

# THE PARENT CHAMPION JOURNEY

Who's the Expert?  
2019 CONFERENCE

Supportive

Nurturing

Structure

## The Beginning...

How could we connect parents with those who make decisions about the services they and their children use? The idea of co-production has been around for a while but how do we make that truly work for A Better Start Southend? As SAVS (Southend Association for Voluntary Services) are responsible for parent engagement they decided to see if they could interest parents in a voluntary role within the project. The creation of the Parent Champions seemed a natural step; let's give them some training, build their confidence, support them and give them a voice at meetings. No one quite knew how they would evolve, but yes, they were being noticed and people began to listen and so their co-production story began.

## The Training...

The Parent Champion training was an opportunity for parents to learn something new, but what parents didn't anticipate was that they would also learn something new about themselves. Their training would teach them understanding of the voluntary sector and would show them how to build their social skills when in a room full of strangers. They would learn how to be comfortable in their own skin and how to make others feel welcome too. The Parent Champions work on lots of layers and have no expectations put upon them, all that they do is because they want to be there; to be part of the conversations, whether that is at an engagement event with other parents or at a meeting with local business partners and research teams. They are community minded, they are the parents' voice and they want to be part of the positive change that could bring better local services, facilities, support and structure to families in the A Better Start Southend wards and beyond.

Knowledge

Development

Understanding

Ideas

Creativity

Community

Evolving

Passionate

Confident

Inspired

Unique

Team Work

Empowerment

## The Future...

The Parent Champion programme has been running since March 2017 and there are now 37 Parent Champions working in all of the A Better Start Southend wards. Their future will come from a strong foundation, although it has been an organic process there is still so much room for them to develop further. They will learn new skills that will benefit their own future; they are a unique team player with their feet firmly on the ground.

I liken the Parent Champions to the caterpillar/butterfly cycle - They start very small but with the right support they will grow in character, knowledge and understanding. They require nurturing and development as they grow in confidence. They are all very different and will shine in their own ways as they become wonderfully passionate butterflies. The beauty of the butterflies is that as long as the cycle is allowed to continue they will thrive in the areas that they call home. It is worth being mindful that the butterflies are very fragile and without the right environmental support they will not do the job they were naturally born to do.

"It is a delight to be part of the development of the Parent Champions. The group have become a dynamic and vibrant representation of the voice of local parents. The passion and commitment they bring to the ABSS programme will be an important part of the programme's success now and in the future."

Anthony Quinn - SAVS Deputy CEO