

Essex Family Forum: A new way of getting parent carer views

Essex Family Forum introduced Family Champions in 2017, empowering parent/carers advocates to voice family concerns in policy making. The Graffiti wall started as a physical board that was taken to events the forum attended and families were encouraged to pin their concerns to the board. This turned into a virtual Graffiti Wall during lockdown, enabling families to continue to share their experiences and concerns online.

Parents now use Essex Family Forum's website to post comments regularly - and the forum convey in-person feedback to the local authority. This virtual space informs the forum on what support and services were working and which still needed improvements.

The forum noticed that parents were previously disengaging because they were sharing their questions and concerns with no responses forthcoming. Now a group of senior leaders from Essex County Council's Education and Social Care Teams and Essex Health Care Partners meet regularly to review all feedback received from families via the Graffiti Wall and ensure that questions and concerns are directed to the right services and addressed in a timely manner. Answers are then fed back to the forum. Any questions that are not answered are flagged and raised again.

The forum has seen a big increase in parental engagement as a result of this initiative because families now feel heard. This has led to improved parental engagement in the area and echoes the Essex Family Forum's 'You said, We did' ethos and commitment.