stage. For example, by situating a birth registry service within the Children's Centre there could be an opportunity to connect new parents to the Centre from a child's birth.

The Transforming Early Years project will also build on the success of the local authority's Volunteer Family Mentor programme by widening the team of volunteer parents and grandparents to those that can be trained as **local connectors** or **community ambassadors** within a social network for parents. These skilled community leaders will use their insights into the lives of families in the locality to promote and provide quality early years services to the community. This new workforce of community members will provide support and advice to each other, and, under new governance arrangements, will work in partnership with professionals in order to design, commission and deliver new services.

## Looking to the future...

*"We won't be doing routine tasks that don't meet need, but will offer services based on what parents have identified".*

### Community ownership

- The Children's Centres will be at the heart of a mobilised community and deeply connected to other supports; they will be better informed about local need through the involvement of parent governors and researchers and better able to provide services that the community wants.
- A greater number of families will be involved, gaining more skills and working more intensively with their Children's Centre. There will be different activities running, in more locations and a greater number of volunteer-led sessions.
- Investment in community-led services, organisations and leaders will enable the community to own the responsibility for creating confident parents to be first educators of their children.

### New roles and responsibilities

- A greater number of parents and grandparents will be trained volunteers - and the programme transferred to sustainable community ownership.
- All staff will take responsibility for mentoring volunteers. This will be a valued and integral part of their role.
- Parents will be influencing service design and delivery as part of the governance of Children's Centres, which in turn will be a hub for community activity. There will be a volunteer chair of the parent-led mutual.

## Different...

Two existing groups will become a social enterprise affiliated to two Children's Centres, which will be governed by parents and other community members.

Existing provision that is not meeting local need will be decommissioned and the new social enterprise, Family Voices, will be commissioned instead to offer services that are more user driven, co-constructed, community-based and targeted towards priority groups.

## Better...

The new arrangements will build community capital; grow the capacity of parents and families to 'own' their early years provision; and considerably extend existing reach and utilisation levels among key target groups.

They will engage and involve community volunteers, enabling the development of life skills, improve employability and raise community aspirations.

Professionals will see their role as working alongside and developing the skills of community volunteers, expanding reach and capacity whilst also drawing upon local intelligence, relationships and trust.



## Evidence of impact

- The area will see a reduction in levels of deprivation and an improvement in children's 'school readiness'.
- Professionals will use case studies and service user journeys as well as cost per head comparisons to evaluate the success and efficiency of new services – to demonstrate that it is different, better and cheaper.

## Next steps

The prototyping phase of the Transforming Early Years work will focus on determining the direction of development for the Children's Centre mutual and on creating a communicable long-term vision. This vision will be owned by Family Voices, which will become a constituted social enterprise to carry forward the work.

The role of Family Voices will be expanded and grown – as a self-conscious strategy to build its capacity as a community-owned dimension of the Children's Centres' work. It will be commissioned to undertake new co-designed programmes of work within a strategy for engaging existing non-users.

The aspiration will be to empower Family Voice to be in a position to mutualise the Children's Centres within 18 months.

This will also involve utilising a number of specific opportunities to progress the work 'on the ground'. The volunteer training will be enhanced to include governance and then piloted with Family Voices, and volunteers from the Volunteer Family Mentor pilot might also be engaged by the Centres from March, when the Child Poverty Programme comes to an end. A successful mentoring project with a small group of dads in the Southmead and Phoenix Centres will also be extended and promoted.

The team is aware that the assumption among a small number of their staff is that volunteers are a risk to family support, and that this will need to be tackled as the project progresses. Connected to this is a very real concern among some senior staff about what all these developments will mean for their staff in relation to their terms and conditions of employment.

## Interim case study, Spring 2011.

## Lower cost...

The changing role of community volunteers and grandparents will extend the reach of services at lower cost.

Ineffective provision will be decommissioned as will that which is no longer required. Alternatively these may be used to generate revenue streams instead.

Longer-term, in addition to seeing a reduction in levels of deprivation and an improvement in children's 'school readiness', the area will also make far less demand on costly downstream intervention and crisis support services.

# Transforming Early Years – radical efficiency in practice

## From neighbourhoods to communities in Barking and Dagenham

### Some background information

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD) Transforming Early Years team is made up of the Integrated Family Services senior management team, the management group of The Leys Children's Centre and a group of parents from the local community.

Through the Transforming Early Years project they are building on the strength of a currently centralised strategy and management workforce for Children's Centres across the borough, and a commitment to working innovatively.

The project focuses on the very specific needs of The Leys estate where families are predominantly white working class and there is a history of high dependency and low aspiration. The estate is geographically isolated and poorly served by shops and services – families have to travel by bus to reach the nearest supermarket, and there is no convenience store or post office.

### Reconceptualising the Challenge

Professionals experience continued difficulty in engaging a hard-core of white, working class families on The Leys who want their children to do well, and who need support, but who don't access services that could help them.

Data from the local primary school indicated high numbers of children eligible for free school meals who were underachieving at the Foundation Stage. The families of these children were not using the early years services leading to poor outcomes once the children started school.

*“Children eligible for free school meals are underachieving and they don't come here. We're not helping them achieve.”*

*“The ethnography backed up what we suspected. There's a lot about suspicion and mistrust and stigmatisation. We knew that – we now have evidence for it.”*

The Transforming Early Years team want to improve their ability to reach out to the families most in need who are not taking up the child and family services on offer. In the current economic climate they are also thinking about efficiency and have completed a **Resource Audit** to work out the cost of existing services for each family.

Through **Ethnographic Research** the team confirmed what they already suspected; that the Children's Centre itself is viewed with mistrust by those families who are perhaps most in need of its services. In contrast to

### Resource Audit

A review of how much is spent, on what, for whose benefit stimulates important conversations about equity and value for money.

### Ethnographic Research

Working with and listening to parents and children in the community offers a fresh perspective and new insights on old problems.

ethnic minority groups, some white working class families have intensely negative feelings about the Children's Centre.

## New Solutions

The Transforming Early Years project has led to a radical rethink of the way the Children's Centre is run. The plan is to open a café and shop space – a service desperately needed and wanted by residents on the estate. The team want to create an inviting place for whole families to go and a place to access basic goods.

Eventually the café and shop will be owned by members of the community, so further increasing skills and social capital amongst families. They want to create a sense of the space being 'for the community, by the community'. By providing something that meets material needs, and is owned by and run by the community, the team aims to build trust and develop a peer-led support function, which can more successfully engage families. They hope the café and shop space will come to represent The Leys families' capability and self-determination.

LBBB also proposes to appoint a **trained team of parent volunteers** to offer families one-to-one peer support within and outside the Centre. Volunteers will also recruit and support other volunteers and take on 'staff' roles such as running 'stay and play' or language development sessions. They will signpost families to existing services, as well as provide more intensive one-to-one mentoring in people's homes.

This volunteer support network will be more immediately accessible to families on the estate; there will be more knowledge-sharing between professionals and residents, and more people on The Leys who can spot need. The team realises that mobilising volunteers is the key to making their service more efficient, and that capacity building is key to their success.

## Looking to the future...

*"We know we need to be willing to think ourselves out of a job."*

### Remodeled Children's Centre and new roles for professionals

- The remodeled Children's Centre will not be run by professionals, but will be in the hands of parents and carers using professional involvement when it is required.
- The Centre will engage new families; the target will be 'hard-to-reach' groups.
- The 'feel' of the place will be different and less formal, and the perception of ownership will be different.
- All users of the Centre will experience a different quality of support which builds independence and resilience, not dependency.
- Staff will still have a role in referrals, ensuring continuity between universal and targeted services, be alert to problems arising via contact with volunteers, and arrange family support intervention where appropriate.
- Staff (Family Support Workers) will attend groups less frequently and more flexibly. They will have fewer full-time equivalent hours, won't be based in the Centre, will facilitate volunteers' initial training and recruitment, and co-ordinate the services they offer.

## Different...

The new approach intentionally seeks to demonstrate that parents and residents have the capacity to build social good on the estate.

It assumes capability not deficit and will develop an infrastructure to make it possible for the community to make things happen for themselves. It also recognises that professionals in the Children's Centre are simply never going to succeed in reaching families not-yet-engaged, and aims instead to build relationships of trust amongst residents to reach one another and to develop peer-to-peer support.

It responds not just to a professionalised view of what is needed (e.g. 'these children are reaching Foundation Stage without all the social, emotional and communications skills they need; therefore we must intervene') but seeks to both build on assumed parental aspiration for their children ('we all want our children to succeed don't we? Let's help each other'). It also understands that for parents there are very practical needs which need meeting ('there is nowhere to buy milk, recharge the electricity etc., let's start a community-run shop'). It will need to be different in the way that families access more intensive support: the team will need to think about how peer-supporters might need to 'draw-down' professional input in response to the needs of particular families.

## Better...

The new approach will reach those families most in need who at the moment are not taking up (or are avoiding) professionally-run services. It will use other parents to engage these families, which will be less stigmatising and more relational. It will be possible for some activities to take place in locations other than the Children's Centre - for example a parent might run a play session in their own home and this will bring new resources into the system.

It will be better if it succeeds in changing the mindset of the estate ('we can make good things happen here!'), rather than perpetuating the deep dependency culture. The link between the shop and family support may be important - in that the system of peer-support will be built around very visibly community-owned activities (the shop, the signposting volunteers etc.). The hope is that this will reduce the stigma of accessing support, especially if that support is advertised or even provided by a peer resident as opposed to a professional. If the project team successfully design an infrastructure to recruit, train and retain volunteers, the model is very scalable at marginal additional cost.

## Lower cost...

If developed effectively, parents with mainly universal needs will be able to be supported by their peers: the Children's Centre approach could potentially be remodelled to rely far less on expensive professional roles, some of which should be decommissioned or redeployed.

If parents/community members are more effective than professionals at recruiting families to targeted services, the unit cost will fall.

There are also potentially long-term cost savings if those families currently untouched by the Children's Centre are engaged in early preventative support which can change the outcomes for parents and children, leading to reduced failure costs later on in the system (e.g. reduced need for S&L services, reduced child obesity, reduction in children looked after).

## Trained and active parent volunteer network

- The community shop and the volunteer network will demonstrate how local parents make things happen on the estate.
- Outreach will be more effective and parents will be better supported by the peer volunteer network.
- Volunteers will become new suppliers able to run sessions in the Centres, e.g. play and language-communication groups.
- In three years' time there will be a stable cohort of skilled volunteers (each with their own development plan) who are able to move into employment where possible.

## Increased social capital and achievement

- There will be evidence of greater confidence, and strong networks across social and cultural boundaries.
- Children will achieve more highly in the Foundation Stage and there will be fewer obese children on the estate.

## Next steps

The team has invited three parents from the estate to help them prototype the shop in January.

Roles and responsibilities of the professional staff will need to be clarified as part of overall local government restructuring, and support will be offered to staff who realise that, although they are not out of a job, their job will be changing substantially.

Much work remains to be done with families and with professional staff to help undo the culture of dependency that has developed, and the perception that support must be provided by paid professionals.

The team is confident that they have the necessary skills and capacities to think creatively and differently, and to shed preconceptions and assumptions. In the long term they realise this work will involve changes to their existing roles and responsibilities.

## Interim case study, Spring 2011.

# Transforming Early Years – radical efficiency in practice

## Community-owned services – Parents 1st and One Plus One

### Some background information

The Transforming Early Years project brings together One Plus One and Parents 1st to work with families in West Basildon, Essex.

Parents 1st is a social enterprise dedicated to building the strengths and skills of individuals and communities. They are committed to improving outcomes for children and families through peer support programmes and worked with One Plus One, a research and training organisation supporting parents, to develop the highly successful Community Mothers programme in Thurrock.

One Plus One is a team of researchers, practitioners and information specialists whose aim is to enhance understanding of how family relationships contribute to the wellbeing of adults and children. They create resources for professionals and volunteers working in the frontline of family support. Over 2,000 frontline practitioners and volunteers have been trained to use the resources. One Plus One estimate that they have achieved outreach to around one million families.

### Reconceptualising the Challenge

The Parents 1st and the One Plus One team knows some of the external pressures that problems such as street crime, vandalism and hostility heap on families who are ‘just surviving’ in West Basildon.

These families often have a limited awareness of available services, can’t access the help they need and can be put off by ‘judgemental’ professionals. As a result, much of the existing early years support is accessed by affluent families who are already able to cope well. At the other end of the spectrum, a high proportion of resources are spent on vulnerable families in crisis.

Existing professional services don’t really reflect individuals’ and community needs and **Ethnographic Research** has provided an opportunity for staff to talk to mothers and fathers and gain new insights into how difficult it is even for a fairly assertive mother to assume she wasn’t being judged by professionals, and about how levels of crime greatly reduce people’s confidence and happiness in the community.

The whole period of pregnancy and the earliest months of family life are a

### Ethnographic Research

Working with and listening to parents and children in the community offers a fresh perspective and new insights on old problems.

### Resource Audit

A review of how much is spent, on what, for whose benefit stimulates important conversations about equity and value for money.

*“The community development approach is where we come from, working with families, bringing back issues that families identify. Those will be taken on in partnership with the local community.”*

critically important time for early development and the long-term health and social outcomes for children. People becoming parents, especially for the first time, may need lots of support and so this is a great time for early years services to make a big impact. However existing services are not designed to support this group, focusing instead on families with children aged 2½-5 years old.

When a **Resource Audit** showed how much more money is spent on children from the age of 2½ years than on early prevention and disadvantaged families, the team decided that the most important thing they could do would be to redirect money from services for families with 2½ year olds to early provision.

So Parents 1st and One Plus One will develop a new model for Children's Centres that will focus investment and support around pregnancy and the earliest months of a child's life. It will build on mutual support and trust within the local community and make a real difference to family and community relationships.

## New Solutions

The team has two 'big ideas' for transforming early years. Their first idea is to develop a **peer-support hub owned by local families**, focused on providing support to families from conception up until 12 weeks. The new service will be radically different from anything currently available in West Basildon, and will involve training parents from the community to be expert peer-supporters. These expert parents will operate as a multi-skilled team of personal pregnancy assistants (listening, coordinating services), and provide more and more tailored support for expectant and new parents at important points in their 'journey'. They will also develop a self-assessment tool for new parents to help them to identify the range of services they might need.

The second idea is to turn one or more of the Children's Centres in West Basildon into a **community-owned mutual** that is owned and run by local residents. Community representatives, not the council, will decide what services are on offer, and consistent approaches will be used by support providers across different services (health visitors, GPs and volunteers). The key difference this will make to the current service is that families and members of the community will be the first port of call rather than professionals. The team believes this will encourage families to look earlier rather than later for the support they need. One of the benefits of operating as a mutual will be that the board will be able to challenge poor practice or ask staff to leave if they feel they can't or won't support the new, community based approach. The mutual will shift the balance of its spending on families to the early years, away from 2½-5 year olds.

## Looking to the future...

The team want to bring about two key changes in West Basildon: to engage new families in their service through brokering skills in the community, and to secure the future of the redesigned service by encouraging mutual ownership of Children's Centres. This will also enable new suppliers to support the early years service.

### Targeted peer-support for expectant and new parents

- Every expectant parent will be contacted by a skilled (probably paid) peer supporter from the team and they will have a meaningful contact with the antenatal mum and her partner as soon as they find she is pregnant.

## Different...

The new approach will see the current focus of investment from Children's Centre budgets turned on its head. The majority of spending would be on families from conception to the first few months of a child's life - not on the two to five-year olds who currently benefit from the majority of funding.

Today's model of support would be inverted - trained peer supporters would take the place of Children's Centre professionals to provide the front line of support for families. They would work with parents as soon as possible after they discover they are pregnant to understand their aspirations and concerns, and co-design a programme of support that suits them. Peer supporters would be connected with professionals, including midwives and health visitors to create the best package of support and to help shift their practice to be more respectful and responsive to families.

- The conversation will provide factual information about the kinds of group work and one-to-one support available to both parents and the wider family, and help the mum to assess her own needs. It will also make both parents feel special and aware that the door remains open for the future.
- This universal engagement with antenatal parents will build trust and rapport, and when volunteers see signs of an issue arising, they will help people work it through for themselves.
- All couples will be supported, but the more vulnerable parents would be helped at a much earlier stage than they are at present with issues such as early bonding and attachment that are critical to the development of the child.

### Active community involvement and new roles for staff

- Lots more members of the community will be actively involved in peer support as members of the support hub or mutual.
- Services will be run by this community mutual with a management board that allocates its own resources, and which recruits and trains its own staff.
- Staff will be committed to an empowerment model, rather than a dependency, illness-focused model – one that has families, rather than professionals at its heart.
- Local people will be at the helm, listening to the needs of the community and acting on the wider issues that impact on parenting. Eventually, experienced volunteers will set up their own social enterprises, becoming new suppliers offering services on a self-employed basis.

### Next steps

The team is off great start so far. The first cohort of peer support volunteers have already been recruited across the five Children's Centres in West Basildon and have completed an initial taster course. They have now been enrolled onto their introductory accredited training which starts in March.

The team and volunteers will be prototyping some of their ideas for engaging expectant parents over the next two to three months. They are considering pharmacies, supermarkets and antenatal booking clinics as new places to meet newly pregnant mums, let them know about the new service, and test out their ideas with them.

The team is focusing on building a compelling case to present to the local authority (Essex) to persuade them to 'spin out' the West Basildon Centre (and possibly four others) to their control.

The team is conscious that it must work to ensure good relationships between staff and volunteers. This includes reassuring existing staff who have concerns about the risks involved in the volunteer-led project, and making sure that volunteers as a group feel supported.

### Interim case study, Spring 2011.

### Better...

The approach will work with parents at the critical transition moment in family life to help build the capacities and home environment that will support them to flourish later. It should also connect with the families who currently feel alienated from services run by professionals who they see as distant and judgmental.

It should improve the effectiveness of the complementary support they receive from professionals as their practice is reshaped and they are used in a targeted way, when really needed.

Furthermore, the norms of peer support are expected to generate other community-led support that might be housed in the traditional Children's Centre, including the credit union and clothes swaps.

### Lower cost...

This model should be significantly lower cost for the local authority. By training parents to provide front-line support, some of the professionals previously doing this work would become volunteer trainers and supporters whilst others would no longer be needed.

By reaching more families sooner, the unit cost of interactions with each should drop significantly. Over time, working effectively with parents and children during the earliest months of family life should mean significant reductions in spending on crisis interventions.

Finally, the ability to leverage-in greater community resources, like the credit union, with the same budget, represents far greater value for money.

# Transforming Early Years – radical efficiency in practice

## Families Taking Control in Reading

### Some background information

Over the last three years Reading's Directorate of Education and Children's Services has improved performance and achieved cost savings of 12 per cent. The Transforming Early Years team aims to continue to improve standards of service delivery with a focus on the most vulnerable families, and at the same time realise a further 15 per cent reduction in costs over the next three years.

There have been some significant improvements in outcomes in Reading in the recent past including the reduction of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), teenage pregnancy and rises in GCSE performance. However there is a widening gap in outcomes between the most and least deprived young people in Reading.

The team is building on their positive partnership with the Children's Trust Board in Reading, where there are strong systems for consultation with families. The work focuses on one Children's Centre in the South Reading area of Whitley. Despite improvement in key performance indicators and £6 million a year spent on services for children and young people with perceived emotional and behavioural difficulties, some parts of the community in Whitley are characterised by a sense of powerlessness and social isolation.

### Reconceptualising the Challenge

The Reading team is looking to shift the balance of power from professionals to families as a route to further improving outcomes and efficiency. This means focusing on radical solutions that will tackle the real needs of families as an alternative to traditional service responses.

Costly services and the way professionals work often reinforces some families' belief that they are not able to make a positive difference to their own children's outcomes.

Early in the Transforming Early Years work it became clear that the 'external locus of control' was the biggest issue for the families in greatest need of support. This was reinforced by findings of

*“We had a huge shock when we interviewed 32 families (92 children) and none of them had ever paid for childcare. Many parents are doing part-time jobs but they all use sisters and aunts etc. We just hadn't realised that the white working class culture is such that they don't put their children into paid childcare.”*

### Ethnographic Research

Working with and listening to parents and children in the community offers a fresh perspective and new insights on old problems.



Reading's **Ethnographic Research** which provided alarming details of families' poor social capital and showed clearly that they weren't getting the services they wanted or needed.

The team realised that ineffective or inconsistent services lead to lack of engagement, and that biased or flawed professional attitudes can contribute to families' feelings of powerlessness. They began to understand that their perceptions of families being 'hard to reach' and of poor parenting were resulting in families' real needs being unidentified. There was real desire in the team to grasp the opportunity to change things, and to think about how they could provide what families want rather than what professionals tell them they need.

## New Solutions

The Reading team's aim is to offer radically different early years services that reduce the need for longer-term and 'higher end' intervention. This means changing the systems and processes around service delivery to ensure that the families who need the most support are offered solutions that meet their needs. The team is determined that services must be designed and delivered very differently by using volunteer involvement to support a more family-centric service.

To make these aims a reality, the team has developed linked ideas of a **Community Café** and **Expert Parent Club** as a route to de-stigmatising access to co-located services. In time they would like to see a local community building offering a range of services and a café in one location. It would be radically different from the current Children's Centre - run by volunteers and a place where families feel comfortable to be, play, and eat during the day and evening, without fear of judgement. This is the long-term goal.

In the short term the Expert Parent Club will increase families' social capital and self-esteem, awareness of and take-up of services and will enable parents to offer high quality support to their peers.

Together these interventions will provide training and volunteering opportunities for parents, whilst enabling professionals to learn more about the needs of families and spot at-risk children early.

These will be evidence informed, in particular by Feinstein's work on predictive screening, and will enable families to develop skills in five key areas that have been shown to improve resilience.

## Looking to the future...

*"Staff do a good job now but we want it to be a more equal partnership, so that they will say it is more exciting to work with families, more rewarding, to see the strengths and protective factors of families being utilised and built upon."*

## Different...

This new approach assumes that control over problems and their solutions will rest with parents and community members.

Professionals will seek to provide an environment that will enable families to flourish, rather than come in and 'fix' things. The new service will be more organic; led by parents, constantly changing, and improving, flexing and responding directly to the community's real needs.

As it grows the new service has the potential to subvert the current Children's Centre model in which professionals try to bring parents into the Centre to receive support. Instead, peer-to-peer supporters at the Centre will work with trained volunteers who will call in professional support when it is required.

## Better...

The new opportunities will reach those families most in need who at the moment are not taking up professionally-run services.

By providing training and supervision the volunteer programme will build parents' capacity to support one another, by being a welcoming presence, buddying and in some cases offering more intensive support. Receiving support will thus become less stigmatising and more relational, increasing social capital in the community.

### **A new role for parents**

- In three years, all 13 Children's Centres in the Borough will be community-owned, with parents managing them and far fewer professionals working in them.
- Expert parents in the Centres will 'pull in' professional support when it is needed.
- Parents will run courses with a valid evidence base and staff will have a greater role in supporting, training and advising volunteers. Staff will also engage in designing, delivering and evaluating services, and have a greater leadership and co-ordination role in relation to individuals and services.

### **A fresh start for local families**

- There will be new customers, both a greater number and a greater range of families using the Children's Centre.
- Families will value peer support and will perceive services, such as parenting programmes, as universally available and relevant to them.
- There will be improved outcomes for children including transition to school and at Foundation Stage.

### **Next steps**

The team in the pilot centre is very committed and has huge capacity to change and a willingness to learn, and beyond this group there is a lot of interest in the work.

The team is currently negotiating the relocation of birth registrations to a pilot Centre and screening via the midwifery service is due to start in April. Drawing on support from Community Development Officers, The Children's Action team and the pilot Centre, the team will be prototyping elements of their new service in January and February.

Children's Centres have been used to operating with a high degree of autonomy so there is work to be done to mobilise collective commitment to the Transforming Early Years ideas. In addition, some of the Centres sit within schools where headteachers have negative professional perspectives about parents.

### **Interim case study, Spring 2011.**

### **Lower cost...**

Many parents will be supported by peers relying far less on expensive professional roles, some of which will be decommissioned or redeployed.

Increased use of the new service by families will reduce the unit cost of provision.

Early intervention and improved outcomes will reduce the need for high cost interventions such as speech and language therapy, childhood obesity and looked-after children.