

# The Pembury Children's Community Evaluation

April 2018



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Pembury Children's Community is being evaluated by Sheffield Hallam University as part of a wider evaluation of Children's Communities being conducted for Save the Children UK between 2017 and 2019. This report draws on data collected between January and December 2017 through a range of research activities:

- Semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the delivery and governance of the Children's Community in Pembury and/or involved in the commissioning, planning or delivery of services to children, young people and families in the area.
- Interviews and focus groups with young people and parents living in Pembury and participating in one or more activities supported by the Children's Community.
- Attendance and observations at Children's Community Board meetings and events.
- Documentary analysis of Children's Community reports and minutes of meetings.
- Evaluation of a Children's Community initiative supported through seed corn funding from Save the Children UK.

A full report on the evaluation of the Children's Community programme in 2017 is available at <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/childrens-community-evaluation-2017.pdf>

## What has happened in the Pembury Children's Community?

The Children's Community in Pembury has brought together local residents and a wide range of agencies (including Peabody, Hackney Council, and local schools) involved in the planning and delivery of services to children and young people in Pembury to co-ordinate and deliver a long-term and holistic approach to improving outcomes for children and young people in the area. The Children's Community is governed by a Board,, operations group and residents steering group which have so far undertaken a range of activities:

- Gathering evidence of community need through local consultation and research.
- Agreeing a vision for Pembury, and a theory of change to guide the work of the Children's Community.
- Working in partnership to deliver services for children, young people and families. These include services delivered at the Pembury Community Centre: the Pembury Pass, Pembury Pathways and Pembury Youth Club.
- Developing new services, in response to community need. A recent example is the Pembury Ready for School project which is working across early years, family support and primary school to support local children to make a successful transition to primary school.

### **Pembury Ready for School**

The Pembury Ready for School project grew out of the observation that young children living on the Pembury estate would benefit from support which helped them to make a successful transition to primary school. The innovative project is supported by seed corn funding from Save the Children UK and funding from the academy involved and is supporting children

from 23 local families to make a successful transition to Mossbourne Parkside Academy in September 2017 and throughout their first year at primary school.

The project provides an estate-based teacher working across home and school, working in partnership with a parent advisor. Parents and children were invited to events during the summer term before Reception and over the school holidays, and home visits were carried out for each child in the cohort. Repeated and frequent engagement through home visits and community events was designed to develop relationships and build trust and engagement with staff to support improved engagement with school. In Reception year, the children have taken part in in-school sessions and an after school group, and parent workshops were held during the autumn term. Eight families have also received home learning sessions. These were individually tailored to provide advice and model interactions for parents of children with SEND and children whose emotional and social development was negatively impacting their progress at school. Support has been allocated on the basis of need, as assessed by the Ready for School teacher. This meant that children who received the most hours of additional support in school also received extra support out of school. A challenge for the project was to ensure that all children in the cohort received support during their first term at school. Attainment and progress data for these children indicates that compared to their peers Ready for School children have made good progress in their first term at school, particularly in speaking, reading, and numbers. Further analysis of data in the summer term will allow for the continued assessment of the progress of the group.

Although most parents interviewed indicated that they did not have concerns about their child starting school, the project has provided reassurance that their child has settled in and is making good progress at school and has helped to develop positive home-school relationships:

*The best thing for me personally is knowing that there's someone in the classroom that (my son) knows outside of school teachers.*

The project has revealed that many parents were keen to support their children's learning but are not confident in their ability to do so. Having access to information about the school curriculum and child development can help these parents to be more confident. Parents also made reference to improvements to family life. Benefits included better parenting skills, improved coping strategies, increased confidence and new relationships and networks.

*More involved with the child since engagement with the project - I think it's been more since the project. (Interview)*

*It build up my confidence more yeah... Yeah I would say three ways, in myself and help my child and I think it's really good experience to have this project going on. (Interview)*

For children, the project has helped them to feel comfortable in a new school:

*Happy because of having my own school. I got used to it. I love all the things hanging on the wall.*

For the school staff, the Pembury Ready for School project has complemented existing transition activities including stay and play sessions, meetings and workshops for parents and staggered starts for the children. It has also provided welcome additional support in the classroom and has helped the children to settle into school. The project has also helped to build parental engagement with school.

Eleven families have also received support from the Peabody Parent Advisor on non-educational areas of family life. The support has covered a range of issues including volunteering (3 families), peer support (4 families), adult education (8 families), money advice (8 families), immigration advice/ referral (3 families), support to complete applications

(4 families), help to arrange childcare (5 families), accompanying on visits and appointments (4 families) and support for housing issues or repairs (5 families). Parents who were interviewed who had received support from the Parent Advisor were unanimously positive about the service, citing in particular the open and encouraging approach of the Advisor:

*(She) helped me in a lot of ways .she encouraged me, tell me about it and to go to certain things and stuff, so I think I can say she's been a good support to me and she encouraged me to do a lot of things that I would just have said no to.*

Learning from the project thus far includes:

- The project has helped to settle children into school and has supported home-school engagement by providing parents with a known and accessible contact at the school.
- Having extra input appears to help children progress. The Ready for School cohort started Reception slightly behind their peers in many areas but by the autumn assessment period a higher proportion of them were on track to meet Foundation stage outcomes (Good Level of Development - GLD) than their peers. This was still the case in the spring term.
- For some children with high levels of need, personal, social and emotional development and wellbeing was enhanced by the opportunity for focussed input and support from an adult working between home and school.
- Transition to primary school offers an opportunity to contact families and provide a wide range of non-educational support, leading to outcomes which include improved home and financial circumstances and participation in education and volunteering.
- The provision of wraparound, holistic and family-centred support is valued by families and may be especially beneficial to families with the highest levels of need. An exemplar was given by the estate-based teacher of support given through the R4S project to the families of children with SEND which has helped to overcome gaps in local provision caused by turnover of staff in crucial roles (e.g. Speech and Language therapists and the school SENDCo). Support provided through R4S has addressed families' questions, thereby reducing anxieties, and facilitated access to further support, for instance through application for an Education Health Care Plan. This level of support may be difficult for those in school-based roles (SENDCo and class teachers) to provide due to time pressures.
- In-school activities have helped the children to make progress. The children have appreciated the time out of the classroom with the teacher and this has provided an opportunity for focused activity.
- The after school groups were popular with children and parents, and have contributed to children's increased confidence, feelings of belonging and building relationships. However, the children are often tired after school and this has led the R4S staff to reflect that increased engagement with the families in the summer term prior to entering Reception might be preferable to the children having extra-long days in their first term at primary school.
- The home-based activities have also impacted on children's confidence and ability to settle into school as they have provided opportunities for the children and parents to build closer relationships with the estate-based teacher and to address any questions or issues arising.
- Although this particular cohort of children as a whole were slightly behind their peers when entering school, living on the Pembury estate is not a reliable proxy for additional need and there are other children in the year group who would also benefit from additional support.
- .The project has had an important impact in developing relationships between local

organisations working with young children. For instance, prior to R4S, there was little regular communication or collaboration between the school, two local nurseries, the housing provider and local children's centre services. Through collaboration on the R4S project these organisations now participate regularly in meetings of the Pembury Children's Community Early Years group, one outcome of which is developing collaborative work on children's transition to schoolsettings.

- Improved communication and data sharing between nurseries and schools in the summer term could support better transition. For example, it may be useful for summary information on individual children's strengths, needs and interests to be made available by nurseries (subject to consents) to teachers making home visits. Similarly, visits to nurseries by school teachers to discuss children's needs, and particularly those with SEND, could help to ensure that schools are best prepared to support those children through transition.

## What has changed for local services?

There is a huge amount of very positive work taking place with children and young people in Pembury. The Pembury Community Centre has become an important focus for services and is seen by local residents as an asset to the community.

*I like the fact that this became the Pembury Centre and there is a lot going on and they really include you, they call and talk to you and that sort of thing and let you know what's going on.*

*I think it's become more of a community now, there's a lot more to do than what there was before when I first moved here, like play sessions here.*

Other service impacts include:

- The development of new services providing integrated support to families and young people. A recent example is the Ready for School project.
- A change to community working in Peabody. The Children's Community approach has been rolled out to other Peabody estates.
- Pembury is a testbed for new Borough-wide initiatives supporting children and families. Recent examples include initiatives around contextual safeguarding and inclusive growth.
- The Children's Community is helping to ensure the continuation of services which might otherwise have been vulnerable to cuts. One exemplar is the provision for young people through the Pembury youth club.

## What difference is this making to families in the area?

The evaluation team has conducted interviews and focus groups with parents, children and young people in Pembury. The research involved:

- Semi-structured, face to face interviews with six parents of children attending the Pembury Ready for School project.
- Semi-structured face to face interviews with two Pembury residents involved in activities delivered at the Pembury Community Centre.

- Semi-structured face to face interviews and focus groups with young people attending the Pembury Youth Club. Three interviews and two focus groups (involving five and two young people respectively) were carried out with young people aged between 11 and 17 years.

The research focused on three key themes:

- Participants' experiences of services provided by the Pembury Children's Community.
- Participants' views on services and facilities available to the residents living in the Pembury area.

Interviewees told us that:

**They like the services that are provided.** An important factor for all was the accessible and welcoming environment of the Community Centre, and the supportive approach of service providers.

*I think the estate would be very boring...without the youth club I don't know, it would just be really weird not having somewhere to go if you want to chill out, if you're cold and you're out with your friends it would just be really boring. ... Yeah I would be on the street more often which is not good. (Interview - Pembury youth club)*

*Yeah, I thought it was very useful cos it helps your child prepare for what's going to happen and they tell you about each subject they're going to be learning, so it was very useful. (Interview - Ready for School)*

I felt supported. I'm a single parent and I have two children. I felt that she supported me and there was somebody in my corner trying to help me move better where I'm going with my family. (Interview - Pembury Pathways)

**The Children's Community is engaging hard to reach families.** Families supported through the Pembury Pathways project are often new to the area, have limited contact with local services and may be experiencing isolation. Interviewees said that the approach of the support worker - which focuses on community-based outreach and proactive engagement - was vital in helping them to access services.

*A massive difference, the way I see it I wouldn't be here if it weren't for (project worker), cos as much as I live on the estate, I'm not one to just join a social group, so it was for her to come in and show me these things and I don't think I'd know about the job. (Parent)*

*I'm quite reserved so I was a bit reluctant to hear what she was saying, I thought it's another door knock selling services, but then she was very personable and she got on with my son and started telling me there were things, she seen I just moved into the property and cos I came from temporary (accommodation) I didn't have any furniture or anything, so she was comfortable to sit with me on cushions and stuff and she said there's a lot of ways she could support me and to encourage my son to read, she told me about the Book Start project and my son could receive free books and she was telling me about all the things I can access and she told me it was free. (Parent)*

**Families are accessing multiple services:** Parents identified a range of services that they were accessing, including support for young and older children, parenting, employment and skills.

**A range of benefits are** associated with involvement with activities and services. These include increased confidence and social activity, skills and employment.

*Yeah cos it teaches us like how to meet people, when we go onto trips we kind of meet new people that we've never met before, sometimes we'll see other youth centres that are at the place, sometimes we'll hang with them and make new friends everywhere. .... Yeah my self-confidence has gone up since I've come here. (Young person)*

*All the activities that they have there (at the community centre) I try to join in. I think it does make you feel like you've got a bit of self-worth, cos I've been doing health and social care recently so for the first time in a long time I feel like I can probably go out and get a job now. (Parent)*

**Life in Pembury is changing for the better.** Although (for young people in particular) there were ongoing concerns around safety, access to sport and leisure facilities and the quality of green space, on the whole interviewees felt that improved access to services and a focal point for activities was helping to increase a sense of community.

*Just a very friendly place, when I was younger, like seven or eight, it wasn't really that friendly cos it had a lot of gangs and stuff, but since the youth club had come the whole place just got better cos everyone was just going to the youth club to be safe, if they were on the streets then they'll just be scared the whole time, wouldn't be able to have fun. (Young person)*

*I think it's become more of a community now, there's a lot more to do than what there was before when I first moved here. (Parent)*

## What next for the Children's Community in Pembury?

The Children's Community in Pembury has made a great deal of progress. There have been new services developed and changes to existing services implemented. Peabody, in particular, has changed significantly the way it provides services to its communities through, and as a result of, its work through the Children's Community, and there is evidence emerging that Hackney Council is increasingly looking to Pembury to 'test and learn' innovative and new approaches. There is clear leadership, although there is a risk that the programme is associated too closely with the work of Peabody and (some parts) of the local authority. A crucial next stage in the development of the programme governance is to bring to the Children's Community Board a stronger sense of shared responsibility for driving work forward.

The coming phase for the Pembury Children's Community is crucial. The Community is part way along its 'journey', and would benefit from a clearer focus on how it expects to achieve its aims, both to support stronger planning and sharper evaluation. The evaluation can support this next phase of development by working to establish a clear set of outcomes expected in the next phase and provide the means by which the Community can establishing the data it needs to be collected for its own evaluation in the next period. A key next step is to begin to expand evidence around sustained changes in practices and thinking on the part of local services, and to identify opportunities for the greatest impact.

There is a need for the Pembury Children's Community to continue to build evidence of its impact on families in the area. The evaluation team is working with the Children's Communities to develop data dashboards which will assess progress against a range of impact measures.

Continued efforts to engage the voluntary sector are important, not only because voluntary sector organisations have a central role in providing services to families and children, but also because the ambitions of the Children's Community to build capacity and resilience in the community will be supported by the involvement of non-statutory agencies in the governance of the programme.