



QUEEN'S PARK FAMILIES



Queen's Park Families pilot phase 2014-17: Full Report

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1. About Queen's Park

Queen's Park ward sits in a band of socio-economic deprivation at the north-western tip of the City of Westminster, on the boundary with Brent to the north and Kensington and Chelsea to the south. The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index for 2015 places 33% of households in Queen's Park in the most deprived 5% in the country. 41% of children are eligible for Free School Meals, and its 'Mozart Estate' (approximately 25% of the ward's households) has consistently the worst level of child poverty in the UK. Queen's Park has one of the lowest health and well-being indexes of all London wards (according to GLA data), and life expectancy is 19 years lower than in parts of Westminster less than 2 miles away. At least 60% of children in the area have English as an Additional Language: a high proportion of parents in

the area speak little English, which can increase feelings of isolation already caused by fragmented families (e.g. there are particularly high rates of single parent households), high rates of transient populations and recently arrived families, and cultural divisions. Local Children's Services have seen increases to the already high rates of children being placed under Protection Orders, and the area also has higher than average rates of alcohol and drug-related health issues, psychotic behaviour and domestic abuse.

Despite these multiple challenges, Queen's Park has a strong ethos of community action and intervention, nurtured and supported by local charities such as Paddington Development Trust (PDT) who coordinated a local forum from which grew London's first elected parish or 'community' council in 2013.

2. Background to the project

Due to its record of community action, Queen's Park was selected to take part in a Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) initiative called Neighbourhood Community Budget (NCB) in 2012/13, which saw residents invited to help shape how local services were delivered. The focus of this initiative – decided by residents – was Early Years, i.e. children of pre-school age and their families. The NCB programme in Queen's Park was co-ordinated by Paddington Development Trust (PDT) with whom Creative Futures has built a strong co-delivery model since. Here is an extract from the final 'Operations Plan' for the NCB programme, written by PDT (2013):

The Queen's Park NCB focus on pre-school infants was the result of community-led priority-setting, informed by evidence and research into the most effective ways of altering the pattern of behaviour where older children and young people become victims and/or perpetrators of anti-social activity and gang violence.

National and international research overwhelmingly makes the case for early intervention as the most cost-effective mechanism to reduce the numbers of families at risk in relatively stable but poor communities. Early intervention resonated strongly with a community tired of mopping up after tragedy has struck – it chimed with their collective determination to break the cycle of deprivation and help to build a cohesive and resilient future in Queens Park.

"We know that the brains of very young children growing up in violent or abusive households develop differently – as they're exposed to repeated surges of stress hormones – making them prone to hyperactivity and aggression." Theresa May, 2012

The rallying call for residents in Queen's Park, "it takes a whole community to raise a child", lies at the heart of the QP NCB. Early Years was chosen by residents to be the focus of NCB, and for a newly emerging urban model of resident co-production, it was a wise choice. Over the next four years around a thousand new children will be born in Queen's Park. Our ambition is for these children to benefit from a progressive reduction of risk in their later years. When deciding on the Early Years focus, residents made the point that it isn't solely money they are concerned with but the design of services largely unseen by the community.

As it transpired through our analysis, they are right. Although micro scale, the fragmentation and lack of cohesion in the service offer has

been the real problem in Queen's Park for years. Many local families have fallen and continue to fall through the cracks, and although frontline staff are willing and able, providers have not always worked in concert with each other or local residents in a co-productive spirit.

After an intense year, Queen's Park NCB has established the framework for a community-based Early Years revolution. By agreeing to bring parents, professionals and specialists together through the QP Children's Centre Hub, by making Early Years services and budgets accountable through the QP Community Council and by co-designing this Operations Plan - partners and residents are spearheading an NCB Co-design and Co-commissioning Programme over 2013/2014.

3. Test Phase

With funds provided by the NCB programme through PDT, Creative Futures supported a group of local residents to design and deliver a 5-week test programme to meet a gap in provision for families of pre-school age children, especially those aged 0-2 years, which the NCB process had identified as a pressing need by local families.

Residents worked together to create a nurturing environment for families to bring their young children to, once a week, for a half-day 'drop-in' session in a local community hall. Home-made cake, tea and coffee, even a comfy sofa, were provided – and an emphasis was made on nurturing and supporting parents who attended, whilst also providing engaging and educational activities and toys for the children. Each session included a strong creative play and musical element, provided by local Early Years creative professional, Julie Isaac, in order to engage the children with each other through creativity and music, and to stimulate their learning and social and emotional development. Gift bags were provided for every family too, including parenting information, free breastfeeding scarves, wooden shakers, books, and a CD of songs sung in the sessions in order to encourage further music-making in the home.

In all, 5 sessions were delivered, with growing participation from local families (around 40 attended in total), and sufficient momentum was generated to spur Creative Futures to seek funding to sustain the project longer-term.



4. Partnerships

Creative Futures and Paddington Development Trust (PDT) have collaborated on the delivery of Queen's Park Families (QPF) since its first test phase in 2013. As the programme developed from 2014, and particularly once PDT was awarded a contract from Public Health to deliver one of its flagship 'Maternity Champions' pilot programmes in Queen's Park, Creative Futures and PDT have strengthened and formalised their collaborative partnership, enabling the parallel initiatives of QPF and the Maternity Champions to gain a far greater impact than they would have achieved acting separately.

Our current model of collaboration involves Creative Futures hiring and managing the venue, and providing equipment, set-up, two key sessional staff (project 'host' and session facilitator), and monitoring and evaluation. PDT provides fully trained volunteer Maternity Champions – all of whom are local mothers themselves – and their Manager, who attend every session, offering advice and support to parents around parenting, health, nutrition, weaning and breast-feeding, and sign-posting parents to other services, support or activities that might benefit them. This collaborative delivery model enables parents and children attending QPF drop-ins to benefit from a rich diversity of input, experience, support and expertise, and has helped parents to feel welcome, nurtured and supported.

The success of the partnership has led to an expansion of the collaborative model to include a baby drop-in at Queen's Park Children's Centre, and fledgling Westbourne Families sessions in the neighbouring Westbourne ward – discussed further below. In addition, significant funds are now being sought to extend the model across four local wards until 2021.



5. Pilot phase 2014-17

Since February 2014, with funding secured from The People's Health Trust (Health Lottery funding), QPF has been delivering safe, nurturing drop-in sessions for parents/carers and children aged 0-4 years every week, 50-51 weeks of the year. Sessions run from 9.30-11.45 every Wednesday in a local community hall, with the first hour being dedicated to parents/carers with children under 12 months old. Most of the new mothers and babies who attend this part of the session also stay for some or all of the mixed-age part of the session, and enjoy meeting the other parents and children. There is a group singing session at the end of each part of the session, and we have noticed how parents have grown in confidence regarding the singing, and now sound like a choir in full voice. A range of songs is used, with new ones added all the time so that new attendees do not feel unable to join in, and we frequently invite parents to share songs from their own cultures with the group.

Activities each week include free play, during which children explore a range of instruments, books, wooden blocks and other small toys which we transport to the hall for each session; group drumming using our large gathering drum which is always popular and surrounded by children; games and story-telling. Julie, who leads the session, interacts with children in groups and on a one-to-one basis encouraging their creativity and responding to their lead so that our approach is as child-led as possible.

"Love the drop in centre at St Jude's hall on Wednesdays. Easily the best play group I've ever been to and can't believe it's free. Extremely well organised and efficiently run by all of the Maternity champions. This is an invaluable service to so many: we would be lost without it and it plays such an important role in early development of babies and toddlers" (parent).

In 2015 we produced a CD, recorded by Julie with a three other musicians, of songs from the sessions and other childhood songs. We have distributed more than 200 copies of this CD to families who attend the sessions, and they have reported that it has encouraged them to sing more with their children at home.

Other special events and activities have included:

- Instrument-making workshops
- Cake stalls in aid of charities
- Guest musician appearances, including a performance of Wonderful Beast's musical theatre piece "Orla and the Sun" (2016), a String Quartet, and Ghanaian drummer Afla Sackey.
- We're Going on a Bear Hunt – theatre workshop in the park
- Bookstart events
- Tir Eolas folk band workshop and performance



Orla and the Sun (Wonderful Beast production) - and interactive performance, 2016

The sessions and special events encourage creativity, collaborative play, and music-making, and are designed to support many aspects of children's early learning and development.

Special attention is paid to the parents, encouraging them to make friends with other local families and develop peer support networks, all with the help of tea and cake provided by volunteer Maternity Champions from PDT, who also support with advice and guidance on health, parenting and other local activities for children.

Between February 2014 and May 2017, QPF has engaged with more than 350 adults and 400 children, of which at least 75% are from Queen's Park ward, and the majority of others are from neighbouring Harrow Road and Westbourne wards as well as a small proportion from Brent.

The drop-in has remained **free at the point of service** for parents in order to encourage those from economically constrained households to engage in the programme and meet other parents and children on an equal footing.

Funding for QPF has been provided by The People's Heath Trust (majority of funds), plus Queen's Park ward councillor budgets, Westminster Amalgamated Charities, Queen's Park Community Council, and the Community Development Foundation.

Further to the success of QPF and its co-delivery model with PDT, we responded to local need by introducing two more strands to the initiative:

- i) **Baby and Me & Mums To Be:** a drop-in specifically for mothers and babies under 6 months old, held every Monday morning at Queen's Park Children's Centre (from September 2016). This drop-in is very popular, reaching more than 75 families to date, and almost always at its capacity of 20 families. Activities include baby yoga, massage, breast-feeding advice, and group singing. Again, the drop-in is run in collaboration with Maternity Champions who provide knowledge, advice, support and friendship. This drop-in has been supported by a grant from Big Lottery Awards for All.
- ii) **Westbourne Families:** a replica of QPF in Westbourne ward, where there is even less local provision for families with pre-school children following the closure of the Children's Centre there in the summer of 2016. Located in another community hall, this drop-in is also led by Julie Isaac with support from Maternity Champions and from Westbourne Community Champions, another PDT volunteering programme. Westbourne Families has been running since October 2016 with support from Westbourne ward councillor budgets and the Goldsmiths' Company Charity, and has engaged around 60 families so far.

6. Impact and evaluation findings

We have carried out an evaluation including qualitative and quantitative measures since the start of the programme, including gathering feedback from parents through questionnaires and interviews.

6.i Some statistics:

- **499 parents** have completed registration forms since 2014
- **550+ children** have attended since 2014
- More than **220 drop-in sessions** have been delivered to date, including in Westbourne and the 'Baby and Me' sessions
- On average, we engage with **70-80 families each week**

6.ii Impact on children's development and well-being

We do not assess children's developmental stages when they attend QPF, so we rely on parent/carer reporting to describe the impact of the drop-in sessions on children who participate. From questionnaire data gathered between spring 2016 and May 2017 we can report that:

96% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 (where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree') in response to the statement "QPF has helped my child interact with other children in a positive way".

"I found my son happier when he went to the drop-in" (parent)

91% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 in response to the statements "QPF has helped my child develop their social skills" and "QPF has helped my child develop their confidence and sense of self".

"When 'D', 18 months old, started attending the sessions he preferred to stay away from the group and play quietly with his childminder whilst songs were taking place. Three months later and he has transformed into an absolute chatterbox, rushing into each session and playing happily with the other children. He gets fully involved in the musical activities and is often heard singing to himself as we pack up the toys and get ready to head home."
(volunteer)

84% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 in response to the statement "QPF has helped my child learn new words through the singing".

100% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 in response to the statement "QPF has helped my child sing and make music" and 89% scored 4 or 5 out of 5 that "QPF has helped my child experience live music performance for the first time".

80% of respondent parents said that they sing songs from the drop-in at home with their child "regularly".

"The music awake the senses of my child" (parent)

In all, this presents strong evidence that parents see very positive benefits for their children in attending the drop-in, taking part in its activities and engaging with other children, and that these benefits are spilling over into the home, e.g. the extent to which parents are singing more at home with their children, and socialising with those they meet at the drop-ins at other times during the week. These findings support research which points to the benefits of music-rich home environments, and positive social interaction with other families through music and play.

"My son loves all the songs and especially 'brand new baby' when his sister arrived!" (parent)

6.iii Impact on parents, including attachment with their child, well-being, and community connectivity

91% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 (where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree') in response to the statement "QPF has helped me feel more connected to the community in which I live"; and 89% scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 in response to the statement "QPF has helped me meet other parents and children".

"I especially remember the 100th session. I like the fact it's like a big family" (parent).

80% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 in response to the statement “QPF has helped me get advice about other children’s activities/services”.

79% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 in response to the statement “QPF has helped me find support that I have needed”; and 77% scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 that “QPF has helped me feel reassured if I have been worried about something”.

“Maternity champions are amazing. E was not latching on properly but with the right guidance by Maternity Champions E and mum are very happy.” (parent)

83% of parents/carers scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 in response to the statement “QPF has enhanced my bonding with my child”.

One parent sums up why the pilot has been so successful. She says:
“I was made to feel welcome right away. I met other mothers and the maternity champion told me about other services. I got to learn how to relate to my baby, how to talk to her, songs to sing her.”
(extract from article in The Guardian, 2016)

40% of respondents said they had visited the Children’s Centre for the first time as a result of the QPF drop-in, demonstrating that it is helping to engage those who may not have otherwise engaged in the services on offer at the local Children’s Centre.

“Things like this make you feel part of the community and then you get to meet other people that recommend other things, it’s just having an opportunity to build up a good local network.” (parent)



Anne Watson, a new mother in her 30s, first came to the drop in, she was sleep-deprived and emotional. Her baby, Oscar, was nearly six months old and having problems sleeping. “I hadn’t slept properly for weeks and I was beyond exhausted,” she says. “I turned up and said I’d like some advice, and promptly burst into tears. He got scooped off me and cuddled, I got taken off and cuddled too. I was given a cup of tea and someone to talk to. It just made me feel not alone to speak to the maternity champion as she had been through it. I got some support and advice. It was just wonderful.” (extract from article in The Guardian, 2016)

6.iv Most loved features of the drop-ins

We asked parents what they like most about QPF:

Volunteers make you feel special and cared for.

The very warm welcome I get every time I arrive (especially the first time!) -

Volunteers and champions are "champions" - very positive and engaging with the children, very friendly making all children welcome and included.

Friendly, welcoming: a break from the hustle and bustle after school run panic. Some time with my little one without [older siblings] around

So very friendly, lovely cakes, full of love

Fabulous, supportive, lovely people, huge fun, my child loves it, it's the best group we visit.

It's always a highlight of the week

It's wonderful, fun, stimulating and supportive place, run by fab caring people



6.v Evaluation of Public Health England's Maternity Champions scheme

Public Health England, who commissioned the Maternity Champions pilot in Queen's Park (and nearby Old Oak ward in Hammersmith and Fulham), engaged an evaluator to report on the programme's impact on both the parents who attend and on the volunteer Champions themselves. The report is available in full on the Paddington Development Trust website (<http://www.pdt.org.uk/maternity-champions-programme-evaluation/>). Here are some of the findings from the Public Health report which further highlight the positive impacts of the drop-in sessions, which were integral to the Maternity Champions' delivery model in Queen's Park:

"I'm really grateful for the support I was given. I have two small children and many times I felt like I was the only one going through different things related to childcare. As I attended the sessions and met other mothers, I felt great relief to know that the majority of mums go through all sorts of ups and downs. It made me feel very confident and strong and less stressed. Thank you very much for the really helpful sessions." (parent)

"As at the time I was introduced to the Champions, I was feeling depressed because I had just moved over, with no friends to talk to. I was bored and isolated but meeting the Champions, especially Julie and Lina, made me feel welcome, they were ready to answer all my questions and also gave me all the information needed. This really helped me. Am always looking forward to the sessions." (parent)

Volunteers also record notable increases in a series of health related statements, with an average uplift across all the measures of 21% pts. The impact on physical activity is strong, an increase of 24% pts (before to after) now suggesting that all volunteers take part in physical activities such as walking, gentle exercise or going to the gym at least some of the time. The significant impact on sociability and contributing to the local community is further evidenced in the large uplift in 'We attend activities or events in the neighbourhood', where a 44% pt increase is recorded amongst maternity champions. Overall, 22 of 25 volunteers recorded an increase in at least one of these health related statements, and once again, in keeping with previous attribution levels, almost 8 in 10 state these increases are at least mostly due to the Maternity Champions programme.

Amongst in-depth stakeholder interviewees there is recognition that the Maternity Champions' Pilot Programme is having significant impact upon the following three health services/areas in particular and has the potential to have even greater impact: maternal mental health; reducing isolation and building peer support networks; and breastfeeding.

Maternity Champions (MCs) have received training in maternal mental health which has raised awareness of mental health and wellbeing amongst the team. This is subsequently bringing an awareness of maternal mental health for MCs when they meet local women and families. MCs are now complimenting the work of healthcare professionals through their own interactions with women, both antenatally and postnatally, in safe, non-threatening and familiar environments and in a non-judgemental, subtle way.

"MCs are making sure that maternal mental health is on the agenda locally."

"MCs have been trained to start conversations with women and touch on mental health and wellbeing in a non-threatening way."

There are further endorsements amongst practitioners as to how the MCs compliment the work of their teams. This includes accessing isolated and potentially vulnerable families, referring families into their services and escalating mental health issues.

"MCs are bringing more families to the group ['Baby and Me' at Queen's Park Children's Centre]. They are identifying families and escalating mental health issues to the Outreach Team. This is working seamlessly."

"These families are known to the Maternity Champions. They are not known to us." (Children's Centre worker)

Parents expressed their appreciation of this subtle, more befriending approach:

"As I said, I had the baby blues, all the professionals go on about, 'depression' and, 'What's happening?' but the Maternity Champions are like, 'It's okay to feel this way, the baby blues is normal, it's a stage that you go through and you're going to get over it', whereas to be told that the next stage is going to be really bad for you and you might not come out of it; so it's quite nice that they're not professionals and they're not giving you the jargon and the facts, it's quite nice to hear it from someone whose possibly been there or maybe their friend's been there, just to talk to you." (parent & focus group participant)

"...it was very subtle, in terms of introducing themselves [Maternity Champions] and a lot of them are parents themselves, they said, 'I know what you're going through, I know how you feel', so it was just like general chit-chat at the beginning and then you start to recognise the faces and from there you build friendships and you feel more comfortable with your baby and they're just there on hand, even if I felt anxious, I knew that it was okay." (parent & focus group participant)

The increases in awareness and understanding of maternal mental health amongst the team is enabling the Maternity Champions to help bridge the gap between services at a community and borough level. Their experience of community-based mental health services such as IAPT [Improving Access to Psychological Therapies] is leading to increased access to these services by local women and families.

6.vi Case Study report by Ecorys

Towards the end of Creative Futures' 2-year grant, the People's Health Trust commissioned Ecorys to carry out an independent case study evaluation of the QPF project. This case study report is included in full in Appendix I.



7. Conclusion and next steps

Queen's Park Families has become a much loved and valued part of the Early Years landscape in northwest Westminster, and its spin-offs, *Westbourne Families* and *Baby and Me and Mums To Be* are also becoming firmly rooted and established. At a time of dramatically shrinking Early Years resources from the local authority, these drop-ins are becoming an essential service for families with young children growing up in one of the most deprived parts of the capital.

Our evaluations have shown that parents feel more connected to their community, have made new friends, feel supported and welcomed. This reduces the stress and isolation felt by many new parents as they adjust to new challenges, and will in turn improve their mental health and well-being, and that of their child through stronger attachment.

Parents not only feel that they are benefitting, but that their children are too, through meeting other children of the same age in the same locality, interacting and socialising with them through play and music, and developing their individuality and self-confidence.

At parent consultations conducted in May 2017, parents were overwhelmingly positive about QPF and its role in local Early Years provision. Here are some of the key findings from our consultation:

- 83% parents questioned said they would attend more drop-ins if they were available locally; with the remaining 17% saying they would "maybe" attend further drop-ins.
- When asked for their top 3 reasons for attending the sessions, 72% parents/carers put "to bond more with my child through shared activity", and 61% parents/carers put "to feel more connected to the community in which I live", in their top 3 reasons.
- When asked for reasons they bring their child to the drop-ins, 89% put "to interact and socialise with other children", and 80% put "to develop their confidence" in their top 3 reasons.
- 41% put "to improve their [child's] speech, language and communication" in their top 3 reasons.

This concern among parents for the children's language development tallies with NHS data suggesting that around 50% of children in the area have some form of speech, language and communication need. (See also Creative Futures' project, *Music for Change* which includes a collaboration with NHS Speech and

Language Therapists to tackle this issue through targeted provision in nursery school settings:
(<https://www.creativefuturesuk.com/early-years>)

From our consultation we have also found that parents would welcome the expansion of this programme to include further drop-ins in the area every week, with an interest in seeing some afternoon sessions, some additional activities such as dance and arts and crafts, and further sessions specifically for pre-crawling babies.

"Julie [music leader] is amazing with the singing - we sing all the time at home now. Lina [maternity champion] always welcomes you even small things like they remember your name it makes you feel like you are being looked after as well. You get to meet other parents and I like the accessibility: you can stay for as long or short as you want" (parent) .

QPF has met a gap in provision and a local need with a high quality service which local families have come to love and rely upon. It has demonstrated strong evidence of having a positive impact on the local community; and demonstrated the added value of working in partnership with others in a strategic and collaborative way in order to support the needs of families.

Working with PDT, we are hoping to secure funding to extend and expand our drop-in model across 6 settings in north Westminster from the autumn of 2017 through to 2021.

For any further information please contact Creative Futures on 020 8964 2700 or
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Report written and compiled by Julian Knight, © Creative Futures, June 2017

Photos for Creative Futures by Paul Grover and Rimi Solloway



APPENDIX I: Case study: Ecorys independent evaluation:

See below



PEOPLE'S HEALTH TRUST - ACTIVE COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY



Creative Futures - Queen's Park Families

Introduction

This case study focuses on how Queen's Park Families was conceived, and what it aims to do and achieve, as part of the evaluation of the Active Communities Programme managed by People's Health Trust. The report draws on interviews with the project staff, partner and beneficiaries, observation of the group in session and the monitoring information submitted as part of the programme's six monthly review cycle.

About the project

Creative Futures is a local arts education charity which delivers inspirational music and arts programmes for children and young people across different parts of

London. Its main focus is on early years and it delivers a wide variety of projects in Children's Centres, schools and community groups. The charity created Queen's Park Families in 2013 as a community-led pilot project¹.

"We saw that it had potential. We had a group of people who were committed to help get project off the ground. We had a group of parents who we knew wanted it to happen."
(Project staff)

Following on from the success of the pilot², Creative Futures secured two years of additional funding from People's Health Trust under the Active Communities programme to continue Queen's Park Families. The project aims to provide a safe space for families to meet, socialise and support each other with the added

benefits of a specialist early years musician, local volunteers, and Maternity Champions who are on hand to offer guidance and support to new parents. There are also monthly visits from health visitors who offer informal advice. It was a new idea designed to fill a gap that exists in early years provision, especially in light of the significant cuts to local services and closure of several Children's Centres nearby. It offers a community-led alternative to more formal early years provision and aims to reach families that do not normally engage with local services.

"I think for us as an organisation it has been really important to do something which is a bit unique, which is very



Photo credits: Paul Grover © Creative Futures 2015

community-led and very locally focused, which is responding very directly to a need and engaging disadvantaged families.” (Project staff)

“It’s a very strong model and something which is resident- and community-led, and there is a real need for it to carry on, especially as more cuts are coming in to Children Services in Westminster. There’s going to be hardly any Children’s Centres left very soon.” (Project staff)

Queen’s Park is an inner London ward located in the borough of Westminster. The project specifically targets the area in and around the Mozart Estate, which is an area of high density social housing surrounded by private housing. Queen’s Park has one of the highest levels of child poverty in London. Many people who live in Queen’s Park experience disadvantage and social isolation, and young people are at high risk of getting involved in crime and gang violence.

“It was just people from the local community who were interested in making the area better. We were consulted about which services we should try to improve, it could have gone to health, but we all came to together and said that actually, all the evidence shows that early intervention is really good. If we want to help further down the line, it’s probably harder, but if we get in from the beginning, we can make a real difference.” (Partner)

Main findings

- Through their engagement with the project, families have improved social links and support networks. More widely, the project has fostered a sense of community which is changing how parents feel as well as their

daily social interactions when out and about in the area.

- By working with and for the local community, the project is providing a range of ways for parents to contribute to project design and delivery that are proportionate and appropriate. As a result parents feel able to have a say in how things are run and are satisfied with the amount of ‘collective control’ they have.
- Building on local contacts and knowledge of the community, the project team has designed a project that clearly meets the needs of parents with young children, and in doing so, has filled a gap in service provision. The project is building on its success by formalising links with Local Children Services and Children’s Centres.

Who is involved?

Families who live in Queen’s Park are invited to attend weekly drop-in sessions at St Jude’s Hall. There are two sessions, a baby group aimed at 0 to 12 months at 9:30am to 10:30am and a toddler group aimed at 12 to 24 months at 10:30am to 12:00pm. Many families that attend the baby group also attend the toddler group and both sessions include a variety of activities such as free play, story telling and music-making.

The project attracts families to the weekly drop-in sessions via word of mouth, marketing leaflets and posters, and occasionally some special outdoor events to publicise the project and to attract new families. It also works closely with Community Champions, Maternity Champions, health visitors, local Children’s Services, local Children’s Centres, and Paddington

Development Trust to reach families that are disadvantaged and those that do not normally engage with local services. For example, volunteer Community Champions knock on doors of residents on the Mozart Estate, where many of the ‘more vulnerable’ families live, to hand out leaflets and to offer to take families down to the drop-in session.

“We have cards and posters that we put up. We have done a lot of research ourselves, so through door knocking and speaking to people. Now we have some Maternity Champions that let their friends and neighbours know. We have good links with our health visitor team, so they put one of our flyers into each of their birth packs and they actively promote the session.” (Partner)



With the Trust’s funding, a project manager was appointed who works 6 hours a week and oversees the operational running of the project. The weekly drop-sessions are led by project committee members and volunteers with the support of Creative Futures staff. There is also an early years musician who leads on the weekly music activities. Almost all of the staff, project committee and volunteers, including the early years musician and the Maternity Champions are local residents, or

parents who have attended the drop-in sessions and have later offered to volunteer to show their support for the project.

"Our volunteers are made up of local residents, they are quite representative of the area. We are lucky as Paddington Development Trust has been doing work within the community for years, so it has some really good links. I myself am local."
(Partner)



What opportunities does the project offer?

At each weekly drop-in session, a wide range of play equipment and musical instruments are set out for children to play with, while parents can have a seat and chat with other parents as they watch their children playing and interacting with each other. St Jude's Hall offers a large, clean and hazard free space, which means that parents are able to relax and easily interact with other families. The sessions also run at convenient times for families, especially for those that have a school run for older siblings in the morning.

"It's the little things... Just to have tea and cake, and focusing on making it fun for the mums to come. It's not just about the children, it's about the parents getting to know each other, feeling welcome and looked after."
(Project staff)

By bringing in local residents and local parents to run the weekly drop-

in sessions, the project is made accessible, friendly and welcoming for families who would not otherwise engage with local services.

"It's been quite nice that it wasn't in the Children's Centre, as some people see the Children's Centre as more a statutory service and they sometimes feel like they are going to be judged. Ours is like a nice ice breaker for them, we do have the cups of tea and the cake, and we try to make it as homely as possible. So it's especially good for some of the first time mums or parents who are a bit nervous."
(Partner)

The project committee meets every term to agree actions and decide if any changes to the delivery plan are required. From the parents' point of view, the project team are receptive to requests. For example, following some requests from families, Creative Futures has changed the times of the sessions and added a dedicated baby group. They also have monthly visits from a health visitor and a music CD with a collection of songs from the sessions which can be used at home. Overall, families were satisfied with the level of control that they have had over the project, both through the project committee and the beneficiary questionnaires every quarter.

What has the project achieved?

The project aims to reach 30-40 regular attendees and currently attracts around 80 families each week. About two-thirds are regular attendees of different ages and backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the local community, which includes Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and refugee groups.

Many families attend regularly because they enjoy the interactive

and supportive nature of the sessions. It gives them a good opportunity to meet other families and to get to know each other over a cup of tea in a safe and friendly environment where their children can play and interact with one another.

"I think it's an ideal place. It's warm and friendly. It's a chance for mothers to get out of the house and to come and meet other mothers. We make everyone feel welcome and we want everyone to feel welcome."
(Volunteer)

Through positive and sustained engagement with the project, families have benefitted in many ways. For parents, attending the weekly drop-in sessions has helped them to develop greater social links and to feel less isolated (a key programme outcome). It has helped to develop their support networks, including the formation of new friendships within the group. Some families are also socialising with each other outside of the weekly drop-in sessions in local cafes and other community centres.

"It's very relaxed, very casual, it's great. You get to meet lots of new people and the music is always different so your child gets to learn something new." (Beneficiary)

Frequently parents described how they had grown in confidence. They were more able to socialise and share their views and had become more confident in their parenting capabilities, learning to try new things both at the group and later at home. For example, many parents are a lot more comfortable with singing along to songs with their children during the session.

"The first time I came, I didn't know anyone as I was new to the area. I saw how everything was, the children

and parents, the staff and volunteers, the way that they teach and what they do in the session was lovely. So that's why I keep coming." (Beneficiary)

There were individual examples of parents who had learnt new parenting skills with the support of other parents, the Maternity Champions, or the health visitors who come in and offer the group informal advice. The activities are also help parents to interact and develop stronger bonds with their children, as parents are trying different tips and techniques they have picked up at the session at home.

"Going to a drop-in that parents enjoy and that their child enjoys is important. A lot of them say it's the best thing they go to every week and their child loves it. Seeing their child develop through the activities, through singing and interacting with other children, and hopefully it's given them some ideas for activities back at home. There's lots of evidence around the importance of singing to a child and interacting with them on that level." (Project staff)

At the same time, the project has been hugely beneficial for the children. Parents and the project team shared examples of how children have made friends and enjoyed themselves. Group musical games and singing have encouraged children to communicate and help to support their language development.

"Parents have seen their child develop in lots of ways, around coordination, social and emotional development, and interaction with other children, and language skills. So there are lots of benefits for the children." (Project staff)

The interviews with the project team, volunteers and parents also suggest that the project is demonstrating aspects of collective control (another key programme outcome), through collective action and some control over what activities are offered.

"I think we do have a say in how things are run here. There have actually been some changes in here already, all of the mums used to be on the mat with their children, but it was suggested by a few mums that it would be better if they sat on chairs around in a circle, so that the children have more space to play, as before it was a bit difficult for the children to run around." (Beneficiary)



Finally, positive outcomes are evident amongst the wider community. The project has brought a sense of community among people who would not normally speak to each other. Many find they now know more people in the local area, and stop in the street to chat, which helps them feel connected within the community.

"It's not like a place where you go. It's like my second home. When I come every Wednesday, everybody knows me and I know everybody here and we

are treated like we are part of one big family." (Beneficiary)

"Our evaluation has found that families are feeling more connected in the community and getting to know other people." (Project staff)

The volunteers have also benefited both professionally and socially. For example, the early years musician is a local mother who is well known locally, but she initially lacked confidence in her music-leading ability. Creative Futures invested in a series of guest musicians to train and work alongside her, which has helped to develop her confidence and skills. Her experience as an early years musician has helped her to get a part-time position at the local Children's Centre. It has also helped Creative Futures to further strengthen their link with the Children's Centre.

"It makes me so happy, as I love children. It's something I look forward to. You get to see how they are developing. I can see the difference from when they first come and when they have been coming for a long time. I wouldn't change anything." (Volunteer)

The Paddington Development Trust's Maternity Champions also receive accredited training (Birth and Beyond Community Supporter Level 2 training by New Parent Support) and various workshops which are funded by Public Health. Volunteers also receive 'Time Credits', a scheme run by Spice which rewards volunteers for the hours that they give to the project, e.g. with free entry to local attractions and leisure activities.

"For some of [the volunteers] it is about socialising within the team, it's about getting out and meeting new people. A few of our volunteers were newer to the area, so perhaps they

didn't know so many people. Some are attracted by the training we offer, or others just have a real love of babies and are looking to go back into work either working with children in midwifery or health visiting. So for them it's good for their CV and it's good for their progression." (Partner)

Following the success of the Queen's Park Families, Creative Futures is looking at whether this model can be rolled out into local Children Centres in Queen's Park and in neighbouring wards.

"It's helped us to build up good relationships with the Council, Children's Centres and with Paddington Development Trust... It's tied in neatly with other work which Creative Futures is doing in Children's Centres and nurseries locally, so a lot of children who have been to our drop-in are now in the nurseries and engaging with our musicians through another programme." (Project staff)

What has worked well?

- ➔ **Cross fertilisation and joint working with other local provision:** The partnership with Paddington Development Trust and links with Local Children's Services and Children's Centre managers and outreach teams have strengthened through the course of the project and led to further partnership working on other projects.
- ➔ **Local capacity building and collective control:** From the start, the project founders wanted to involve local people to run the project, from the specialist early years musician, local volunteers, to the Maternity Champions. The community-led nature of project is considered to be vital to the project's success.

- ➔ **Beacon of good practice:** According to Creative Futures³, Queen's Park Families is frequently cited by Westminster Children's Services as beacon of good practice in community-led initiatives, that is not only responsive to the needs of the community but also supports and enhances local services.

What are the challenges and how have these been overcome?

- ➔ **The large number of child minders and nannies who attend with the children:** Although the project is specifically designed for local families, there have been several child minders and nannies who also attend the weekly drop-in sessions. At the moment any nannies are welcome to the drop-in sessions, as long as the toddlers and babies they are looking after are living in Queen's Park. However, if the weekly drop-in sessions continue to grow and capacity starts to become an issue then Creative Futures would have to limit numbers and prioritise local families over child minders and nannies.
- ➔ **Engaging families who face multiple disadvantages:** This continues to be a challenge, but Creative Futures has had some success with bringing in families who do not normally access local services by using targeted outreach activities. However, it acknowledges that more could be done to ensure that these families regularly attend the drop-in sessions.
- ➔ **Publicity and awareness rising:** Creative Futures has learnt that there is no need to spend a lot of

money on advertising and publicity, as word of mouth is more effective at bringing people in. Creative Futures has had much more success through tapping into health visitors and midwives and getting them to do the signposting and outreach work for the project.



The future

The project's Active Communities funding came to an end in March 2016, but the project will continue until late autumn 2016 with some limited funding from Queen's Park Community Council's grant scheme. However, to ensure the longer-term sustainability of the project into 2017, Creative Futures is currently looking for other sources of funding to support the project. There is considerable appetite among local families and support networks in Queen's Park for the project to continue. Creative Futures hopes that Westminster's Early Years team can support it financially in future, although there is some uncertainty about this as there have been significant cuts to Early Years services in the area.

"Two good things have come out of it: firstly, we have secured further funding to keep the drop-in going; and secondly, we have started co-delivering a weekly session at the Children's Centre with Paddington Development Trust – which is interesting as it takes the Queen's Park Families model and puts it into the Children's Centre. I think the new project – and the new funding for

Queen's Park Families - have enabled us to have a clear legacy, and we expect both aspects to further develop in the future." (Project staff)



Endnotes

- ¹ It was one of 12 Neighbourhood Community Budget pilots ('Our Place Pioneers') in England, initiated by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to help decentralise power and control over public service delivery to the local level.
- ² The Queen's Park Families pilot project was set up by Creative Futures in Partnership with Paddington Development Trust following the formation of the Queens Park Community Council.
- ³ Creative Futures - 18 Monthly Monitoring Report. Active Communities Funding Programme Delivery.

