



**PARENT CARERS TOGETHER**



**Bournemouth Christchurch Poole**

# PARENT CHAMPION

**FROM PROJECT TO  
PERMANENCY**

**TIME FRAME JULY 2021-2023**

**PREPARED BY  
ALEXIA TOUGH**

# PROJECT RATIONALE

## *Professional & Relatable Support*

### Project rationale

The rationale for the project was based on evidence that both SENDIASS4BCP and PCT were experiencing situations where parent/carers were unsure, confused and unaware of services and support available to them locally and nationally. A relatable professional helper with first-hand experience of the challenges parent/carers faced regarding SEND was deemed an appropriate role to meet the needs of the group. A listening and signposting role evolved into what we now know as a trained and supported Parent Champion. A volunteer who remains impartial and listens and shares factual information regarding the SEND Local Offer and appropriate support networks.

The project plan's design was to deliver a peer-to-peer model that engaged and informed parent/carers. Providing effective information, support, advice and guidance to those who were finding their experience of SEND a difficult situation to navigate. The offer looked to bridge a gap and empower parents/carers to advocate effectively for their child through gaining a greater understanding of the graduated response and relevant support services accessible in their community and nationally. Longer term outcomes hoped to improve emotional well-being for families and educational outcomes for children and young people through supporting their parent/carer with timely and relevant information and support.

The project plan's overarching aim to improve parent/carers knowledge of local and national services in BCP for SEND and to provide a listening space for sharing worries and concerns linked to their SEND experiences.

Specific aims set out in the plan included:

- Increasing parental involvement in their child's learning
- Increasing opportunities for parent/carers to access SEND information in order to support their child
- Delivery of transition information sessions to parent/carers, particularly targeting the harder to reach
- Improve channels of communication between home and school
- Gather information/recurring themes and evaluate
- Establish an infrastructure to support emerging need
- Ensure CPD opportunities are made available to volunteers with access to accredited training
- Ensure volunteers are recognised and celebrated for their contribution as part of the BCP schools and college workforce

The report looks to examine the effectiveness of the peer based model over the course of the project life span, considering implementation, delivery and outcomes.

# FROM PROJECT TO PERMANENCY

*Making a difference for parents and carers across the BCP community*

## **Implementation**

The Parent Champion Co-ordinator was appointed in July 2021 on a 2 year fixed term contract of 22 hours a week, 52 weeks per annum. Key milestones completed in the first 6 months played a decisive role in embedding the project into the local schools' landscape.

Tasks completed:

- design and completion of a minimum standard training package
- review of operational policies making changes and adaptations where necessary
- establishing relationships and partnerships across BCP relevant in supporting the offer
- recruitment of first phase of volunteers
- delivery of training pathway for first phase of volunteers
- matching of volunteers to schools enabling monthly sessions to commence

The role faced a number of challenges in its infancy. Buy-in from schools to allow explanation of the model was varied in receptiveness. The pace of setting up the provision was influenced by recruitment and training of volunteers and the willingness of schools to work in partnership. Those that welcomed the nature of the project saw it as a valuable way to support children and families with SEND without further stretching of their limited resources and time.

## **Project Evaluation**

It has been a challenge to quantify how valuable the service has been as there are no key indicators to measure parent/carer progress after engagement with the service. What has been captured through voluntary 360 feedback from Parent Champions, parent/carers and schools are the softer outcomes. We are looking at ways to capture measurable outcomes in the longer term and are aware there are many factors that influence a parent/carer's decision making of SEND.

Quantitative output data has recorded the numbers of sessions offered, parents attending sessions and how well sessions have been received and nature of information sought.

Due to the take up of sessions and overwhelmingly positive feedback received, a case was put forward to BCP for permanency of the offer in March 2023. After careful consideration the project was granted permanence from July 2023.

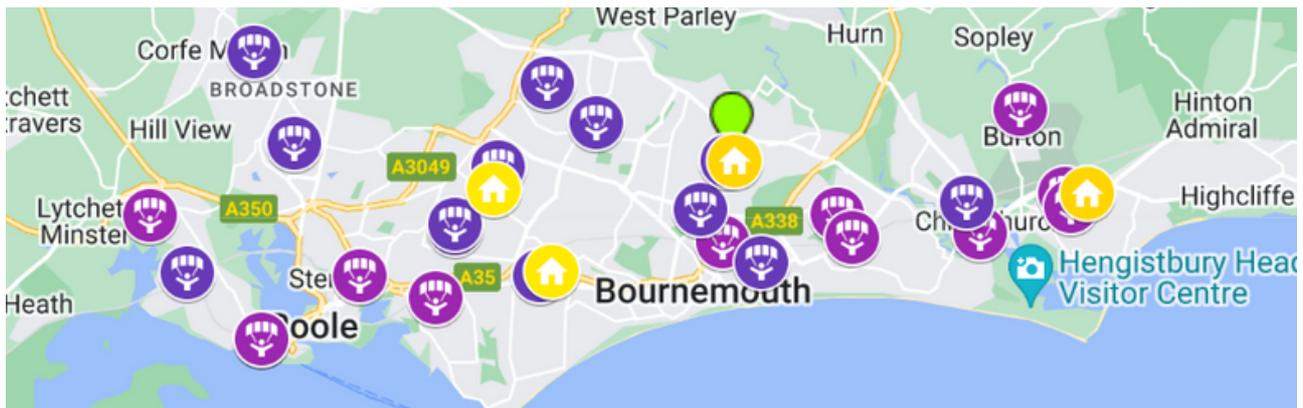
We would like to thank you for all the support for our families over the last year. We would highly recommend every school take advantage of this great offer, which supports families and schools to meet the needs of all children. The organisation and the logistics of this service have been easy to manage from a school resource point of view and make this a highly sustainable project that can reach many families.

## WHERE CAN YOU FIND US?

*The reach has doubled . 12 schools in the first year to 25 schools in the second year.*

*We have more schools in discussion for September 2023.*

*We have also supported sessions in family hubs from 0-19 yrs.*



### 1ST YEAR OF PROJECT

-  The Grange School
-  Avonwood Primary School
-  Twin Sails Infant School and Nursery
-  Hamworthy Park Junior School
-  Burton Primary School
-  St James' C Of E Primary School
-  Twynham School
-  Upton Junior School
-  Longfleet Primary School
-  Malmesbury Park Primary School
-  Somerford Primary Community School
-  Baden Powell & St Peters C Of E Middle School

### 2ND YEAR OF PROJECT

-  Manorside Academy
  -  Hillbourne Primary School
  -  Bayside Academy
  -  Corfe Hills School
  -  Livingstone Road Infant School
  -  Livingstone Road Junior School
  -  Victoria School
  -  Christchurch Junior School
  -  Linwood School
  -  Bethany CE VA Junior School
  -  Queens Park Academy
  -  Elm Academy
  -  Kingsleigh Primary School
-  Branksome Outreach Centre
  -  Rossmore Family Hub
  -  Somerford Arc Drop In
  -  Queen's park Children Centre

We have found our Parent Champion an extremely valuable asset to our parents. Parents shared they found speaking to a Parent Champion very helpful and informative.  
"It's so nice to talk to a parent that gets it"

Clare Kent, Family Worker, Longfleet Primary School

## *Engagement with 199 families*

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With an experienced group of Parent Champions who have an overwhelming desire to support parent/carers the project has engaged with **199 families** since it opened its doors for sessions in January 2022. As a result families are less likely to feel adrift and disconnected from their schools and their community. The reach across stages and ages is increasing. In the summer term of 2023 the project supported 0-3's for the first time through Portage Stay and Plays at Queens Park and Branksome Family Hubs.

### **Recruitment Process**

Recruitment campaigns during the last 2 years have had an excellent response level successfully recruiting 18 volunteers of which 16 volunteers remain actively involved. All have shown commitment to the Parent Champion role throughout their time with the project. Volunteers are genuine in their desire to want to give back to their community. There has been no increase in funding or hours over the 2 year life span of the project for the Parent Champion Co-Ordinator.

The recruitment pathway consists of:

- Completion of an application form providing a detailed insight into why the role is attractive and what is hoped to be gained by becoming a volunteer.
- Attendance at an induction training programme with 8 hours of content delivered over a period of 4 weeks delivered by the Parent Champion Co-Ordinator
- Completion of the Safer Staff recruitment process where all volunteers receive an Enhanced DBS before starting their role.

### **Volunteer training**

Induction training programme aims and objectives:

- The niche role of a Parent Champion in the school community
- Understanding the role of SENDIASS and Parent Carers Together
- The importance of impartiality and confidentiality in role
- Identifying different techniques for effective listening and importance of good communication
- Meeting safeguarding responsibilities effectively
- Understanding the benefits of effective supervision
- Understanding the importance of information sharing and GDPR
- Understanding the importance of equality and diversity
- Learning about the health and personal safety issues in the context of Parent Champion work

### **Evaluation of training**

On completion of training all attendees reported through an anonymous evaluation form:

- Training was very clear in expectations and expected outcomes
- All aims were fully met
- Trainer tools and methods used were relevant and engaging,
- Training was very relevant to their role and there were sufficient opportunities for asking questions.

# UTOPIA

## *Setting our aim high*

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### **Support framework for volunteers in role:**

- Termly network meetings with guest speakers
- Drop in coffee mornings
- Supervision
- Continued CPD
- Annual discussions

### **Management of volunteers**

The importance of providing effective supervision for volunteers is key to understanding boundaries and interactions with parent/carers. This is not only from a safety perspective but also to ensure quality of the service provided and appropriate care of the volunteers well-being. The listening role they provide is a demanding one where they will encounter a range of situations in the sessions they deliver. This is not a role where volunteers develop an ongoing relationship with families so it is important that conversations for parent/carers who attend the sessions are meaningful.

Each volunteer has an opportunity to debrief after their session to ensure a reflective space is given to talk through their thoughts and feelings. This open communication allows a checking of boundaries and clarity of the role. It maximises safeguarding and gives support by problem solving together. We strive for the Parent Champion role to be a rewarding one and this protected time helps to recognise what's going well and where any gaps might be in support or development.

As an organisation it is important volunteers feel valued through different pathways of support. One of the pathways used is through an annual discussion of their role. Strengths and achievements are looked at as are any gaps in support that would add value to their experience and how they support others. 9 volunteers have been in role more than 12 months and have engaged with the discussion. All 9 volunteers report enjoying their role and feel fully supported. They have all agreed to stay in role as a Parent Champion for a further 12 months.

### **Key messages taken away from the training:**

*"There is a lot of responsibility but a lot of support"*

*"Listening is key to signposting in the right direction"*

*" To give parents a safe and confidential place to get help and support"*

*"The role is very clear on what it is and what it is not"*

*" I found the training comprehensive and presented in a way that made it easy to learn"*

*"The trainer was incredibly welcoming, approachable and made us feel a team from the start"*

# VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK

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## **Times where volunteers have enjoyed their role:**

*"supporting families and knowing I've made a difference no matter how big or small, giving parents that opportunity to be fully heard"*

*"offering support to parents and sharing information they were unaware of"*

*"being part of a community who all want to help each other"*

*"being a listening ear for parents who are navigating SEND and being able to signpost to local and national websites and services"*

*"Being part of a fab team of Parent Champions"*

## **Times volunteers have enjoyed their role least:**

*"Wanting to help more and having to explain the unfortunate waiting times for services"*

*"Hearing that parents have been given incorrect information"*

*"parents feeling they are not being listened to"*

## **How volunteers feel about the guidance, training and support given:**

*"Incredibly supportive, nurturing with the correct balance of reminding us of our boundaries"*

*"Excellent, always feel supported and valued and listened to"*

*"A great scheme and looking forward to what the future holds"*

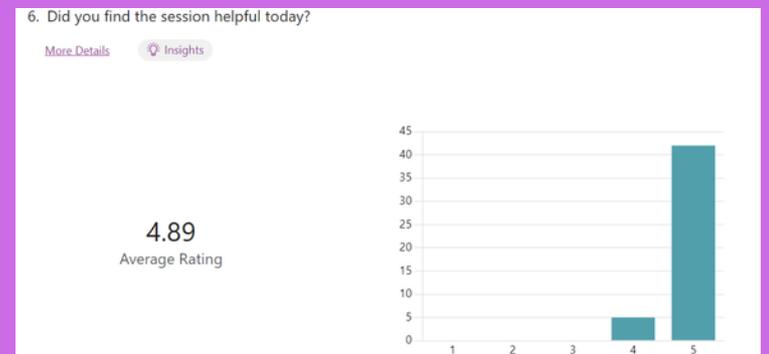
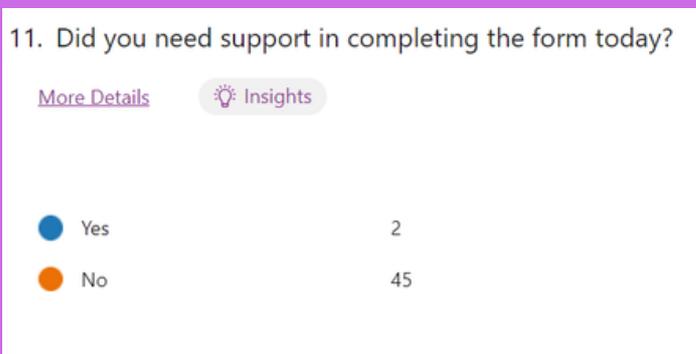
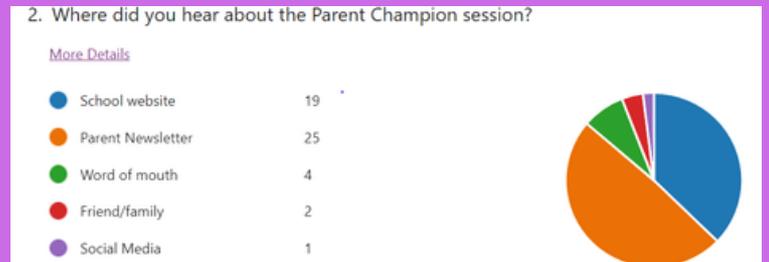
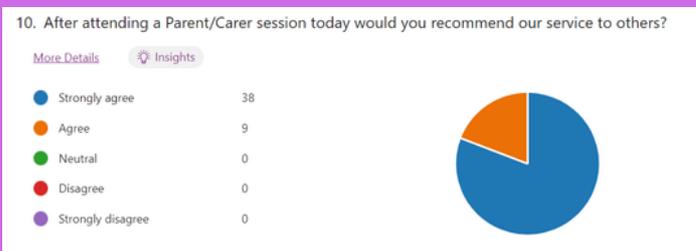
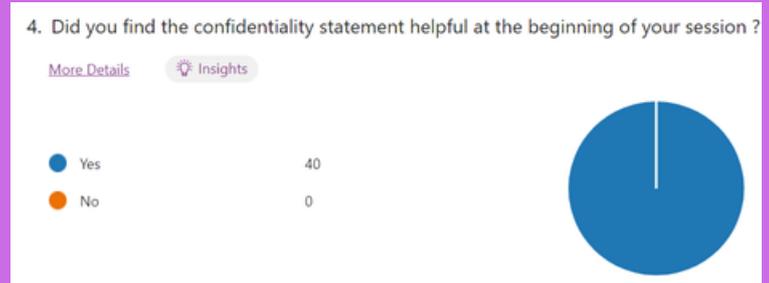
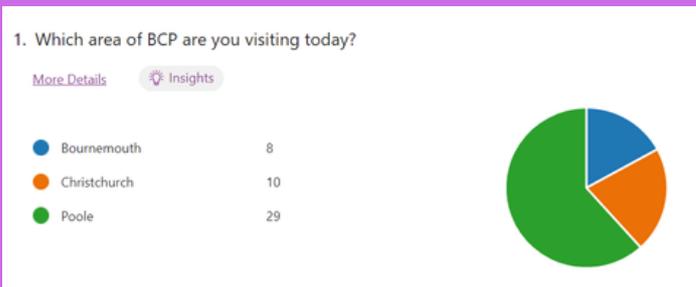
***Annual refresher training is now also part of the package of support for volunteers. This has been attended well and very much welcomed.***

*"For some the parent to parent support can flick the switch from feeling alone to feeling supported"*

Alexia Tough Parent champion Co-ordinator

# PARENT/CARER OUTCOMES

Parent/carers who attend sessions present with a varied knowledge of SEND and are at different stages of their child's journey. Volunteers work very much from a strength based practice and look to acknowledge where things are going well. Parent Champions in providing a confidential and emotionally safe setting support parents to recognise these strengths. Parent Champions have frequently observed an initial boost in parent/carer confidence during a session which may positively impact on parent/carer's ability to talk through next steps for their child and have belief they are able to manage a difficult situation with the correct support.



Parent/carers have responded positively in their feedback to sessions through an anonymous on line form. 47 parent/carers have completed the form. 38 strongly agreeing they would recommend the service to others and 9 agreeing they would recommend. Feedback on the informal approach has been how much parent/carers like discussing their situation with another parent who understands their frustrations and worries. There has not been any verbal or written negative feedback shared throughout the time of the offer.

# PARENT/CARER

*Their words not ours*

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Parent/carers report feeling listened to without time pressures. They have shared they feel comfortable in an environment with another parent and that they are more open to take on new information and ideas.

Information shared by a Parent Champion may have been given previously to a parent/carer through different channels, however each session provides a safe space for refreshing of knowledge or supporting a deeper understanding of information already gained. Parent Champions hold the child at the centre of the conversation and will always support in the best interests of the child.

***" I feel happy, we were able to look at sites and resources together in the session"***

***" Very helpful"***

***" I was given a lot of good information"***

***" I feel someone is actually listening to me"***

***" I have left feeling so much more informed and calmer"***

***"Great advice given on local services and support"***

***"It was very helpful to discuss and find out the next steps to take forward in order to help my daughter and us as parents"***

***"Feel lighter after being able to share"***

***"Made me confident that I am doing all I can"***

***"The information given was brilliant"***



# DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFER

*Future plans*

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Now we have permanency next steps will be to future proof the existing offer and expand on both the number of Parent Champions available to provide the service and to support schools in signing up. 100% reach to the school community with an “as and when” needed service is an achievable goal through partnership working.

In order to deliver the model we would look to facilitate a hybrid offer where Parent Champions work across schools to meet need as it arises. This allows us to strengthen the opportunities for families to access the support. We continually look to remove blockers and barriers for families to enable access for all.

An aim we are yet to deliver on is the delivery of transition information sessions to parent/carers. We have now identified a volunteer lead who will work in partnership with parent/carers, SENDIASS and schools to develop this further.

## HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT?

***Email or call to find out how we can support you to run Parent Champion sessions with minimal resources and time?***

***Offer a confidential space in school for a Parent Champion to support your families***

***Advertise the offer on your school website and in your newsletter and gauge interest from your families.***

***Parent Champion Co-Ordinator - Alexia Tough***

***Email: [alexia.tough@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:alexia.tough@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)***

***TEL: 01202 126894/07825124748***

**PARENT TO PARENT - IT WORKS - YOU HELPED US PROVE IT**

