

Calderdale Parent and Carers Council

Katie Clarke

Katie Clarke is a mother of 6 children including an 18-yr-old daughter who is a communication aid user and wheelchair user. Katie co-founded **1Voice-Communicating Together** which is a national charity supporting disabled children who use alternative methods of communication and their families. She also co-founded **Calderdale Parent and Carers Council** which is recognised as an excellent example of parent participation both locally and nationally.

Summary

Calderdale Parent and Carers Council works with families who have children with a wide range of impairments and supports the parents/carers to make positive change in their lives. In this article, Katie Clarke explains how it began and what it does.

Calderdale Parent and Carers Council was established in 2001 after a consultation process undertaken by Peter Limbrick of Interconnections on behalf of the local authority to find out how parents felt about being involved in the design of local services.

An event was held in the summer of 2001 with parents and professionals coming together to hear about how parent participation and consultation was organised elsewhere in the country. The founder of Leicester Parent Council was invited to speak and talked about how parents were fully involved in improving services within Leicestershire. The parents attending were so inspired that they came together later that day and agreed to establish their own Parent Council. A committee was quickly formed, a membership leaflet designed and distributed and a meeting organised 4 months later with heads of services to launch the group.

The Calderdale Parent and Carers Council (abbreviated below to 'The Parent Council') has grown from a small voluntary run organisation with a membership of 30

families to 350 families and a part-time staff team made up of 2 parents of disabled children, a project co-ordinator and a Chief Executive. The Parent Council reaches more than 1500 people throughout Calderdale via its email list, membership, contact with the 3 special schools and mainstream schools across the authority.

The Parent Council has parent volunteers who represent the members and who sit on a number of steering groups and strategic boards including all the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme boards and subgroups. The Parent Council listens to the views of families and takes those views forward at strategic level. Over the years, The Parent Council has worked in a creative and pro-active way and developed its methods of consultation and participation. It organises a range of activities to enable parents to get involved – coffee mornings and drop-in sessions, family events and fun sessions over the holidays, training and information sessions, focus group workshops, and joint partnership events on such themes as a Managers Day, a Back Care Day, a Support around Behaviour Day, a Celebrating Families Day and recently a 'Having A Voice Making an Impact' training session.

The Parent Council has set up support groups across the local authority in partnership with locally based services. These groups will soon have their own parent representative who will be able to feed back any issues into the main Parent Council.

Parents are regularly kept up to date with local and national news and events through weekly emails and a termly newsletter. Flyers are distributed every month with dates of meetings and events. Parents are referred through the Child Development Unit, Family Support Workers, Children's Centres, Disabled Children's Team, Families Information Service, etc. The Parent Council has a large network across the authority and has partnerships with statutory services, and is

fully engaged with other 3rd sector partners.

Staff members work in a positive, friendly and respectful way – firstly listening to parents who contact them, offering support over the phone or face to face, providing information, signposting and also acting on the issues that are heard.

Recently, the two issues of disposable pads and the emotional wellbeing of families have both been taken on board strategically. Focus groups are established so that reports can be written up and sent to the relevant heads of services and to commissioners. Meetings are then organised with the relevant commissioners with a core group of parents from the initial focus group. Services and parents then work together in a positive and proactive way to ensure that parents are fully involved in the design, implementation and delivery of improved services.

Successes have included:

- Establishing the *Young Disabled People's Forum* which now sits within the Participation Team of the local council.
- An award winning **1Park for All** project which highlighted the need for inclusive playground equipment throughout Calderdale.
- Embedding person-centred thinking throughout Calderdale using a range of tools such as *1 Page Profiles* which are an effective and positive way of using one page to look at the support needs of a young person.
- Delivery of *Creating Ripples* – a course for professionals around working with families with disabled children. The local council has now trained a group of parent carers in training the trainer and who are now part of the Parent Council training team.

Partnerships include Home Start, Play Services, Calderdale Carers Project, Extended Services, Disabled Children's Team, Family Support Services, the Primary Care Trust, DCATCH (Disabled Children's Access to Childcare) Aiming High and Inclusion Service.

Calderdale Parent and Carers Council has worked over the years to support other authorities in establishing their own parent forums. Since Aiming High, The Parent Council also links in to the regional parent forum group and works nationally with Together for Disabled Children. They ensure that their work links in with national agendas involving disabled children and their families and makes sure that this feeds into local practice and procedures.

Contact

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