

## Consulting toolkit - Speed-dating

### Speed dating or networking between Parent Carers and Local Authority and Health managers

#### Rationale

Whilst many individual parent carers have strong and valued relationships with the majority of the practitioners who support them, very few ever get a chance to meet those 'behind the scenes', those whom for many families are the seemingly faceless decision makers who have control over their lives.

There is a growing expectation from central government for Local Authorities and Health Leads/CCGs to work in partnership with their local Parent Carer Forum to shape service provision for their families. In light of the recent and continued changes and developments in services for disabled children: the SEND reforms as laid out in the forthcoming Children and Families Bill and the Health Service reforms, the voice of parent carers and their children/young people is now more vital than ever. Parents involved in shaping services report that they have more confidence, choice and control and this has resulted in local authorities and partners seeing more resilient families, the implementation of better value for money services and less need for crisis interventions.

The idea behind the speed-dating concept is to break down barriers perceived or real between individual parent carers and providers or commissioners. This mutual understanding has resulted in parents having all sorts of situations clarified, access to services fast tracked or a chance to gain an understanding and personal explanation of why something cannot be provided/achieved etc. For commissioners and managers in particular it gives them a real and rare opportunity to hear directly from the families and to keep a track of how their service is viewed and received by families. The feedback is not all negative and the messages sent to parents by attending and listening to families are manifold!

#### Method

All the various professionals have agreed clear descriptions of their role (in plain English!) and the sort of issues they can cover on the day, which is published in advance of the event. Then parents are supported to book a 15 minute slot with the most appropriate person. Booking sheets are organised and names given with sticky labels and time sheets etc so each family and each professional know who they are seeing and when. Professionals are asked to commit to following up any discussions or issues raised by individual parent carers during the event by offering further action/meetings/contact/signposting etc.

Families are given clear instructions such as: This is your opportunity to have a one to one 15 minute discussion with a number of service providers and professionals who

are with us today. If you wish to discuss who you would like to talk to during the Speed Dating session, please visit our Speed Dating Information Desk, where you will receive advice about who can best answer your questions and give you the key information you require. *Please ensure that you keep strictly to your 15 minute time slot as others will be waiting to follow you.*

#### Feedback from previous speed dating events

"I was really a bit scared , but they were really nice to me, spoke to me in private so I could hear and offered lots of advice- I'm so glad I came"

(Parent with own Disability)

"Thank you for having this day. I have talked to so many helpful people who LISTEN and support"

(Parent)

"A great event, opened my eyes and gave me a 'shot in the arm'"

(A Health Commissioner.

"Very successful- we were wondering how on earth we were going to reach families and this is the way"

(new CCG Children's Lead)

"I agree it was a very positive day, and the opportunity for parents and professionals to talk to each other in a stimulating environment was a real plus. Well done for making a start on breaking down barriers to better communication and understanding".

Principal EP

"It was a privilege to be a part of the session and to have an opportunity to really listen to parents. I recorded various verbatim quotes from parents, which reinforce the need for the Local Authority to embrace its new role as 'Champion for vulnerable children and families,' which I have shared with my managers. I look forward to developing our collaborative working even more in the future"

Senior EP/Inclusion Lead

"It was a pleasure to be part of and would love to be involved in any future events!"

Ass Director NHS Community trust

"If, as I have now been told, being there made a difference to the outcomes for just one family then it was well worth my time".

LA Lead/Commissioner

And finally.....

"A parent of a child with special/additional needs told me about the event and encouraged me to attend... I can't stress how much positive impact attending that has had on our lives – I got so much help and support ... it's taken me years to be heard and until I went I'd been feeling excluded, isolated and unsure how to move forward"

**written by Anna Gill, Contact a Family associate**

*This resource has been provided to help parent forums work with commissioners and providers to improve local services for disabled children.*

*You can browse more such resources at [www.cafamily.org.uk/parentcarerparticipation](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/parentcarerparticipation)*