

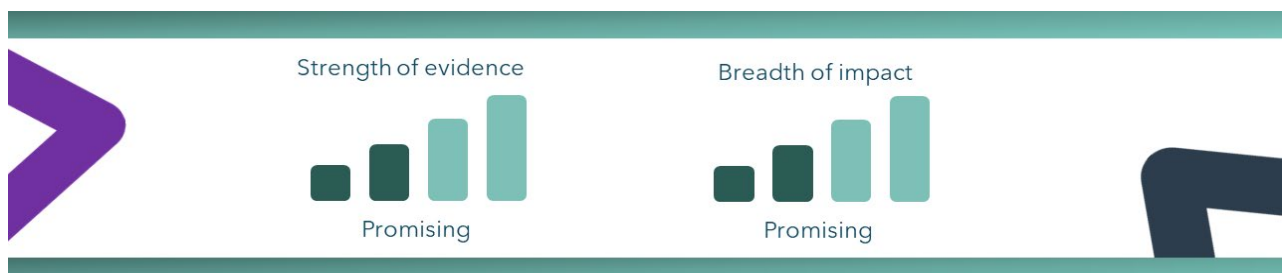
Effective Practice case study: Manchester's approach to a co-produced community offer

Summary

Amid ongoing lockdown restrictions in summer 2020, Manchester City Council (MCC) set out to ensure families of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were making full use of their local universal offer. Working with parents/carers, children and young people, and community partners, the council co-produced a new summer offer, designed to ensure local families had opportunities to build networks and friendships, access excellent quality information, and build confidence in exploring and using the offer. The project also enabled universal services to build their skills, knowledge, and confidence when working with disabled children and young people, children and young people with special educational needs, and their families.

As a result of this work, take up of sessions significantly increased by almost 500% over two years, (from 498 in 2020 to 2954 in 2022), parent groups developed strong, meaningful partnerships with local community providers (one group now sits on the board of a provider), and direct work with young people has led to the piloting of a youth-led grant making group. The council received positive feedback from families around peer-to-peer support, improved accessibility, and young people's increased confidence, friendships, independence, aspirations, skills, and sense of belonging. Key activities crucial to impact were a commitment to co-production, inclusivity, and nurturing a sense of community.

The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework considers that the "strength of evidence" of this case study is **promising** – the work has been evaluated internally and has been shared and has been sustained for two years. The "breadth of impact" of this case study is **promising** – there is evidence of impact in two of the four broad areas of impact considered by the Framework.¹



¹ The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework uses two "signal strength" indicators to present the strength of evidence and the breadth of impact of a case study. Each indicator has four bars – emerging, promising, good and robust, the "strength of evidence" indicator is based on how the project has been evaluated and the length of time it has been sustained. The "breadth of impact" indicator is based on whether the case study can demonstrate impact in four broad areas – the more areas of impact, the higher the signal strength indicator.

Why was this work undertaken? What did the work aim to do?


During lockdown in 2020, many of the usual short break providers in Manchester were unable to deliver their traditional holiday schemes for families. MCC were concerned about how families would cope given the restrictions. They were also aware that families did not always make full use of the local universal services available for a variety of reasons, such as not understanding their child's behaviour and communication, the effects of bad or stressful experiences, or not feeling welcome by front line or reception staff.

MCC therefore considered the strengths they had at their disposal: an excellent model of participation; positive relationships with their parent carer networks; a vibrant city with good outdoor space; and community partners with great ambition for the city's children and young people (such as the commitment to becoming a UNICEF recognised UK Child Friendly City).

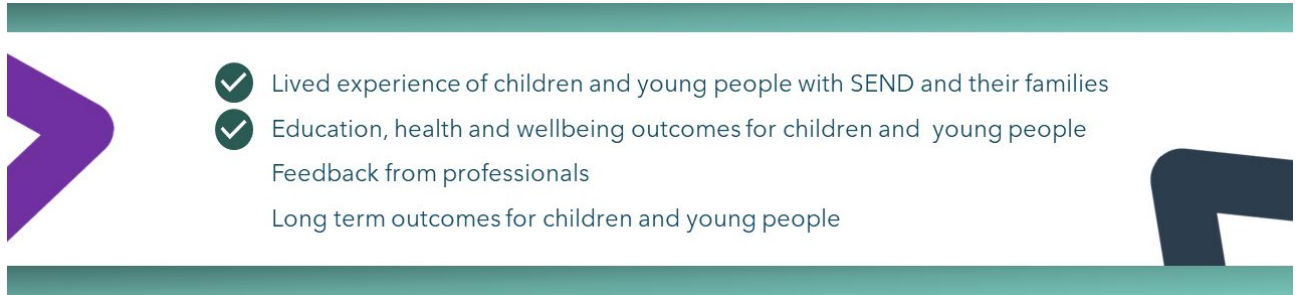
The aims of the project were to:

- ✦ Co-produce a summer offer with children and young people and their families, accessible to all;
- ✦ Build the confidence of families to use universal services and the local offer; and
- ✦ Build the confidence of universal services to work with families of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs.

Progress would be measured using the following benchmarks:

- ✦ Increased take up of universal community services by families of disabled children and young people and those with SEN;
 - ✦ Decrease in families requesting traditional targeted short breaks;
 - ✦ Improved understanding and awareness of the SEND local offer by families and service providers;
 - ✦ Increase in parent and youth led provision; and
 - ✦ Increased opportunities for training and development.
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What was the impact?



The project has been able to demonstrate impact in two of the four areas captured by the SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework. The project has demonstrated significant impact in the core elements on which it has focused:

- ✦ A reduction in the take-up of targeted services from 85% in 2021-22 to 51% in 2023-24 and an increase in community activities from 13% to 39%.
- ✦ Increasing number of sessions attended by families year on year (498 sessions in 2020, 1495 sessions in 2021, and 2954 sessions in 2022).
- ✦ Improved take up of universal services and families accessing the community independently outside of the community offer.
- ✦ Improved awareness of the local offer, with a significant increase in sign up to the local offer newsletter (over 4000 subscribers) and increased attendance at drop-ins, doubling average attendance.
- ✦ A 60% increase in parent-led provision, 150% increase in young people-led commissioning of provision, and a 40% increase in parent support groups.

MCC received positive feedback on areas that have had an impact on children, young people and families. For example, families have reported forging positive networks, friendship, and peer-to-peer support through the offer, and improved access to places they would not have accessed by themselves, but did so knowing there would be other supportive families there to socialise with. As a result of the project's inclusive family approach, family members have reported strengthened relations between one another.

Evaluation responses from parent carers include:

"This group helps me because some kids round here are not very nice and they always tease me, but in this group no one teases me. Everyone's nice and it just makes me feel happy, getting out the house, not being bored, this is a brilliant group, I'm very grateful for it." – **Child participant of MCC's community offer**

"The Drive Ready Workshop helped me to get my provisional license so I can learn how to drive" – **Young participant of MCC's community offer**

"I'm on my own with two children, both with autism. I wouldn't normally access the trips - I feel quite socially isolated. It's hard work being on my own with them. Finances are limited. So it's been great to come on the trips, have the support of the group, and the other people. I don't think I would have been able to get out and do the things that we do without the group." - **Parent participant of MCC's community offer**

"We love the local offer events. Not only is it a chance for us to experience things we might not normally do, but it's also been great to meet some other mums who go through similar stuff. These events have changed our lives over the last couple of years. ..they have been a safe space for our families to connect with each other and be happy being ourselves without prejudice or judgement...For me personally these connections and relationships have supported my own positive mental health and helped me get to a place where I'm confident supporting my children and accessing our community." - **Parent participant of MCC's community offer**

Children and young people have also reported improved confidence, friendships, independence, aspirations, and understanding of their rights due to the project. As a result of travel training offered as part of the project, young people have also reported gaining the confidence and independence to travel to school or college, or access other services. They have also been given the opportunities to develop new skills such as cooking, cycling, arts, music, team building, and social action projects, improving their aspirations, sense of belonging, and knowledge of Manchester.

What were the key actions and practices involved?

There were three key areas of practice crucial to MCC achieving impact with their community offer: a commitment to inclusivity, co-production and a strong participation model. These are described in more detail below.

1. Inclusivity

MCC describe their SEND community offer as not just the offer itself, but about the sense of community it fosters. They describe it as being part of a support network that provides a sense of belonging. Key to the success of this work has been their key principles on openness and accessibility. Historical feedback from parent carers was that they had not applied for short breaks because although they wanted and needed access, they did not want to be seen as "begging" for services and were hesitant about going through a potentially negative process. MCC removed eligibility criteria for accessing the offer, making it as accessible as possible for all families - they do not require proof of special educational need and/or disability; nor do they require an EHC plan. MCC ensure the offer is accessible to all families with disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs by promoting it widely through a weekly local offer newsletter for families and practitioners, as well as ensuring that any booking requirements are available in a range of ways.

The community offer also works well because services want to be inclusive therefore professionals and practitioners are open to receiving briefings which are key to increasing awareness of the local offer and reaching more marginalised families. Consequently, parents have delivered training to universal providers around engaging with families. For MCC, the key has been working with parent carers to provide this support based on lived experience. Manchester have also set up an 'innovation pot' where services can bid for funding to make their offer more inclusive, such as noise-cancelling headsets for young people at busy youth centres. Special schools also work with providers to build capacity, lending expertise to universal services such as mainstream play provision - this is funded by MCC.

2. Co-production

MCC's offer has been impactful and been successfully sustained because of the level and nature of co-production involved. MCC know the offer is what families want because families and young people are involved from the start. Because MCC's local offer is always driven by what young people and their families want, this means it is responsive and open-minded, adapting each summer depending on what participants would like more of or what they think does not work. Co-production is, in their own words, 'business as usual', a 'true partnership'.

MCC have linked parents together with community partners to co-deliver parts of the offer and have trained these parents to do so in areas such as safeguarding, first aid, and health and safety. MCC meet regularly with key community partners to gather proposals from across the city, based on parents' and children and young people's ideas. In turn, partner organisations have told Manchester that these links have shaped how they deliver their work.

MCC also commissioned one of their key partners to co-produce a Youth Led Grant Programme to ensure children and young people had their own dedicated programme. This was a £20k fund designed and led by young people. There were 16 applications and Manchester have funded eight and feedback from the young people involved has been positive.


3. A strong participation model

MCC talk about their participation model being different to other cities. In addition to their PCF, MCC have established a Parent Champion Model. They found that their PCF often felt too formal and therefore not as accessible for some parents. The Parent Champion Model provides more opportunities for any parent to get involved. MCC have also established a Working Together network, bringing families together around shared commonalities. This network comes together three times a year and enables families to participate in any area of work. MCC also meet regularly with children and young people changemakers through the Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN). These networks serve to ensure that MCC can reach more marginalised communities and, fortunately, all were set up pre-pandemic -so when lockdown restrictions were introduced, MCC were well-placed to continue reaching the most vulnerable communities.

Has the work been sustained?

Having started in 2020, the work is now seen as "business as usual". This work has been sustained over two years and will enter its third year. It is now being delivered by partners, with the local offer team co-ordinating and publicising the work. However, to keep the project running it will require a clear commitment to co-production with families and support from the short breaks team to support families to access and remove any barriers. This work would be relevant to any local SEND system seeking to embed a strong community offer with a culture of co-production across a local area, and who are committed to partnership working with children, young people and their families.

This required funding of c.£50k, which has been built into business-as-usual from the Local Offer / Short Breaks team, therefore no additional resource has been required. Manchester has scaled this funding up year on year due to the success of the project, they have diverted funding from the traditional offer to the Community Offer as this is where the demand is. Manchester utilises local community spaces therefore no physical space is required.



Resources required	Value for money
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Financial investment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sustained £ needed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cost neutral
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Physical space	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Savings (+outcomes)



Finding out more

Contact to find out more	Julie Hicklin – SEND Lead: julie.hicklin@manchester.gov.uk
Useful resources and links	Evaluation video created by children and young people in Manchester.