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# CHANGING WALLS INTO WINDOWS

SUMMARY – PRU Parent Advocacy Handbook

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

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### Summary

Education is of vital importance to enable young people reap the longer-term benefits of successful transition to the adult world moving into training and employment, positive relationships, parenthood and wider community responsibility.

However, if school and education are negative experiences the parent of a child entering a Pupil Referral Unit may feel that they have hit a wall. Exclusion can feel like rejection of the parent as much as of the pupil. While fear for the child's future can mix with anxiety engendered by perceptions of a PRU; the multiple overlapping issues can overwhelm some families.

But a parent's experience of a PRU can be very positive indeed – a child rediscovers success in learning, the parent is helped to help them achieve – and along the way finds help and support with some of the issues they face as parents.

The Pathfinder has demonstrated that the advocacy work with parents of children in PRUs has shown promise – walls can become windows.

#### Parent Advocacy in a PRU means that parents are able to:

- Know what to do to support their child's learning
- Work with the staff in the PRU and other agencies to resolve problems
- Know that staff and other parents provide a support network

#### So the child can refocus on learning to:

- Achieve better outcomes in attainment
- Attendance and behaviour measures improve
- Help successful reintegration or transition to further education/training

#### *Parent advocacy delivery*

Each of the PRUs adopted a range of strategies and tactics to engage parents and a variety of support techniques. To engage parents hands-on practical support was essential, as well as referral to other specialist agencies. On-going engagement is the essential core requirement of the parent advocacy activity.

The parent advocacy services were provided in different ways across the five Pathfinders using three methods; in house staff, external local authority staff, third sector, the advantages and disadvantages are considered in the WCL evaluation<sup>1</sup>. The Pathfinders supported 68 parents.

The Pathfinders utilised different approaches to parenting support within the context of wider underpinning theoretical approaches. The key issue is to develop reflective practice and understand what approach works best in each situation. The Pathfinders found that a mix of theories was used, for example motivational interviewing on 1:1 basis along with group sessions which modelled social

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<sup>1</sup> An Evaluation of the Greater London Authority's Parent Advocacy Project in Pupil Referral Units, White Consulting Limited and London Metropolitan University, March 2012 <http://www.tsip.co.uk>

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learning. This multiple and flexible approach fitted well with the changing needs and demands of parents.

The qualitative data collected by the evaluation showed positive changes in self-reflection by parents and children plus positive aspects identified by PRU staff and greater inclusion of families through access to services and support networks.

### *Key lessons learnt from the PRU Parent Advocacy Pathfinder*

The Parent Advocacy Pathfinder has enabled five PRUs to undertake a small scale programme working with parents to achieve better outcomes for their children. The handbook brings together the learning from the project. It includes a working definition of parenting advocacy, commissioning options, culture and organisational considerations (see the risk assessment). In addition the varied approaches and activity undertaken has enabled the development of a robust template based on the theory of change to assist PRUs in developing future activity.

A full evaluation was undertaken which looked closely at process, delivery, data collection. The evaluation, based on the Project Oracle template, is Level 2: Promising. The Pathfinders have identified the practical requirements that need to be considered for the development of future projects.

Data collected during interviews and seminars showed some improvement in terms of self-reflection by the parents and children and positive changes observed by PRU staff and service deliverers. However, all five PRUs involved in this project found it difficult to engage parents.

From the experience of the Pathfinders there are a number of pre-conditions for the successful implementation of Parent Advocacy work within the PRU; leadership, objectives and ethos and a clear understanding of theoretical approaches to parenting support. See the checklist the "do's and don'ts" of parent advocacy.

### **Case Study**

Mother, is a lone parent, provides a safe and stable home for her two sons but needed extra support for her son in Year 9 in the PRU. The first 1:1 interview was a chance to reflect on her experience of parenting, what works and what she might change. Weekly support meetings continued over some months. Her feedback now is that changes she has made as a parent at home had an impact in helping her son be successfully reintegrated back into mainstream school. She says it has also helped her eldest son get a college place.

### **Case Study**

Mother of a Year 10 boy 'L' joined a Triple P group and quickly began to make changes at home. She said she was becoming more consistent and resisting the unreasonable demands of her son who was often violent. L's behaviour outside PRU has escalated and he is now supervised by the YOT. The Educational Psychologist is also involved in assessment of need. Mother continues to ask for the group support which the project offers as this helps her while her son goes through this very challenging time.

## The Do and Don't for developing Parent Advocacy in a Pupil Referral Unit

### Do

1. Describe the 'universal' offer of support to parents in the PRU.
2. Set out clearly – and then test the logic of why the advocacy service you plan to provide will achieve the outcomes you want for pupils, parents, PRU and others (see template).
3. Define the specialist input for targeted parents needed – and set out for all staff how they can use language and take actions which supports the principles of the advocacy programme.
4. Use parent engagement approaches which are both sensitive to need and tenacious.
5. Get the balance right between 1:1 support and group support – in this way both confidentiality and group support is provided.
6. See this provision as a key intervention opportunity – almost an 'adapter' which helps other agencies be plugged in to supporting and challenging the family.

### Don't

1. Make this an inflexible bolt-on service – but make sure it integrates with the induction processes, PRU routines and reintegration processes – and responds to the unique circumstances of each family.
2. Set up the service without a clear, straightforward monitoring and evaluation strategy.
3. Work in isolation from other locality parenting work (include statutory and voluntary)
4. Ignore the need for clarity about information sharing, programmes and thresholds for referral
5. Miss the chance for tackling issues such as sex education - empowering parents to support their children along with skills in managing family dynamics
6. Stereotype parents of pupils in PRUs – some are doing their very best and using the right sort of approaches – and some are not.

### Defining Parent Advocacy

The five Pathfinders developed different approaches to parent advocacy including a range of styles for commissioning and delivery. These decisions were based on specific parameters unique to each of the PRUs in terms on in-house staffing and expertise and availability of local service providers.

Each PRU developed different target cohorts, varied methods of recruitment, their own range of support and the numbers of parents engaged with varied. Despite these differences, there are many shared features to help define parent advocacy.

#### Purpose

- Enabling parents to get their voice heard
- Empowering parents – with skills, knowledge and understanding
- Offering way for repair of harm/rebuilding of confidence
- Building relationships between PRU and parents based on support and assertive challenge
- Timely support for parents

#### Practices

- Modelling behaviours/approaches
- Mentoring/coaching of behaviours/approaches
- Enabling the pupil to hear the parent voice
- Using language and style which builds trust and can also challenge/support

#### Activities

- Providing practical support – so that trust builds for pupil focused work
- Communicating parent views, needs and hopes to both PRU and other services working with the parents or pupils
- Challenging parents and services including PRUs (consider the 'placement' of the advocacy services in relation to the PRU)

#### Organisational

- Having a culture which is 'ready for advocacy' – ethos, leadership and management
- Being clear on the limits of advocacy work and the referral threshold at which parent needs are met by better access to another service
- Training staff in advocacy approaches

#### Advocacy focus is the overlap between

- What the parent wants for their children
- What the schools, LA and service delivery partners want for the pupils
- How the PRU functions – (e.g. is it a short stay or longer placement)

### Pathfinder learning: Modelling behaviour to parents

It's about treating parents as equals – 'we're all on the same team'. Parent's feedback is that so far they've been told off. Parents need to be seen as part of the solution, not part of the problem.

## Other formats and languages

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### Hindi

यदि आप इस दस्तावेज की प्रति अपनी  
भाषा में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया निम्नलिखित  
नंबर पर फोन करें अथवा नीचे दिये गये  
पते पर संपर्क करें

### Vietnamese

Nếu bạn muốn có văn bản tài liệu  
này bằng ngôn ngữ của mình, hãy  
liên hệ theo số điện thoại hoặc địa  
chỉ dưới đây.

### Bengali

আপনি যদি আপনার ভাষায় এই দলিলের প্রতিলিপি  
(কপি) চান, তা হলে নিচের ফোন নম্বরে  
বা ঠিকানায় অনুগ্রহ করে যোগাযোগ করুন।

### Greek

Αν θέλετε να αποκτήσετε αντίγραφο του παρόντος  
εγγράφου στη δική σας γλώσσα, παρακαλείστε να  
επικοινωνήσετε τηλεφωνικά στον αριθμό αυτό ή ταχυ-  
δρομικά στην παρακάτω διεύθυνση.

### Urdu

اگر آپ اس دستاویز کی نقل اپنی زبان میں  
چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم نیچے دئے گئے نمبر  
پر فون کریں یا دیئے گئے پتے پر رابطہ کریں

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinizde  
hazırlanmış bir nüshasını  
edinmek için, lütfen aşağıdaki  
telefon numarasını arayınız  
veya adrese başvurunuz.

### Arabic

إذا أردت نسخة من هذه الوثيقة بلغتك، يرجى  
الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو مراسلة العنوان  
أدناه

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ  
ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਹੇਠ  
ਲਿਖੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਰਾਬਤਾ ਕਰੋ:

### Gujarati

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજની નકલ તમારી ભાષામાં  
જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી આપેલ નંબર ઉપર  
ફોન કરો અથવા નીચેના સરનામે સંપર્ક સાધો.

