

# Parent Play Champion Network

## The Context

- \* **Families are important partners and at the heart of all that we do.** We work hard to find ways to actively engage parents/carers in all aspects of our work and understand issues they face and develop solutions that work locally.
- \* The **Early Years Working Group (EYWG) in Longsight, Manchester** consists of local practitioners and parents who are working together to explore the needs of local families to better understand the local context, common themes, barriers, key issues, and support available for families and children in improving children's **speech, language and communication and social and emotional development outcomes.**
- \* To increase parental voice and engagement, Parent Play Champions in the EYWG co-designed **The Parent Play Champion Network (PPCN)** with Save the Children Manchester Team.
- \* PPCN will raise issues and needs about them and their families and EYWG will be one of the mechanisms for raising awareness and exploring opportunities for improvement and change. EYWG has a responsibility to consider and respond to issues and topics raised by PPCN.
- \* The role of Parent Play Champions has been continuously strengthened by bringing parent voices into decision making around early years and play in the community and services.

Working with **15** parents/carers in the Parent Play Champion Network.

Working with **5** parent champions in the EYWG

Working with **13** local organisations and service teams in the EYWG.

## Our Aims

Create a safe space for parents/carers to talk about what matters to them, connect with other parents, and become confident to support their children's learning and development.

Support and empower parents/carers to participate at all levels by providing different opportunities to get involved, support other parents/carers in their own progression and play a vital role in helping shape services and support

Develop parental involvement and engagement practice within the community that promotes parental voice, confidence, and upskilling.

## What we've heard and learnt

### PARENTS FELT

- \* Listened to and included since they have an active role and participation in the EYWG agenda and meetings
- \* Valued for their contribution and saw first-hand that their ideas and suggestions were being responded to and positive steps were being taken from these discussions
- \* Empowered to find ways to progress and develop the network and themselves with local practitioners

### PARENTS SAID

- \* Having a safe and equal space to say what they need and want was an empowering and motivating experience.
- \* They don't get any time to look after themselves and this impacts on their ability to play. The network provides a social and learning environment for them and their children.
- \* They struggle to find and access information, services and support in the local area and heavily relies on word by mouth.

### PARENTS WANT

- \* Skills, training and opportunities for their own personal development and progression e.g., ESOL classes, digital skills...
- \* "Me time" - a time for themselves that positively contributes to their mental health and wellbeing
- \* Information to be accessible, user- and family- friendly and possibly translated to local languages.

## What we did

### CHILDCARE

- \* Provided childcare provision so that parents/carers can actively participate in sessions, workshops, and meetings such as EYWG and PPCN
- \* Worked with creche workers to provide meaningful and differentiated play activities that meet the individual needs of the children in the PPCN

### LISTENING AND LEARNING

- \* Facilitated workshops on listening and responding to parents/carers' needs
- \* Reflecting and understanding key themes that came out from these workshops
- \* Working with and learning from local grassroots organisations and service teams who work in the local community

### ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION

- \* Translated play tips into community languages and ensured that resources such as home learning leaflets were user- and family-friendly.
- \* Encouraged Parent Play Champion to share information and services with other parents/carers
- \* Supported the launch of Manchester's first family hub by talking to other parents and practitioners about what services and support they would like to see.
- \* Working with EYWG to ensure that information is being shared regularly with the PPCN and Parent Play Champions are sharing this information to their peers
- \* Consulting with PPCN on how and where we share information – going to where the parents are.

### SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING

- \* Providing incentives as a recognition of parents' participation
- \* Strengths-based approach by upskilling
- \* Participating in Innovation projects and developing a clearer understanding of the link between play and learning
- \* Including parents/carers from planning, designing, to delivery of workshops and activities to gain insights, helps parents to grow their confidence, and to find their voice
- \* Providing **Early Years Grants** and **Gift-in-Kind**

## Our Impact

### For Parents/Carers and Children

#### Impact on mental health and wellbeing

Parents value having time for themselves, and childcare being provided. This gives time to socialise with their peers in a positive and nurturing environment.

#### Impact on self-confidence and self-esteem

Parents feeling empowered to share their ideas and opinions. Parents' voice contributed to decision-making.

#### Impact on children's learning and development

Parents share that attending PPCN contributed to their children's development of social and emotional skills as well as speech, language, and communication.

#### Increasing parents peer-to-peer support

Parents making new friends, recruiting other parents, showing their support, and inspiring one another to make their voices heard.

#### Increased access to services and support

Parents are accessing services and support that they haven't accessed before or may not be aware of. Parents were signposted to a range of services.

*"This is a time for myself. I'm just happy to be out even for just 2 hours a month and talk to other mothers."*

*"Whenever I give some suggestions or opinion about my needs or the needs of my kids they listen and appreciate the things I have to say."*

*"I like attending because I learn a lot of new information and support. I like meeting other parents and at the same time practising my English."*

*"I felt like, okay, what I have to say is important and that is not just my feeling – it is the feeling of all the parents."*

*"My son said he likes being here. I can see how his speech are developing. He's starting to talk a lot more and his behaviour is changing for the better."*

*"This is for our children. For their future. That's why I think it's so important that we join and talk to the professionals."*

## For Practitioners

### Impact on practice and approaches

Practitioners shared that gathering parents' insights is one of their areas of focus. Sharing our good practices on co-design and innovation approaches and listening events contributed to practitioners developing their own inclusive practices and workshops in the local community. We are continuously providing practical support to Early Years organisations in the local area.

### Impact on partnership work

Reciprocal relationships are continuing to develop and strengthen through the EYWG and PPCN. Continuing to work together to listen and respond to parents' needs and sharing learning and experiences on parental engagement and progression.

## What's Next

- \* Continue to expand the PPCN and EYW and listen to the voice of families to support the integration of play-based learning across the system.
- \* Continue to invest in PPCN to ensure their strong voice is heard in early years forums and is continuously shaping local services and support.
- \* Continue to work in partnership with local organisations and families to **listen, understand and test out** new ideas to improve speech, language, and communication and social and emotional outcomes for children aged 0 to 3.
- \* Set up action learning events, workshops, and trainings with local workforce to inform and embed what works when working with families, and what it takes to create conditions for parent empowerment and progression.