

## Gloucestershire: Representing a diverse range of parent experience

### Forum

Gloucestershire Parent Carers  
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### Background

Gloucestershire is a large, mainly rural county. The forum is supported by a part-time parent carer coordinator, funded by the local authority and hosted by Carers Gloucestershire. She reports to the forum's steering group of parent carers. The forum has developed by encouraging and supporting parents to form into local support groups (geographical and special interest). Support groups then nominate a parent carer to represent them on the forum steering group. The forum wanted to be able to represent the views of a greater number and wider range of parents, including ethnic minority group and families living in remote rural areas.

### What they did to represent the views of a greater number of parents

The forum asked their members what prevented them taking part. This led them to:

- increase the number of ways people can input their views; including surveys, telephone polls, home visits, holding open meetings during the day and repeating them in the evening
- where possible, piggyback meetings on other meetings parent attend
- provide expenses to cover the cost of travel and childcare, so that parents are more likely to attend road shows, training, forums and meetings.

### What they did to represent a wider range of communities

The forum:

- organised a road show of events around the county which included visiting some of the more isolated rural areas in Gloucestershire
- enlisted the help of community leaders and ran targeted consultations to encourage black and minority families to attend
- liaised with service providers working with vulnerable groups; for example migrants and low-income families, and asked them to encourage parents to sign up to the network
- helped set up support and focus groups for community groups; for example, Younger Asian Women's group, and Eastern European Communities' group. These groups then nominated a parent carer representative to be a member of the forum steering committee.

- introduced training for parent representatives in a variety of settings, so they felt confident in representing the views of others at meetings.

### What they did to improve their publicity and promotional material

Having listened to parents, the forum:

- changed their name from Gloucestershire Parent Carer Council to Gloucestershire Parent Carers and now describe themselves as a network, as some parents said the word 'council' put them off joining
- updated their promotional materials with new photos to show a range of diverse parent carers and made sure this can be seen in a range of community, education and health organisations and cultural settings
- improved how they tell people about the benefits of parent carer participation, after realising that fathers are more likely to join if they hear about the forum's successful outcomes in improving services.

### Outcomes

- Membership has increased to one thousand from five hundred and is more reflective of the range of different communities in Gloucestershire.
- The forum steering group now includes parents from a wider range of backgrounds and communities.
- The forum is recognised by both parents and professionals as being a truly representative group and has been able to make some real improvements to the lives of families from different communities.



## Why this worked

The forum:

- recognised the importance of getting to know their community and researched the make-up and location of ethnic communities in Gloucestershire
- engaged the help of those already working with BME communities and community leaders to ensure approaches were culturally appropriate and events were popular
- met parent carers in settings where they felt more able to express their views having interpreters when needed (often members of the community will help with interpreting)

- made it easier for parents to input their views to the forum and made sure more people heard about their success stories
- listened to parents and improved how they publicised themselves to attract more members
- the local authority funds a part-time parent carer participation worker, without which the forum would not have had the capacity to run all these initiatives.

### Top Tips

Forums with limited capacity could consider trying to implement just one of these strategies to increase their membership.

*This case study has been written to help parent forums work with commissioners and providers to improve local services for disabled children. You can browse more success stories at [www.cafamily.org.uk/parentcarerparticipation](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/parentcarerparticipation)*