**Parent Power**

Paul Webb, a Pre-16 WP Officer at King’s College London (KCL) introduced his parental engagement project at King’s College London in the context of successful parental engagement, particularly with hard to access parents.

**Delegates were given a few minutes to talk at tables about how we do parental engagement at our institutions.** Feedback to the group was as follows:

* Parent guides were mentioned, with many universities who mentioned these noting that they were no longer producing them.
* Separate parent sessions during on campus visits and open days. Personal statement workshops for parents were mentioned.
* Offering to speak to parents at for example school parent evening sessions
* Training Student Ambassadors in specifically how to deal with parents/ answer particular questions from them
* Celebration events involving parents at the end of summer schools / residential projects
* Communications targeted at parents following event data capture
* Parental involvement in Applicant Information Evenings both on and off-campus
* Campaign targeting parents with information about Clearing, how it works and what it’s about
* Family learning events where parents can bring children at any age, anyone is treated as potential learner (soft engagement)
* Facebook live chats aimed at parents
* Postcards
* Suggestion of having parent ambassadors on behalf of an institution

**Parent Power project outline**

* Run with KCL WP team and Citizens UK. Training parents up to be experts in HE, who can then work in their own communities as advocates and campaigners
* Uses ‘community organising’ methodology
* Citizens UK - community organising charity, founded the living wage society; they have 12 ‘chapters’ where they have community organisers helping to make change and advocate. KCL has just become an institutional member of South London citizens, working with a community who is already organised. Need to be a member to access training etc.

**Community Organising**

* “There is no selfless good deed” – you do things to make you feel good.
* Important in the context of Community Organising, which is a process where people in proximity come together to act in shared self-interest. Community Organising generally assumes that social change necessarily involves a struggle to get power for the powerless. Durable power for organisation representing the charity, which can then be used to influence key decision makers and have a place at the table where decisions are made.
* Parent Power essentially aiming to have parents representing our institution and HE, with a seat at the table with local government and politicians, to have their say.
* Can we use this methodology to take the things Community Organising does well and use this for parental engagement?
* Moving from the world as it is to as it should be requires power. There are 2 types of power:
  + ‘Dominant’ / ‘coercive’ = over people, not accountable
  + ‘Relational’ = with people, persuasion, accountable – this is the power CO is interested in within communities
* Self-interest – working towards a goal you’re interested in. Important that people reveal their own interest, for example for KCL there is an agenda in terms of WP.
* Develop relationships through relational one to ones which are a 2 way conversation lasting 30-40 mins.
* The action is in the reaction – no point doing something if there is no result out of it, as that’s not the aim of protest. With action, people have a plan to enact change, and people will react to it. Parent Power is a form of action. Needs outcomes.
* Rosa Parks - formed a community around her, finally broke through with that action. Good example of relational power and Community Organising enacting huge change.
* Matthew Bolton’s book “How to Resist” really explains what Community Organising is and helped to put parent power in to context.

**How does this relate to parent power at KCL?**

* They hired a community organiser for 2 days a week, which was the biggest expense.
* Told parents at a pre-16 WP programme event that they wanted to work with them to access HE, then met with over 50 parents in a listening campaign to help them find out what parents thought about HE. Interesting results and things coming up they thought wouldn’t. One example is citizenship as a barrier to HE, where they would get to stage of applying for student finance and be treated as a non-UK citizen, so have no access to student finance. KCL have now set up payment plan for citizenship as a result.
* Spoke to the parents, who decided they would like meetings every 6 weeks on a Saturday.
* Continues in that format, with 30-40 parents coming to most meetings and a core group of parents who are more involved.
* Developed a small, strong group of parents who formed a committee, who have advocated for KCL and HE and achieved a lot.

**Successes**

* Bespoke trips to Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial and Leicester. Parents wrote letters to the universities asking for this and arranged it
* 90% bursaries at private summer schools in London for 2 years in a row
* Met with the Mayor’s office
* Sit on a violence reduction unit panel
* Child citizenship payment plan: £80 per month interest free instead of £1000 upfront per child
* Several parents have enrolled on university courses themselves, an incredible benefit which wasn’t anticipated
* Won the Guardian University Award for social and community impact

**Relational one to ones**

* These are the most important part of Parent Power, regular meetings with parents to find out who they are as people. Seems to be what’s missing from a lot of outreach. Through this you gain access to more parents who trust each other, which helps it to grow.
* Not a chat, or therapy, or networking, or about talking about policies or sounding like experts. Instead these are about being more human, disclosing things about yourself, finding out things about each other to build an authentic relationship.
* They are conversations people want to have, as long as they’re authentic and not used as a hard sell.
* Location needs to be in a mutual place, not in the institution. Most parents haven’t been inside a grand university building before so this wouldn’t be appropriate.
* Intention and self-disclosure are key – need to declare your self-interest and talk about next steps.

**Photo**

Paul showed a photo of a trip to Imperial College London to which everyone involved had been invited. The trip was a success, with parents empowered to ask questions about what they wanted to know, e.g. “what are you doing about contextual admissions?”. Paul provided information about the lives and experiences of some of the parents in the picture which illustrated how much had been gained from the relational 1-1s, and how these parents had developed within the project. One example was a parent who has now set up a Spanish speaking Parent Power group working alongside the original group, while another has gone on to speak at WonkFest and went to the Guardian Awards.

**Notes on relational one to ones**

* Have a conversation about something a little deeper, which can feel strange at first as it’s not usually something we do in a work context. Fundamental to developing relationships between an institution and parents.
* Important caveat – education always needs to be on the agenda. In Community Organising more generally there isn’t an agenda, you’re meant to find something of mutual interest to work on together.
* Share your story as far as comfortable
* Some good openers are “why do you care about education?” or “what makes you angry?”

**Paul asked the group to sit in pairs and have a relational one to one for 10 minutes**:

* Everyone talked for the whole time
* It was noted that we possibly found it easy as it’s in the nature of our job to chat.
* It was fed back that it was nice to sit next to someone likeminded and talk about yourself and not just your job. Found connections e.g. what they studied at university.
* The key is to go beyond work and ask questions that go slightly further. “Not just at the bar” – it’s counterintuitive to save certain conversations for a particular setting or environment.
* Sometimes they don’t work!

**Paul took questions from the room:**

* How do you balance the personal vs professional? How deep do you go? Avoiding TMI?
  + A lot of it is intuition. Used to think it was a delicate balance, most people are open to talking about things in a non-judgemental way. When we stop worrying about it is when the real conversations can develop.
* How do you spark that initial interest? Lots of these target parents are anti-university and aren’t keen on their their child being involved.
  + They use the King’s Scholars programme - when the kids are selected the parents are invited to a welcome session. Parents want the best for their kids and are so proud they have been selected. KCL say we are really interested in what you have to say and invite them to be honest (and negative), then say the opinion is valid, that we need that voice in the room, give an email address and ask if they’d like to go for a coffee. Acknowledge that your experience is different and spark a conversation.
* Finding the ‘in’ to the parent? If kids are involved in projects parents are in a sense self-selecting?
  + About trying to think in creative ways. Parental engagement programme in Hastings – white working class coastal town where some of the kids have never seen the city, or live 10 mins from the beach and have never been. Engagement was a problem so KCL found an organisation in Hastings which had a basis of trust with the community already. They built trust & a relationship with this organisation which led to 15 parents on a year-long programme.
* What about teachers? High achieving students, but people on the council or the teachers might not have had an inspired journey. The delegate noted that they always try to go away from a conversation knowing a couple of personal things about the teacher to build on. Have KCL also looked at teachers?
  + KCL work with 12 schools, one of the teachers is now part of parent power and is CUK rep for that school
* How do you deal with criticism that you’re becoming elitist using only those 12 schools / justify using those schools?
  + Paul **personal** view – can’t work with all of them, have to use a certain number, select on basis of criteria of who is in most need. Criteria based on strategic plan, variety of factors, based on internal WP schools targeting strategy.
* Operational budget? A big expense was providing lunch, realised was £400 each time and most of budget was going on food. Asked parents if it would be ok to have tea or coffee and use the budget to go on trips instead. All decisions go through the parents, and would never make a decision on behalf of the parents.