

Southend Children's Services: Volunteers Make the Difference

Summary

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council is passionate that an integrated volunteer approach makes a real difference to the lives of children and their families. The commitment to the recruitment, development and deployment of volunteers across all four stages of the integrated model used in Southend, is a key to working together effectively to ensuring that child and their families at the centre of all services to met their needs and improve their lives.

Authority/partner organisation(s):	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL
Improvement East theme:	PERFORMANCE
Improvement East initiative (workstream):	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Authors:	DIANA BATEMAN, GROUP MANAGER EARLY YEARS AND CHILDHOOD AND MICHAEL STEPHENSON, SPECIALIST RESOURCE SERVICES
Date:	MARCH 2010

Main Messages:

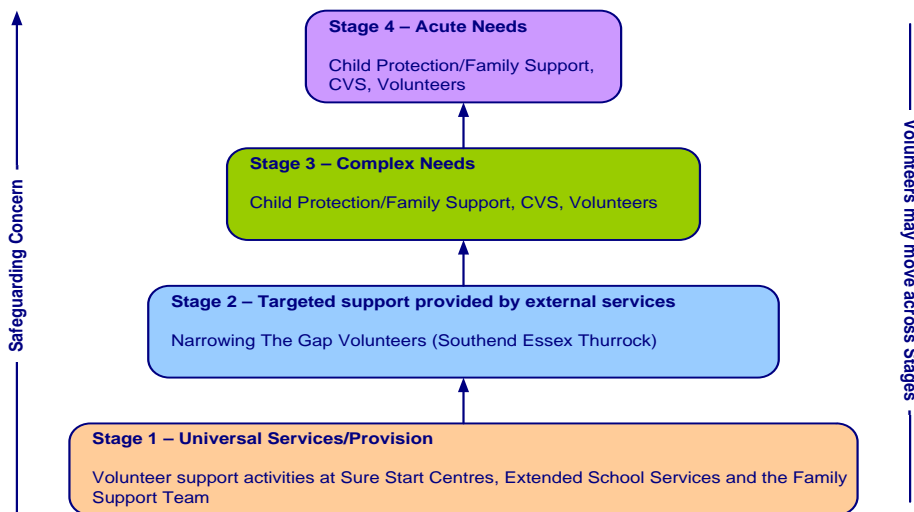
Volunteering is a golden thread for community delivery of Integrated working which is achieved through collaboration and co-ordination at all levels and across all services. This leads to securing better outcomes for all children and families but provides particular support to vulnerable child and families. Volunteers are part of the resources to ensuring that a child or family only has to tell their story once to get the support that they need.

Case study

Southend Borough Council is a compact urban Unitary Authority. There are areas of high affluence and wards that lie within the 10% of the most disadvantaged in the country.

Following the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in April 2008 and a paper to the DMT reviewing the existing provision in October 2008, a recommendation was made that the volunteer programme should be mainstreamed into a wider Children and Learning Family Support Team. The Early Years and Specialists Resources Service proposed to develop a single identity for the provision of family support across all four stages. This was to have three elements, direct family support, parenting and volunteering services. The volunteer element of the team would provide family friendly focussed intervention and add significant capacity for support to families across all stages.

Southend staged intervention model



The Early Years and Childhood Volunteer Programme, at stages 1 and 2, provides the opportunity for parents and carers to share their skills whilst supporting other parents and expectant parents in their community. The volunteers support a variety of activities at Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended School services. *(Please see appendix i).*

Building on the outcomes of the Victoria Climbié inquiry¹, the Community Service Volunteers (CSV) developed various projects for volunteers for specific support at stages 3 & 4. The CSV Volunteers work with families where there are child protection and child in need concerns. The volunteers work within the family home to support families with issues such as, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol, mental health, neglect, unclean homes, problems with behaviour, school attendance, routine, boundaries and parenting etc. The role of the volunteer is to support and empower families to make positive changes in their lives.

The main risk in developing the role of volunteers is that of safeguarding, both for the families and volunteers. This is minimised through a rigorous recruitment, screening and training process. On going safeguarding is maintained by regular monitoring by the volunteer co-ordinator managers. i.e. 1-2-1, group meetings, written and verbal feedback.

Volunteers are recruited by advertisement, referrals from local agencies and promotional events. They then progress through a rigorous vetting procedure, child protection training and basic training with the volunteer co-ordinators before diverging into specific pathways depending on which stage of preventative work they wish to undertake. e.g.

- For stages 1 and 2, volunteers attend a Me and My Community Course: this is for 10 weeks encouraging potential volunteers to recognise their existing skills, talents and potential, recognise and manage stress for themselves and others, practice assertive communication and negotiations skills.
- For stages 3 and 4, volunteers go through an in-depth interview for professional assessment for training and matching families, then once a month sessions covering such topics as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, assertiveness and self esteem.

¹ The project has been piloted in Bromley & Sunderland and has made a positive impact in the reduction of children being on a child protection plan. The families who were supported by a volunteer came off the child protection plan and did not have further re-registration.

A number of applications for the Me and My Community Programme have been received from members of ethnic minority groups. This will increase capacity to reach families from sectors of the local community where English is their second language.

Success of the volunteer programme has been recognised several times by articles in the local press and radio. In 2009 the volunteer programme was highly commended in the Stars Excellence Award by Southend County Council.

Efficiencies

Investment in the volunteer programme is through Sure Start, Extended School Budget and the Council via CSV.

2009 - 2011	Stages 1 & 2	Stages 3 & 4
Investment over 3 yrs <i>Staff costs + admin + training</i>	£40,000 x 3 = £120,000 <i>(0.5 co-ordinator)</i>	£100,000 x 3 = £300,000 <i>(Full time co-ordinator)</i>
Number of Volunteers per year <small>(based on first year's recruitment)</small>	80 x 3 = 240	55 x 3 = 165
Average no of hrs for each Volunteer per annum	100hrs	250hrs
Total no of volunteer hours	Yr 1 = 80 x 100 = 8000 Yr 2 = 160 x 100 = 16000 Yr 3 = 240 x 100 = 24000 Total = 48,000	Yr 1 = 55 x 250 = 13,750 Yr 2 = 110 x 250 = 27,500 Yr 3 = 165 x 250 = 41,250 Total = 82,500
Potential savings through use of volunteers. Calculated using guidance from the European Regional Development Fund @ £10/hr	48,000 x £10 = £480,000	82,500 x £10 = £825,000
Efficiency savings; Volunteer savings minus investment	480,000 – 120,000 = £360,000	825,000 – 300,000 = £525,000
Total potential efficiency savings	£360,000 + £525,000 =	£885,000

The calculations above show that there is a potential for £885,000 efficiency savings over the next three years through this programme.

Improvement and Impact

One volunteer programme has allowed a significant increase in the number and variety of services that can be funded and offered. Additional value also includes the engagement of the community into the work of Children's Centres, their ability to access services for young children and families and enhancing community cohesion. Thus development of an effective volunteer programme can provide capacity to substantially increase the range of support and activities that the Council is already delivering.

Next Steps

This case study, supported by Improvement East, has allowed the time and capacity to meet with all agencies to review and evaluate the work to date. The volunteer managers are working towards a more integrated training programme by sharing expertise and knowledge. It is the intent of this team to work with other local agencies such as the Youth Offending Service and Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS) to share good practice and continue to increase efficiency, particularly in a common training programme for all volunteers.

It is intended that an application to the new Health and Social Care Volunteering Fund will be made in February and contribute to sharing new learning and good practice.

Conclusion

- All feedback indicates that this initiative is making and will continue to make a positive contribution when measured against the performance indicators of the project

Indicator	2007/8	2008/9	December 2009	Direction of travel
Referrals to Children's Social Care per 10,000 population	1,749	1,695	1,387	↓
Numbers of Looked After Children	280	276	270	↓
Percentage of children who have a second or subsequent Child Protection Plan	12.8%	17.9%	12%	↓

- Efficiency gains will increase year on year. *(for the duration of a 3yr programme)*
- Volunteers have made and continue to make a significant contribution to the capacity of the Family Support Team and its ability to offer a wide range of preventative work.
- Volunteers develop a unique relationship with families and offer an invaluable medium through which support services can be accessed
- By offering quality training and support, volunteers gain through an enhancement of their own education, training and employment skills.

Key outcomes

- Efficiency savings in the region of £885,000 over 3 years
- Increase in capacity for preventative work in reducing bullying, injury and death to young people
- Increased access to support services –which has had a positive impact on children referred to social care for initial assessment within 7 working days
- Increased local skills base
- Significant uptake of volunteering at Stages 1 and 2 – 98 Volunteers registered with 56 regularly active in children's centres and 15 regularly working alongside Family Support Coordinators; 48 are actively engaged in continuous professional development (for example participation in the 'Me and My Community' Programme); 7 have successfully gone onto paid employment.

Learning

Critical factors for success;

- Skilled professional co-ordinators
- Rigorous screening and well-structured training
- Ongoing monitoring and support of volunteers
- Recognised pathways for qualifications of volunteers

Quotes from users of the programme

- Volunteer A - Being a volunteer was fantastic...The experience was invaluable to me I believe it was the best way to spend my time. I had great fun and was doing something worthwhile...it was confidence that I took away with me to use in all aspects of life
- Volunteer B - says she gained self-confidence a sense of worth a chance for her children to see their Mum motivated and to show that she can make a change
- Volunteer C - says...He is more confident in and out of the work scene...the belief that he could do his NVQ 3 in Childcare, (which he recently completed)

The recruitment and training of the volunteers is an on going process. Many of the volunteers are expressing an interest in pursuing this type of work as a career. Volunteers have a wealth of skills and experiences that they are able to utilise with the families. One family said that they only got the confidence to get help because of the volunteer.

Photographs of volunteers across all stages 1-4



Contact details

Improvement East contact:	Lynsay Cook, Programme Manager Lynsay.cook@improvementeast.gov.uk
Authority contact:	Jane Theadom, Southend School and Preventative Services Children & Learning Dept
Other partner organisations:	Diana Bateman, Group Manager Early Years and Childhood, email dianabateman@southend.gov.uk ; Michael Stephenson, Specialist Resource Services, email: michaelstephenson@southend.gov.uk ;

Appendix i

Volunteers support activities at Sure Start Children's Centres, Extended School services and the Family Support Team:

Playground Games Volunteer Supporter - assisting the Family Support co-ordinator in encouraging children to participate in the playgroup games, interact with one another and to learn new skills.

Infant Massage, Baby Yoga and Rhythm Kids Groups - volunteers assist the Family Support Co-ordinators by engaging with parents and modelling the activities.

Parent Partnership Service Volunteers.

The Parent Partnership Service provides support to parents/carers of children/young people who currently have a statement of special educational needs and to anyone who needs advice or help regarding the statutory assessment process.

Volunteer Translators - a register of volunteers who speak additional languages is being developed to support families who have English as an additional language. This may include accompanying the family on an introductory visit to a nursery or pre-school.

Play and Stay or Creative Fun Group Support Volunteers - assist in the delivery of creative fun sessions with activities including painting, gluing, messy play, cooking, sand play and garden play.

Song and Rhythm Group Support Volunteers - to assist in the delivery of songs and stories for parents and their children aged 1-3 years.

Parent and Toddler Groups - volunteers encourage parents to engage with their children through play activities.

Assisting Holiday Activities

After School Clubs - Volunteers assist with after school family fun activities for children with their parents/carers

Funky Friday Group - volunteers support the after schools club for children aged 8-11 by engaging and chatting to the children, participating in activities with the children and being positive role models

Listening to Children Read - volunteers provided individual 1:1 reading support for children

Assisting EASOL Courses - volunteers support parents who are attending English as a Second Language Course, helping them to practice and improve their English speaking, reading and writing skills

Community Based Business Advisors - a new project where volunteers are attached to a nominated Sure Start Children's Centre. Following a four month training course, the volunteers will be able to provide quality advice to residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods who are interested in developing a business idea or becoming entrepreneurs.

Young Parent Group Support Volunteer - being a positive role model to young parents, welcoming young parents to the group, signposting parents to other services and activities

Nursery Assistant Volunteer - assisting in the Child Day-care Rooms by reading stories and sharing books with the children and supporting creative activities. Assisting with the children's learning journeys, playing games, helping with cooking activities.

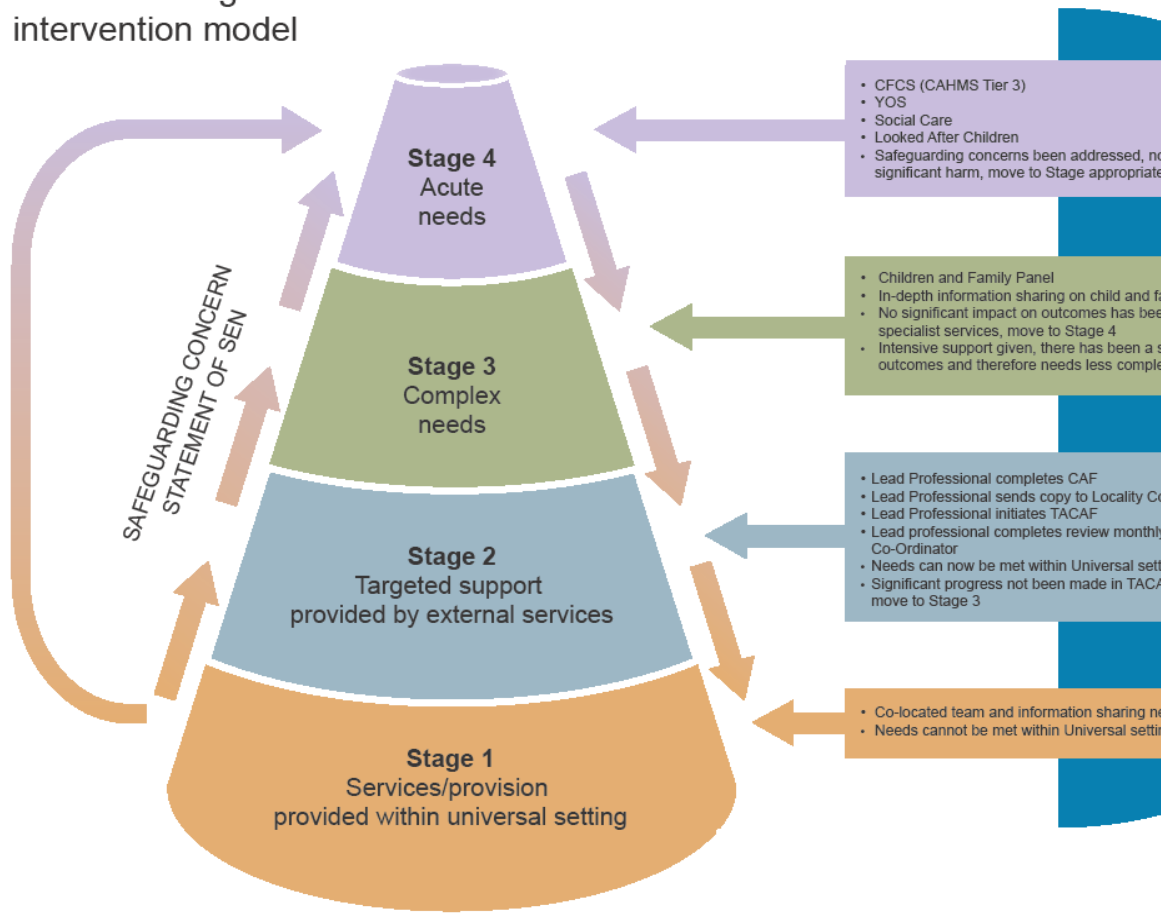
Meeters and Greeters - assist with welcoming new parents to the Children's Centre, helping parents to sign in and complete forms, setting up activities and packing away.

Admin Support Volunteer - assisting the Volunteer Co-ordinator with the administration of the Volunteer Programme, including updating the databases, typing and preparing letters, photocopying, assembling volunteer induction packs etc

Dad's Group Volunteer - assisting in raising awareness of the group, welcoming new Dads to the group.

Early Birds Group Volunteers - A support group for parents who have a child who was born too soon, too small or too sick and spent time in the special care baby unit. Volunteers provide support to families at the group and over the telephone. The Group is the only registered Bliss Group in the Southend Borough

Southend staged intervention model



Stage 1 and 2

My and My Community, Book Star, Volunteers working within schools, childcare providers and children's centres

Stage 2 and 3

Narrowing the Gap Volunteers (Southend Education Trust)

Stage 2 – 4

Appropriate adult volunteers to support young people at the Police station during police interview, search, DNA etc (YOS), volunteers helping with Reparation (YOS)

Stage 3

Parent Partnership Supporters (Parent Partnership)

Stage 3 and 4

Child Protection/Family Support Volunteers (CSV), Amigos mentoring (YOS) working with children of FIP families, children in foster families, children at risk of offending; Referral Order panel members – statutory requirement to have Volunteer community panel members (YOS).