

Executive Summary

Parent Champions Pilot Evaluation Report

Developmental screenings help families identify whether children are meeting milestones with skills like talking, walking, and socializing. Screenings are critical for identifying potential delays or challenges and connecting families to support services that help children thrive as they grow. Access to screening, however, is not equitably distributed across King County with variations in screening rates by race/ethnicity, geography, income, and caregiver education level (Communities Count, 2024).

Community partners were sharing with King County staff that barriers such as lack of culturally- and linguistically-matched services, stigma around having a child with a developmental difference, fear of child welfare system involvement and other misconceptions were contributing to inequities.

The Parent Champions Pilot is a community-informed response to overcome these barriers, support parents/caregivers, and reduce inequities in access to developmental screenings and support services.

Inspired by the Parent Champion Network in South Africa, Parent Champions are parents/caregivers who have gone through the experience of raising children with developmental delays and disabilities. Parent Champions provide information and mentorship to their peers. Critically, Parent Champions share a cultural background and speak the same language as the parents/caregivers they support.

Evaluation Questions

- 1 How was the Parent Champions Pilot implemented?
- 2 What outcomes did participants experience because of Parent Champions?
- 3 What challenges did partners encounter?
- 4 What factors enabled success and helped overcome challenges?
- 5 What changes should be made in the next round of implementation?

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“Having a Parent Champion makes so much sense, right? How do you best relate to someone? [Having] someone who looks like you and has similar lived experience [helps] build trust faster with families.”

Community partner



Best Starts for
KIDS

Best Starts for Kids (Best Starts) is King County's community-driven initiative to support every baby born and raised in King County to be happy, healthy, safe, and thriving.



“[The] support and everything, the screening – I think that just makes a difference in the lives of our toddlers.”

Parent/caregiver

Methods: How were data collected and analyzed?

Qualitative analysis of:

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| 5 structured interviews with community partners | 4 listening sessions with parents/caregivers | 1 listening session and survey with Parent Champions |
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Ongoing consultation and a meaning-making session with partners also informed this report.

Key findings: Outcomes

The Parent Champions Pilot improved wellbeing for Parent Champions, parents/caregivers, and their families in the following ways:



Increased social connections and belonging: Parent Champions helped parents/caregivers feel less alone and also found community with one another.



Increased knowledge of parenting and child development helped dispel misconceptions about screening and enabled families to better connect with their children.



Reduced shame and stigma, and increased pride about raising a child with developmental differences. Some parents/caregivers shared they were still on their journey of acceptance.



Increased confidence advocating for their children in their communities and in institutional settings like schools or doctors' offices.



Increased equitable access to developmental screenings and timely connections to services like speech, physical, and occupational therapies that help children thrive as they grow.

Additionally, Parent Champions helped community partners who were participating in the pilot build trust and reach more families. There was also early evidence of community-level narrative change about developmental delays and disabilities.



“A lot of the time [parents are] afraid to say ‘hey, my child has Autism,’ because in our culture it’s taboo.”

Parent Champion

Challenges



Logistical challenges such as scheduling and lack of access to transportation made administering programming more difficult.



Stigma about developmental differences is deeply rooted and took time to overcome.



Families needed support with basic needs before they could address concerns about their child's development.



External factors such as long waitlists for services, lack of culturally- and linguistically appropriate community resources, and fear about immigration enforcement created additional barriers for families.



Parent Champions and Community of Practice Managers needed more time than they were contracted for to fulfil their roles.

Enabling factors



Cultural and linguistic matches with Parent Champions enabled trust-building.



Facilitated community of practice gatherings were a key element of the Parent Champions pilot design.



Capacity building support and intentional planning helped set up community partners for success.



Time to build trusting relationships was essential to overcome stigma.



Flexibility to implement programs that were responsive to community needs improved engagement.



Recommendations



Maintain and strengthen the community of practice, capacity building supports, onboarding for Parent Champions, evaluation activities, and coordination and resource-sharing between community partners.



Increase funding and hours for Parent Champions and Community of Practice Managers.



Clarify roles between Parent Champions and provider staff, as well as Community of Practice Managers and King County Staff.



Apply the Parent Champions model to other Best Starts and DCHS strategies.

Want to learn more?

For a complete list of recommendations, please refer to the full report:

<https://cdn.kingcounty.gov/-/media/king-county/depts/dchs/ddecSD/pme/parentchampionsevaluationreport.pdf>

References

Communities Count. (2024). Early Developmental Screening: Rates of developmental screening among young children in King County doubled between 2019 and 2023.

<https://www.communitiescount.org/developmental-screening>



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