Working with Parents
Joint winner
Sparklers Parent Mentoring Programme, St Paul's Community Development Trust

Described by the judges as 'a very powerful initiative, which addresses a crucial local need', Sparklers Parent Mentoring Programme supports mothers and fathers to empower each other.

Built from robust evidence-based practice and co-constructed with professionals, parents and children from one of the most deprived wards in Birmingham, the aim of the project is to target hard-to-reach parents from minority communities and encourage them to access early years services, as well as tackle their own issues.

Under the programme, parents of children from birth to 11 are trained at children’s centres and primary schools as mentors – ‘Sparklers’ – to provide support to new, isolated or unconfident mothers and fathers to boost their confidence, make new friends and be great parents.

Described as a ‘two-strand model’, the programme supports the emotional wellbeing of both mentors and mentees. According to St Paul’s Community Development Trust, it helps them to develop emotional resilience as their confidence and self-belief increases, while reducing their stress levels as they learn to manage and maintain changes in their lives.

‘Sparklers’ also gain practical workplace experience, increasing their chance of seeking employment in the future, while mentees are empowered to find solutions to their problems, and through becoming more involved with their local children’s centre or child’s school, feel a valued part of their child’s learning.

So far, 14 parents have trained as mentors under the programme, which has been developed in partnership with Approachable Parenting CIC, Washwood Heath Children’s Centre, Balsall Heath Children’s Centre and Clifton Primary School – both of which are managed by St Paul’s Community Development Trust on behalf of Birmingham City Council.

The Turn-up Sparkbrook Case for Change Initiative’s innovation unit also provided support to the programme.

Of those who have received training, 100 percent reported increased confidence and feeling good about themselves as a result.

One parent said the programme has completely turned around her family life, changing her from an angry, insecure individual to a much happier and confident mum.

Another said, 'Before attending the course, I felt isolated and my self-esteem was low. Now I feel a lot more confident and because I know how to interact with others, I feel much more part of the community.'

Finalist
Stone Eden Nursery School, Carlisle

Criterion
Open to services or projects that support parents, enhance their understanding of their children’s learning and development, or improve children’s outcomes through involvement and co-operation with families
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Joint winner

Mother and Baby Support Unit, HMP Styal, Action for Children

“Excellent programme, should be developed across all HMPs”
Judge

Action for Children’s Mother and Baby Unit at HMP/YOI Styal provides a unique, supportive environment in which mothers are encouraged, empowered and inspired to bond with their babies and transform their life chances. This is achieved by providing parenting support, targeted intervention and high-quality nursery provision for up to 10 children who may reside there from birth to two years old.

On arrival to the unit, mothers are assessed to determine their needs and a plan of intervention is put in place. This can include attending courses on basic baby care, as well as training and support with communication skills, or dealing with bereavement and loss or substance misuse.

An on-site baby shop encourages mothers to provide for their babies and develop budgeting skills. Staff are on hand to support and advise on the suitability of items, with regards to health issues or age and stage of development. Mothers use the shop to supplement the diet of their babies and further meet their nutritional needs.

The aim of the shop is to empower the women to meet their children’s needs alone when they leave the prison.

Another priority of the unit is parents’ relationships with their extended families, as staff recognise they are a major source of support for the mothers and babies during incarceration and upon release.

Every month, family days are held to provide quality contact between mothers, their babies, fathers, siblings and other family members.

Home Diaries also work to build positive relationships with carers and extended family members.

The unit also has a Mothers Home where visiting children can see their mothers in a more relaxed and safe environment.

The Little Acorns nursery in the unit is rated outstanding by Ofsted. Nursery staff co-ordinate with parental support key workers to ensure outcomes for both mother and baby are the focus of the team. To ensure the development needs of babies are met and extended, they organise regular outings to groups, activities and play resources outside the prison environment.

Kidzone Cranwell, Sleaford (parent liaison co-ordinator)

Kidzone is based within RAF Cranwell, serving military parents and their children. The charity provides childcare for children from three months old, and support for families on a range of issues.

Recognising the difficulties faced by many families with postings, house moving, displacement and detachments, it serves as a place of support, continuity and stability in the lives of children and their parents.

Last year, Kidzone launched an online journal that parents on detachment can read and contribute to, enabling them to stay involved in their child’s learning and development. Families are also invited to attend a range of events throughout the year, organised by the charity’s parent liaison co-ordinator and a focus group of staff and parents.

Springboard Saturdads, led by Springboard Opportunity Group in Chippenham

Set up in 2012, Springboard Saturdads is a monthly group that provides fathers with a supportive and social network.

Run by Springboard Opportunity Group, a specialist pre-school for children from birth to five, the fathers who attend have at least one child with special educational needs, from life-limiting to complex conditions such as Down Syndrome and Autism.

During the monthly sessions, which are influenced by the interests of participants, fathers and children get the opportunity to play and spend quality time together.

Fathers who attend the group report feeling more confident in supporting their child in mainstream experiences, and less isolated.