

## **12. DCDP Case Study: Volunteer Dundee, Discoverin' Families**

Initially, a project manager and two project workers worked in four different areas in Dundee and engaged with parents to explore ways to provide peer support to other parents.

Our approach was to set up information hubs in the communities, staffed, where possible, by trained volunteer parents who could identify with the parents looking for help – as they had similar experiences. This peer to peer support was expected to reduce some of the barriers to parents accessing support. However, this method had limited success as the relationship building was not there in this model. The staff and parent volunteers looked at other ways to engage with the 'hard to reach' parents we were aiming at and a series of engagement activities was devised in co-production with our current volunteers.

When funding from the Council was reduced, we undertook a complete overhaul of the service. We reduced the staffing to two part-time project workers, one working in Charleston and the other in the North East.

In Charleston, it was clear that there was a lack of family opportunities in the evenings and at weekends. Using the Gala day, the Discoverin' Families worker engaged with local families by offering take away bread-making bags in return for a family ticket to a magic show. Seventy family members attended the magic show and, at the end, a feedback form was used to explore other activities that might be of interest, and how families could take part.

Beyond this, we have consulted parents about what life is like for them, using family fun quizzes with prizes and a multiple-choice questionnaire exploring the positive and negative aspects of being a working parent. This revealed a high level of stress, but also recognition that work was a positive example for children. Some parents added comments about difficulties in securing childcare and the financial costs of childcare.

Also in Charleston, work at a parent/carer and toddler group has led, in time, to parents taking more ownership of the group through planning sessions and deciding what information and support they need, such as sessions on positive parenting and home safety.

Overall, we have found that the delivery of sessions and engagement of parents has helped to decrease social isolation. Parents are encouraged to be the leaders of change, using an asset-based approach which involves each parent, and highlights their individual skills. Parents are creating peer support networks which, in turn, are increasing their socialisation.

At the same time, staff are addressing confidence-building as part of sessions. Parents are reporting increased levels of self-esteem because the project is recognising their needs, and addressing gaps in local provision.

The Discoverin' Families North East Project works in partnership with One Parent Family Scotland (OPFS) who refer parents onto Discoverin' Families to further their capacity and network of support. Beyond this partnership, Discoverin' Families has successfully engaged parents who live in the North East of Dundee through presence at local groups and events, and speaking with parents to promote interest.

Meetings have created an opportunity for staff and parents to build relationships, essential for continuous participation and group support. Staff have facilitated conversations exploring parent's needs and skills, building confidence and self-esteem. Parents are creating support networks and are sharing experiences in a safe environment. Parents are reporting an increased level of self-esteem and confidence: *"I am looking forward to being involved and helping"*. The group has decreased levels of isolation and improved parent's socialisation.

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