

Parent Information Point: Next Steps

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Biographical notes

Titus Alexander is an educator and author who works in all phases of education. In July 2004 he was appointed Director for Learning Communities at the Scarman Trust.

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Executive Summary

Background

'**Parent Information Point**' is a two-hour interactive information workshop for parents at key transition points in a child's life, currently at ages five, 11 and 14, offered through schools and other venues. PIP was developed in response to a national mapping of family services by the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) in 2001 which found that services required substantial improvement and that parents wanted more information about child development and services

available to help with family matters.

PIP aims to provide all parents with information on child development and where to get help on family matters, as advocated in *Every Child Matters*. An independent evaluation of 26 pilot workshops in three very different areas reported parents' increased knowledge of child development, awareness of family support services, readiness to use services and greater confidence in themselves as parents. The greatest impact was found among groups considered hard to reach, including parents on low incomes and minority ethnic groups.

PIP contributes to a wide range of government policies, including Sure Start, children's centres, extended schools, family learning, health promotion and neighbourhood renewal. It has the potential to be a keystone intervention for supporting parents and transforming family services that could help reduce the multi-billion pound cost of family stress and child protection.

Aims

This study describes the feasibility of a second-stage development of PIP workshops across six local authority areas, including inner and outer London, three different metropolitan areas and one rural county. It also makes the case for PIP as a catalyst for improving child and family services at a local level.

Conditions for success

Drawing on the experience of other initiatives, the study describes the predisposing, enabling, reinforcing and other conditions needed for PIP to be effective. These include:

- availability, accessibility and responsiveness of parent and family support services
 - active support for parents to help them access services and overcome barriers due
 - to lack of confidence, childcare, language skills or transport
 - support from senior management, interagency cooperation and joint ownership of PIP at a local and national level
 - adequate resources to ensure quality workshops, including training for staff,
 - systematic monitoring, evaluation and external support for PIP workshops.
- For these reasons PIP has to be part of a comprehensive strategy for parent and family support.

Recommendations

Drawing on a wide range of experience from other projects, this study recommends that NFPI:

establishes a **national team** of three posts to develop, promote and sustain PIP,

with sufficient operational autonomy and security of employment to get on with

the job

considers setting up a national **consortium** of support agencies to provide

training, information and support for local PIP partnerships

aims to reach agreements with **local partnerships** in six local authority areas

willing and able to promote and support PIP in schools and other venues

improves **publicity, outreach and organisation** at venues to increase

participation

maintains a national system of **monitoring, quality control, training and**

support to back up local partnerships

sets up a **research project** and advisory group to carry out systematic data

collection, evaluation and analysis of PIP in relation to changing needs; services

for families and wider impact, including cost-benefits to families and society.

Most local authority areas will need a **development stage** of between two and six months to find out whether PIP is viable in that area. They would then appoint a **local coordinator** to support PIP workshops in schools and other settings, as well as a designated coordinator in each venue.

A distinctive 'brand' and communication strategy for parent information and support should be developed, in cooperation with other national providers and national agencies, to increase awareness, impact and effectiveness of support for parents.

The PIP model needs continuous development to address different needs and circumstances, including:

modules for birth, entry to nursery at three to four years old, and particular

groups of parents, such as parents with disabilities or parents of children with

special needs or disabilities

PIP 'clusters', running different elements of the workshop between a secondary school and feeder primary schools, or a primary school and nurseries or children's centres

information sheets, bookstalls and other support for PIP sessions

the use of radio, television or other media to support PIP should be piloted in at least one area.

Costs and funding

The running costs of PIP in each area or venue can only be calculated through the development stage. PIP workshops could be funded from a variety of sources at a local level, including children's trusts, extended schools, Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, LSC family learning and health promotion, but it will be much easier to tap these funding streams once PIP has demonstrated its value at a local level through a centrally-funded trial period.