



# School's Offer and Engagement

UPDATE REPORT

FAMILY VOICE PETERBOROUGH PARENT REP TEAM

## **Introduction**

During 2019 to 2020 Financial Year Family Voice Peterborough conducted a range of activities to facilitate engagement with settings and also ensure delivery against a small grant for work entitled 'Schools Offer'. The work entailed coffee mornings, SEN information report work, training, sign posting, involvement in the SENCo Network and provision of information and advice to settings and parent carers.

### Schools Offer

The schools offer was a funded pilot devised to explore ways of developing sustainability for the forum, by way of utilising forum expertise across a range of areas as a costed model with income generation built in. Schools were targeted to be part of the pilot to access the services on offer at a zero cost in return for helping to develop the services to be income generation ready and providing testimonials of the impact of the services on setting level parent carer and professional relationships and participation.

The premise behind the original proposal was built on anecdotal evidence that kept on re-occurring through forum work with parent-carers. The forum has seen a growing number of parent-carers who are dissatisfied with their relationships with the school their child or young person is attending. Schools in Peterborough are experiencing considerable financial difficulties in being able to meet their statutory duty to children with SEND due to a decrease in revenue support from central government. The impact of this is that trust and relationships are breaking down between parent-carers and educational settings to the point that the systems are being viewed as more adversarial and parents are increasingly feeling the need to fight to gain resources for their children from an ever shrinking pot. The position of the forum has been one of concern about the breakdown of these relationships, at the same time as also facing an internal need to achieve sustainability.

The pilot was broken down into three elements training, SEN information report guidance and coffee mornings/ micro-forums. The settings were able to choose which elements that wanted to gain access to.

Family Voice Peterborough has been further developing the School's Offer in order to have better relationships with schools, their parent carers and improve educational outcomes for children with SEND.

During the period of work covered in this report FVP have engaged with over 10 different settings.

The schools offer programme can be found on the FVP website [www.familyvoice.org](http://www.familyvoice.org)

## **Method**

Since February 2023 FVP has sent out hard copies of letters together with flyers and booklets to approximately 86 schools within the Peterborough area. This was done to introduce FVP and offer the schools engagement opportunities through coffee mornings, events, SEN information report review work and other support. The return rate using this method was very low therefore we needed to change how we make initial contact with school's Headteachers and SENCOs.

Peterborough City Council SENI Team has helped us by providing information about whether the schools are maintained or if they belong an Academy Trust. This helped FVP to build the mailing lists and understand the parameters of their work. FVP now has the current information up to date, however this is something that will need to be re-visited on regular bases due to the constant changes in the system. From May 2023 FVP representatives have been contacting schools via telephone to update the current system with information on SENCO contacts/changes etc. This has been followed by introductory emails and links to our website so they can read all about Family Voice and the offer delivered to the schools and their parent carers.

This method of contacting the settings within the Peterborough area has proven to be far better and the response rate has increased dramatically. FVP is now working closely with 13 schools and their Parent Carers and is also in contact with others. FVP is also engaging with SENCOs through SENCO networks and training sessions delivered by the PCC which helps to improve engagements with schools.

## **Discussion**

### Progress

The table below demonstrates which schools we have engaged with, how many parent carers from each school as well as the outcomes for the parent carers (if relevant).

Setting	Notes	School Offer Requested/ Purchased	Meetings Occurred/ To Take Place	Number of Parents engaged with	Outcomes for parent carers	Funded directly (fee) or via PCC grant
<b>Wittering</b>	no response after video meeting					
<b>Northborough</b>	First meeting held on 10 <sup>th</sup> July.	Coffee Mornings	1	5	Parents were able to self-refer to short breaks and SENDIASS	Funded by PCC
<b>Peakirk-cum-Glinton</b>	Initial meetings held, and work programmed in.	yes - coffee mornings	First Coffee morning 18/09/2023			Funded by PCC
<b>Werrington Primary</b>	Initial video conference, they are interested but have difficulty getting parents to engage, can offer voucher incentive, waiting for September dates		Dates to be confirmed in September			Funded by PCC
<b>Orton Wistow, Nene Valley and Woodston Primary schools</b>	Have joined together and formed a small trust (OWN Trust) and they were interested in our offer -Sset up 6 dates in Sept/Oct 23. Deliver 1 morning and 1 afternoon session at each of the school's.	Coffee mornings	First meeting will take place 19/09/2023			£300 paid (need to check if the invoice has been paid)

<b>Ken Stimpson</b>	has bought into our School's Offer, however we have had some difficulties with contact and putting some dates into the calendar to deliver the service	SEN Information Report	Awaiting the dates suitable for the SENCO			£600 paid for SEN information review
<b>West Town Primary School</b>	We have had a meeting and they are interested in setting up coffee mornings. Waiting for further information.		Attended their Summer Fair	10	Parents of newly diagnosed children needed more information on the services available	
<b>All Saints Primary School</b>	We have attended two coffee mornings now and have set up further 4 to run throughout next year from September	yes - coffee mornings	2	7	Self Referral to incontinence services for 3 families; families have been referred to the relevant services	Funded by PCC
<b>Eye Primary School</b>	Initial meeting set for Sept 18th at 1pm					Funded by PCC

## General themes from Schools engagement

- Lack of Family Voice awareness from school staff and some SENCOs.
- Awareness of the support available with SEN reports, signposting, building the bridge between parent carers and professionals.
- Awareness of parent support that Family Voice offers through trips, signposting, parent carer hub sessions and training.
- Lack of awareness of how engagement with parent carers can help them to improve the services and, in turn, outcomes for their children and young people.

## Barriers

There have been certain barriers that we had to overcome in order to improve the engagement with SENCOs. Because school office staff were unaware of FVP they were not always passing the information (meaning our leaflets) to the relevant people and can be very reluctant to share the information (e.g., who the SENCO is). This has proven to be the main barrier to engage with schools, however it became apparent that the more face-to-face contact we have, it then changes people's perspective. This led to changing the way Parent Reps engage with schools in order to improve the outcomes.

## Outcomes/ Difference

Since the start of this project, this academic year have hit the target for engaging with over 10 schools and will continue to build on these connections to:

- Make sure parent/carers know where to go if they have any questions;
- Make sure parent/carers know what support there is and to sign post them in the right direction;
- Build relationships and trust between settings and parent/carers across Peterborough
- Raise awareness of Family Voice in the school environment as a good informative service
- Provide evidence of what parents' needs are and feed it back to the relevant services to the LA and DofE

Some evidence of the outcomes achieved to date; the 'so what' are as follows:

### **All Saint's primary school – case study**

Family Voice Representatives had 2 coffee mornings at All Saint's school with another 4 dotted throughout the next Academic Year. The demographics of this schools is very diverse, with a lot of families classed as Seldom Heard – this provided us with an excellent opportunity to engage with them as they may not have gone to an event in a different setting. Although the setting is very welcoming to their parent carers, due to the language and other barriers, they struggle to engage with some of them. The SENCO also felt that a lot of them could benefit from some external services, however she was unsure of what other help was available to the parent carers and how to access it.

It is important to note, that some of the Seldom Heard parents, albeit a little disconnected at first, have found our coffee mornings very useful and continued to engage with FVP during the next coffee morning. The increase in confidence means that they will not only feel less

isolated, but will be able to join FVP at other activities, access the help they need through other services, which, in turn, will improve outcomes for their children and families and them a voice that could help shape current and future services.

Narrative on issues/ themes mentioned

- Little knowledge of NHS funded nappies/pull ups for children with SEND as parents are currently paying for them. All Saints have made 3 referrals since our first meeting. This will help parent carers access the right size nappies/pull-ups and will alleviate some of their financial burden that comes with sourcing their own nappies.
- Parents struggling with sleep patterns for their children and are unaware of any help available to them
- Parents with worries about the SALT services available to those children who are currently awaiting diagnoses.
- In order for parent carers to feel less isolated and more informed, FVP has shared a copy of SEND newsletter which gives information on groups, activities, trips and support over the summer holidays

### **What difference FVP coffee mornings made to schools (Feedback from SENCOs):**

*Working with Family Voice has been very important for our school over the last academic year. It has provided opportunities for parents to know there is a network of people they can talk to and ask questions to; we have learnt lots as a school community about the resources and services that are just at our doorstep. Online courses have also increased the confidence of parents. I look forward to working with them more in the future!*

*Giving the parents a contact and highlighting that they can access support for their children. The parents gave very positive feedback to school staff about the session. Thank you very much.*

*Creating a space for parents to meet others, share worries, questions, being aware of specialist services having someone to answer questions SENCO/school cannot.*

As you can see from the feedback above, SENCOs value our input and they feel we make a difference to their parent carers. SENCOs have highlighted how difficult it is to know the information that parent carers so desperately need, whether it is about what their children and their families are entitled to, where do go and seek help and support when the need arises, or what are other services available to them (e.g. carer's assessments, nappies, day opportunities for their children, family breaks etc). This information can sometimes be hard to find and as SENCOs feel already overwhelmed with their busy roles, they welcome us to their schools to provide the necessary information and help their parent carers.

### **What difference FVP coffee mornings made to Parent Carers (Parents verbal feedback):**

*My English is not very good, and I worry people don't understand me and that's why I don't speak a lot. Thank you for making me feel better about it, being patient and listening to me. I will speak with SENDIASS and use the DLA guide you told me about. If I need more information, I know who to call. Thank you for that.*

*I didn't know that there were other services available for my child, like short breaks, direct payments and many other organisations that can provide my child with some other activities during the weekends and school holidays. I didn't even know that the 0-25 Disability Team existed! My head is buzzing with all the new information you have given to us.*

As can be seen from the information above, parent carers are not always aware about the services available to their children and families. They often feel 'stuck' in their own world and feel as if no one cares about them. They feel very empowered when finding out the information about different services and always tell us they wish they knew about it sooner. Parent carers feel more empowered to seek the help they need; they have better knowledge about their entitlement and feel relieved that the services they thought do not exist are actually available to them.

### Objective

FVP will continue building on the positive connections to increase awareness, build the bridge between parent carers and professionals, ensure that parent carers from Seldom Heard Communities are able to have their voice heard and feel more empowered to advocate for their children. This will help to improve outcomes not only for school setting, parent carers and their children.

This is an ongoing project. Peterborough's population is forever increasing and constant changes in the system means that FVP need to:

- Actively contact schools on a regular basis through emails, telephone calls, dropping flyers and packs into schools to initiate a 'face to face' contact to raise awareness of Family Voice and the Schools Offer.
- Build positive relationships with Schools' reception and office staff so that they understand the value of FVP and are willing to pass the information to the relevant department.
- Building relationships with reception and office staff at schools and getting information through to the SEND departments is vital. Forwarding on relevant up to date information and newsletters.
- Raise the profile of Family Voice generally - to get knowledge of the Schools Offer out and to engage schools and parents via coffee hubs/micro forums so everyone is working together to improve the services as well as outcomes for their children and young people.
- Continue attending SEND conferences, SENCO networks and training programmes to raise awareness.

There are a few projects from the local authority which FVP could use to bring the many support services together i.e. the new booklet which is about to be launched and also the new posters and flyers which will list FVP – this could be delivered into schools along with our packs. Also, copies of our up to date FVP directory which list support groups (this is currently being updated).



FVP would like to achieve, the following outcomes:

Parents;

- to make them feel they are not alone in their child's journey
- to make them aware of different services available to them and their families
- to share experiences and strategies to enjoy school life
- to encourage parent participation in further coffee mornings/meet ups, engagement using different avenues, for example trips and activities, Seldom Heard gatherings.
- parent carers feel more confident, less isolated and are informed of the services available to their children and families

Settings;

- to create a safe space for parents to meet up and discuss any SEN related difficulties
- to make parents feel more confident in acquiring any services available to their child
- to build positive relationships with their parent carers in order to provide the best outcomes for their children

### **Recommendations for internal FVP procedures:**

- Having a general list of items and a toolkit for Parent Carers of topics to be covered over the 6 coffee morning meetings - this gives Parent Carer Reps a good idea how to proceed, general ground rules and how to close a situation down to keep to time and sign post further for discussion outside of the meeting.
- Have a system in place on how to deal with difficult conversations with Parents who are struggling to cope.
- Have a bank of information/support groups, events for children of different abilities and PCC Information hub website QR codes to give to parents if requested - all parent carer reps should have one and this information should be updated every 3/6 months.
- Current updates from the LA via newsletters to give to schools/parent carers to help inform them of local events and activities/trips, training sessions.
- To set up forms with QR codes as well as hard copies so that parent carers would be able to feedback their experiences and concerns.
- Capture as much data as possible through surveys and parent carer feedback forms to build up a bigger picture of areas of concern (building on our Topics of Importance) that might need to be addressed further.

### **Next steps**

- Continue contacting schools during the next academic year using the method that has proved to be most beneficiary.
- To provide the information that parent carers need in the most accessible way, be it verbally, email links, QR codes or leaflets.
- Promote engagement with FVP during events and activities which in turn will help to tackle parental loneliness.
- Collect data and concerns through surveys in order to build a bigger picture of wider Peterborough's population needs.
- Regular reviews of the school's offer to ensure it is accessible and delivers what parent carers need.