

# Radical Efficiency in Early Years Settings: 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 Prescott 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.

*"We provide a good service for those who choose to use it but we are not well known to those who don't. I used to think that we should do more - but now I know we should do different."*

## 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.

## Progress made towards implementation

### Making co-production a reality

The team in Knowsley is putting co-production at the heart of the new service design and delivery. Children's Centre staff have been working closely with Family Voices - a group of parents (about nine parents with 15 more going through CRB checks currently) who had formed just prior to the start of the Transforming Early Years Programme. The Children's Centre Parent and Community Outreach Officer was bringing the group together and was able to reorientate it to the direction in which the Knowsley TEY project was heading. *"When we really got a grip on TEY, we realised we could invest time and resources in Family Voices, they could be a vehicle to develop and it was what they wanted as well so it made sense."* Since being involved in the project, Family Voices has strengthened and grown in partnership with the Children's Centre. They have received training and are now facilitating stay and play sessions every week, as well as attending other outreach, undertaking fundraising and developing an informal communications strategy.

The team has identified six areas of work for co-production that will be set out in a service-level agreement between the Children's Centre and Family Voices, which will become a public limited company with its own constitution and have charitable status:

- Remove barriers to access.
- Support and provision are differentiated according to need.
- Increased school-readiness.
- Reduced social isolation.

## 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 utilization 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.

- Improvement in child health.
- Growth in community-located provision.

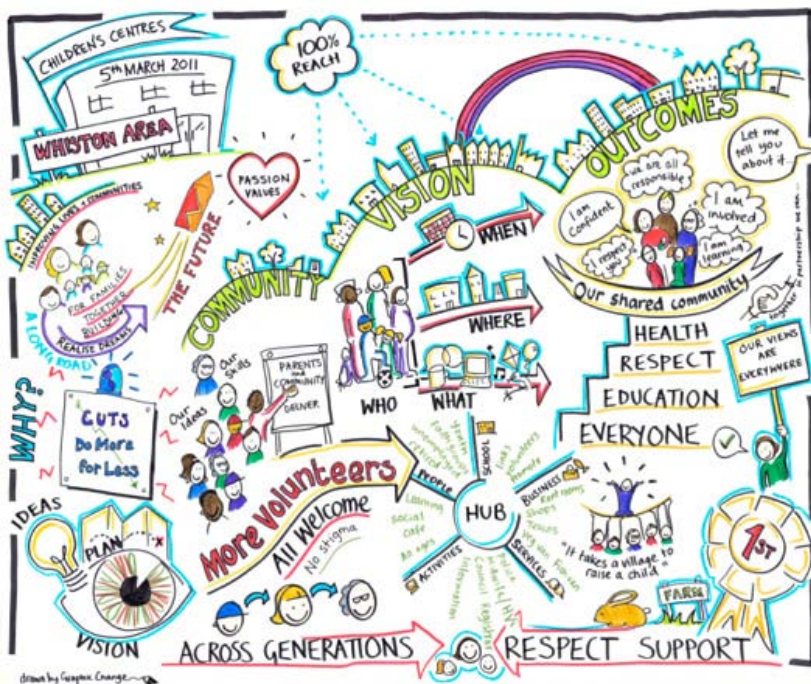
### Working with and supporting volunteers

Children’s centre professionals have valued the opportunity to work directly with parent volunteers within Family Voices. In particular, the volunteers helped the wider team define the new vision for the service.

The vision statement the volunteers came up with was: *‘The People’s Centre is a place to meet friends and make friends, to pass on your skills and knowledge and gain new ones along the way. We are here to improve the lives of every person in the community, regardless of age.’* This vision was cemented during a session with staff, the Dad’s club and Family Voices that was facilitated by Innovation Unit. The output was a visual illustration of their vision (see Figure 1) the outcome was an appreciation from staff for the volunteers and the time they were freely giving to this work.

*“The practitioners came up with high-level visionary stuff. Family Voices did it in ten minutes; they had nailed it and what it was that we were going to do, and the practitioners just couldn’t do it.”*

**Figure 1:** The Family Voices vision



### Adapting and developing professional support

In the future more services will be delivered by local people and as a result those services will be more ‘in tune with the needs of the local community’. Co-producing these services with Family Voices will require a new staffing which focuses on children’s centre staff delivering some targeted provision, but also becoming enablers as opposed to providers. Staff will be largely responsible for high quality volunteer training and providing ongoing support and supervision to Family Voices. The aim is that ‘both parties will feel a shared responsibility for high quality services’.

The Knowsley team has looked carefully at staffing and restructuring and the kinds of roles that will be needed. Due to local restructuring of Children’s Centres, the team hasn’t yet identified a firm staffing structure but they have a number of worked-up options. One option would

## Prototyping

Trying out elements of the new service as a way of testing assumptions and answering questions about what works.

Prototyping with Family Voices helped the team prioritise what they wanted to change in the new service. For example they didn’t like how the Children’s Centre registration form was laid out because it asked for too much detail and put people off registering. So they created a simpler first contact form and tried out lots of versions of it with parents.

Prototyping also helped the team identify that there was limited demand for a planned new element of the service – a registrar based at the Children’s Centre.

### Kelly – Family Voices parent volunteer:

*“When she first started she was quiet in the group. In the last few months she has come out of her shell and she has so many ideas.*

*Kelly has been instrumental in fundraising – she doesn’t drive but has a pram. She has been to local businesses, the chip shop and bingo night, to get freebies to raise money. She also worked tirelessly to get gifts for the tombola.”*

*Her confidence has really grown. She is really passionate about what she is doing.”*

remove the equivalent of two full-time professional staff as a result of commissioning Family Voices. Six business and administration posts would be replaced with four Customer and Facilities Officers. All new posts would have flexible job descriptions so they were able to adapt to meet the needs of the service.

This is an opportunity for management to consider the staffing needs. In some cases it may be that local people can deliver services better than paid staff and at less cost. Not only is the efficiency attractive, but the opportunity to provide local people with work experience means that the Children's Centre will be investing directly in the community.

### Developing targets and measures of success

As well as the areas for co-production set out above, the Knowsley team has identified a number of targets for their Transforming Early Years work in the coming years.

A key aim is to reach many more families than children's centres do currently:

- In 2009-10 Whiston Area Children's Centres reached 397 children, a total of 22.7 per cent. Through transforming early years it is expected that reach will increase to 75+ per cent by 2012-13.
- In 2009-10, 934 children were registered with Whiston Area Children's Centre, a total of 53 per cent. Through transforming early years it is expected that registration will increase to 90 per cent by 2012-13.

The project also specifically aims to increase reach amongst 'sceptical non-attendees' and will measure changes across two super-output areas with high levels of families in this category.

The project will increase the number of volunteers and time spent volunteering:

- In 2009-10 there were two volunteers who volunteered between 2-15 hours per week (total approx. 220 hours). In 2010-11, 12 volunteers volunteered between 2-24 hours per week (total approx. 1,840 hours). It is expected that in 2012-12 there will be an active number of 50 volunteers at any one time and that they will volunteer for at least two hours per week, totaling at least 5,000 hours.

### Assessing efficiency

The Knowsley team gathered a range of data in order that a cost analysis of their new service could be undertaken. The headlines from this analysis show that:

	Existing service	Redesigned service, year 1	Difference	Difference (%)
<b>The redesigned service will cost less:</b>	£509,261	£442,150	-£67,111	-13%
<b>And yet reach more families:</b>	278	649	371	133%
<b>Together, this results in a reduction of unit cost:</b>	£1,832	£681	-£1,151	-63%

### Where next?

*"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

*"We looked at the old budget broken into staff salaries and the different strands of work (child development and learning, family support, outreach and engagement, and the business and administration side).*

*We looked at the strands and how much was spent and what was needed and how Family Voices will help each of the strands. For example we didn't assign a budget to reach and engagement - because Family Voices would be commissioned to do that."*

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.

### **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 for the project**

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 utilizing 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.

### **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 services that are 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.