



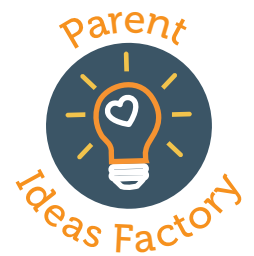
STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

Community Budgeting Approaches with Early Years Parents

Giving the community their voice within decision making has always been a key outcome of the Better Start partnership. Community or participatory budgeting is a process where power is passed to the community to choose how money is spent in their communities. The process was piloted with Better Start to engage more families with activities within Children Centres and ultimately wider early years activities and support.

Initially in 2015 nine parents' forums across each of the Children Centres were given a total budget of £42,000 annually to choose activities for their centers and encourage new families to register. In April 2018, the process was adapted to include wider participation from all Children's Centre users through a postcard system and subsequent voting system within the parents' forums. This gave a wider reach and engaged more families in the process. This was adapted further in 2019 to become **The Parents Ideas Factory** which introduced an online form alongside postcard suggestions.

Street to Scale, was also introduced in August 2019 and widened the offer to engage those not attending Children's Centers. Street to Scale offers a prepaid credit card to community members to spend up to £1000 on activities or resources which benefit their wider community. The process was open to all parents of babies and young children and therefore not limited just to those actively attending Children Centres.



Why was this needed?

A key element of Better Start has been to strengthen relationships with communities. Using community budgets aimed to build stronger communities through offering a range of accessible and inclusive activities, chosen by families for families and equally share decision making.

Families are encouraged to think about activities which would encourage new families to use their Children Centres/Family Hubs and the wider early years offer in the town. For example, funding story telling sessions or trips to pantomimes or the theatre and then promoting universal sessions in libraries or Family Hubs.

The approach supported the development of strong co-productive relationships between parents, the parents' forum, and professionals in the Family Hub. By developing a shared process of decision making around the offer of activities on timetables this supported other pieces of consultation and co-production with families.



What we learnt

The iterative development of the use of community budgeting with families allowed reflection and improvement. Each stage provided rich learning around how decision making could be truly shared with communities and reach those that were not engaging with early years services or confident to vocalise their ideas.

Whilst The Parents Ideas Factory was more inclusive and had a wider reach, the introduction of Street to Scale enabled parents to manage projects from start to finish including all purchasing and budgeting, this further developed community capacity.

When families attended an activity or event funded by the community budget there has been seen that individuals do go on to attend a future event within the Children Centre/Family Hub. With the average number of activities which individuals engaged in following the initial funded activity being three. Partners also saw higher engagement in their activities following linked activities, for example higher attendance at Early Years Park Ranger sessions following a visiting farm activity on a local park.

The total number of babies and young children aged 0-4 that were brought to the funded activities and events was over 8000 in the decade of delivery. Of these, 58% resided in households categorised as the most deprived in Blackpool, IMD1(2019).

One of the challenges of the process has been being able to engage with a wide range of families. There have been challenges in that individuals or groups will only look at activities directly relevant, or of interest to themselves. For example, ideas submitted by parents of SEND reviewed by parents' forums with no experience of SEND risked being overlooked, or vice versa. Strengthening Parent Forums representation has been a focus of the Family Hub Parent Panel development to reduce this risk.

To continue this work, a model has been developed in conjunction with the Local Authority Social Value Team which will be piloted through Family Hubs. The approach will create stronger links between Councilor Budgets, Social Value Budgets and Family Hubs. Through parents panels expenditure can be influenced by parents panels and be directed by community decision making.



What would you do with £1000 to change your community?

Street to Scale

Through Street to Scale, Blackpool Better Start can provide funding of up to £1,000 to help groups of two or more local people tackle something which really matters to families and early years children in their community.

Take a look at what people from your community have already done here: blackpoolbetterstart.org.uk/street-to-scale

Mobile Book Swap by Dads 4 Life

We know children's books are sometimes an expense that unfortunately some families just can't afford. We want to make education and family story time as accessible as possible for the whole community, whatever their situation.

We have created four mobile book swap units to provide a free way for people to read and exchange children's books. The libraries are really child friendly and will be stocked with a collection of 200 children's books. As the scheme takes off it will be filled with all kinds of swaps and donations!

By taking part in this project, I've learnt new skills and have really enjoyed giving back. It's so easy to get involved in community projects and help others out.

How does it work?

- 1 Lead the way**
Bring together five or more local people to tackle a social issue or project that matters in your community.
- 2 Set a mission**
Pick an issue for your group to tackle in an 8-week period.
- 3 Contact Us**
Email betterstart.org@nospoc.org.uk with your idea.
- 4 Community Vote**
Your idea will be voted on by a panel made up of the local community.
- 5 Form a WhatsApp Group**
Give your group a name and put the mission in the description.
- 6 Invite Street to Scale**
Invite one of our Street to Scale organisers to the group. They will help you with the proposal cards and answer any money questions.
- 7 Find Citizens**
You can find more people to be part of your group to help you achieve your mission. Your idea will also be shared with local services who could help too and may be in touch! Up to ten people can be used to back.
- 8 Open your box and get spending!**
When you are all set, message Street to Scale on your WhatsApp and the cards will be issued. You will then have 8 weeks to complete your mission and spend the £1,000.

blackpoolbetterstart.org.uk/street-to-scale



Suggestion Card

parent Ideas Factory

Funding your ideas for you and your little ones

We want you to make suggestions about any activities or ideas you have for your little ones. You can even make suggestions about any activities you'd like to do too. Whatever your idea is – we can help make it happen!

Simply fill in overleaf and post it in a suggestion box in a Family Hub or local library, and we will do the rest.

Group Facilitators needed

[@blackpoolbetterstart](https://www.facebook.com/BetterStartBlackpool) blackpoolbetterstart.org

Outcomes

Provision

Between 2015 and 2025 there were 1706 activities delivered as part of the approach.

Engagement

Between 2015 and 2025 there have been over 7500 families attending the activities.

Reach

The total number of babies and young children aged 0-4 that were brought to the funded activities and events was over 8000. Of these, 58% resided in households categorised as the most deprived in Blackpool, IMD1(2019).