

All together now

How one setting in Yorkshire secured more than £100,000 in funding over five years, and opened a yurt, food bank, art sessions and Forest School. By **Carl Duck**

In 2015, Hornsea Nursery School, based in East Riding of Yorkshire, set up a club for parents to meet after their children's morning or afternoon drop-off. Head teacher Claire White had always been keen on the idea of supporting the community through the school, which is in a coastal area, and employed me as a project manager to help develop community projects and win funding.

We were looking at the broad range of issues associated with deprivation – lack of confidence, employment opportunities and skills, social isolation, domestic violence, and mental health issues.

The first step was to get parents on board. The nursery school provided free refreshments and parents were invited to sit down and chat in a new community room – we called it the coffee club.

Initially, there was minimal engagement with school staff, but then groups of parents started to stay. Once the two groups were established – mothers with children in the morning, and mums and dads with more acute employability and confidence problems in the afternoon – parents agreed we could undertake five weeks of informal consultation led by a community engagement officer.

Parents created a 'tree of ideas' which had their ambitions for themselves and the community. The outcomes were significant and identified a range of needs – building confidence and dealing with anxiety was a main one.

By the Easter term the groups had co-organised a family day in the holiday period: a day of play, arts and Forest School activities, attended by 100 people and children, which led to a number of funding bids and community-led projects.

We put in a bid for funding to Tesco's Bags of Help scheme, which gives grants of up to £4,000 for community projects. This enabled,



among other things, weekly 'bake and take' mornings run by a chef who focused on creating healthy main meals that people could take home and recreate. It also, crucially, helped confidence-building. Some of the unemployed people are now working, while some of the stay-at-home mums started volunteering in the school.

The Humberside Police and Crime Commissioner also provided funding to convert an empty room into a sensory space with specialist resources for children with special educational needs. The aim of this £10,000 project was to get parents to be able to model practitioners' behaviour with their own children.

A side benefit was also providing a quiet space for parents who had had traumatic experiences to be with their children; this contact also meant we could target and support these parents with specific help.

We found that art was really popular with our parents and a good way of engaging them with their children. We applied for £10,000 Big Lottery funding for an outdoor art space in a yurt. A range of school and community arts projects happen there: a member of staff with a fine art degree leads ceramics projects with parents and children, while every year the school puts on an art exhibition with the local arts group.

We also run a food project, whereby excess food from

Hornsea's sensory room and community room

→ FURTHER INFORMATION

- www.hornseanurseryschool.co.uk
- Carl Duck works with nursery and primary schools in Hull, East Riding and other parts of Yorkshire to help them develop community cohesion projects; he also works part-time in the School of Education, The University of Hull and completed an MBA in 2011 on community cohesion and the roles and responsibilities of the public sector. Email: carlduck21@gmail.com

supermarkets is delivered weekly and put into a parents' larder. Parents pay a nominal fee and can choose up to a certain number of items per week. We tried giving it away but found parents like it better with a charge – they don't want to be seen to be taking food for free.

Since 2014 we have also won a £20,000 grant for outdoor improvement and £10,000 grants for a water feature and community project, front garden project, ICT and a heritage project.

Hornsea Nursery School can now be seen as a conduit for community activity that promotes positive cohesion. The community room hosts a weekly parent/toddler group for a nominal charge and is open for public hire. And with the local primary school we also host events such as night-time Forest School around the fire pit in the winter.

Community ownership is important. All communities are different and projects have to be tailored to the specific needs of the community, members of which have to be actively engaged in what is happening. We have also found, like with the free food scheme, that you have to evaluate a project's success with the help of the parents and community and adapt it if necessary.

Once you have this in place, you have a template which increases the likelihood of new projects being successful. ■