

Setting up and sustaining a local hub - a case study by BEYA Early Years Hub

BEYA Hub operates across 12 wards in the East Central Locality of the London Borough of Barnet. When the Hub began there was little centralised information about the local area in terms of details of early years settings, schools, health provision etc. This made it hard for agencies to work together.

One of the first things BEYA did therefore was to **get to know their local community** by mapping out the local area. The Hub coordinator made lists of early years PVI settings, of schools, of parent and toddler groups etc. This information was gleaned from local authority records, from staff knowledge and from information that BEYA already had such as service leaflets and booklets. Armed with this information, the coordinator was able to make direct contact with settings and agencies and sub-divide them into areas known as mini-hubs. Each mini-hub has its own coordinator operating from a children's centre (although this could easily be a group setting or school).

Local coordinators visited settings, invited providers and others to attend networking meetings, organised taster sessions in different settings and set up shared training so that providers could get to know each other and **build relationships**. This was quite time consuming and in some cases meant the coordinator had to contact people several times to explain the purpose of the Hub and the possible benefits to the provider, and the families they work with, of being part of it.

Once people had started to develop mutual trust and a better understanding of what different providers and individuals do, it was important to find ways to **sustain these relationships**. This includes keeping contact and encouraging people to maintain open communication – for example through face-to-face or online meetings. Hub meetings provide an opportunity for members to share worries and concerns as well as positive outcomes and solutions to challenges – this aspect of Hub membership proved to be vitally important during the coronavirus pandemic when setting managers reported feeling particularly isolated and vulnerable.

The BEYA Hub is proving to be an effective conduit and broker between different elements of provision of services for children under five – they are able to bring the local authority, health services and the early years community together so that ultimately children and their families benefit from more joined up services delivered by better informed practitioners.

On the next page is a summary of tips on how to set up and sustain a local hub.

Getting to know your local community – practice tips

- ✓ Contact the local authority to request names of local providers.
- ✓ Visit providers if possible – the personal touch is always appreciated.
- ✓ Set up networking opportunities and invite local providers along.

Building relationships – practice tips

- ✓ Broker visits to different types of settings (nurseries, schools, PVI, childminder drop-in groups, health centres).
- ✓ Invite local authority and health teams to networking meeting or visits (such as family support, brokerage officers, health visitors).
- ✓ Set up networking opportunities and invite local providers.
- ✓ Encourage people to share information.

Sustaining relationships – practice tips

- ✓ Keep lines of communication open and communicate openly - consider monthly meetings.
- ✓ Encourage people to appreciate each other – agree roles and who does what – these can be written down as a collaboration agreement which all partners could sign.
- ✓ Extend yourself – be prepared to go a little bit out of your way.
- ✓ Encourage people to ask for help, to lend a hand and to share different ways of solving problems.
- ✓ Ask members what they need from a Hub and work with them to meet these needs e.g. setting up training, inviting local authority officers to meetings etc.