

## Parent Power

**A community organising scheme for parents in Lambeth and Southwark run by King's College London in partnership with Citizens UK**



Parent Power is a parental engagement programme run in partnership with community organising charity [Citizens UK](#). It uses community organising methods to mobilise and train local underrepresented parents, enabling them to become university access experts in their local communities, while also giving them the tools to start campaigns for educational equality.

King's Service Strategy commits us to serving our local community as part of being a 'civic university at the heart of London'. Our whole university partnership with Citizens UK is integral to our commitment to serving our local communities. Led by its member organisations, Citizens UK empowers communities to act together for power, social justice and the common good. They do this by teaching their members community organising techniques so that they can have an impact on the issues that matter to them. They also develop the leadership capacity of their members to achieve victories that change lives and transform communities. These tools, popularised by famous civic movements such as the American Civil Rights Movement and the Living Wage Campaign, and championed by expert community organisers such as Saul Alinsky and Barack Obama, include relational 121s, house-meetings, listening campaigns and collective action.

Parent Power has engaged over 200 underrepresented parents, recruiting more than 50 as local parent power leaders. They meet once a month to campaign on issues of educational inequality, such as the unaffordability of summer schools and private tutoring, or the inaccessibility of university open days. So far, they have secured bespoke open days to the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College London and Leicester, received training on tutoring, student finance and university access, won bursary places at private summer schools, and met with the Metropolitan Police and local councils to demand better local educational provision for their children. A notable achievement was successfully campaigning for Lambeth Council to become the first UK council to have a social mobility strategy. More recently, the parents have campaigned for the Home Office to reduce the application fee for child citizenship from £1,012 to cost price. They are also calling on the Mayor of London to establish a Parent Commissioner for London, who will amplify and advocate for parent voices.

Due to the innovative engagement techniques employed in the programme, 100% of parents involved have said that they now know more about how to access highly selective universities, while 100% would also recommend it to fellow parents. In addition, out of the original cohort of parent leaders, 10% have applied to university directly because of their involvement in the programme.

## Establishing Parent Power A 7-step process

### 1. Recruiting Schools

- Build relationships with schools
- Explain the programme
- Secure buy-in from senior leadership.

### 2. Group meetings in schools

- 10-15 parents are invited to an in-school meeting led by a university outreach officer and community organiser
- The meeting is used to build relationships (through discussing questions such as, 'Why is education important to you?').

### 3. 121 conversations with parents

- These are an imperative part of the process and involve the outreach officer or community organiser holding 30-minute relational 121 meetings with parents
- These conversations are used to build strong relationships and trust.

### 4. Campus meetings

- Meetings for 30-40 parents held once every 6 weeks on a Saturday morning on the university campus with childcare and lunch provided
- Parents discuss campaigns, receive training on university access and hear from inspirational speakers, including student ambassadors
- The meetings also provide the opportunity to build a team and develop parent leaders.

### 5. Run a listening campaign

- Conduct 121 conversations with parents to listen to them and find worthwhile and winnable tangible issues that parents can tackle (e.g. Parent Power has campaigned on the cost of private summer school places and the inaccessibility of open days).

### 6. Research the issues

- Parent leaders explore and look into the issues and various solutions
- Decisions are made about whether the issue is worthwhile and whether the solution is winnable or feasible
- They then look at key players and work out how to effect the change. In many cases this will involve getting a meeting with decision makers.

### 7. Take action and negotiate

- Parent leaders get to the person who has the power to make a change
- They then take action and negotiate.

## Recent campaigns

### Children into Citizens

After listening to the concerns of local parents during Parent Power meetings, King's College London backed the campaign for the Home Office to reduce the application fee for child citizenship from £1,012 to cost price. King's hosted a meeting of 400 people from the community and the leader of Lambeth Council who agreed to be a champion for the [Children into Citizens Campaign](#), while senior staff from King's were part of a Citizens UK delegation who met with the former Immigration Minister, Caroline Nokes, to discuss the issue. King's staff and Parent Power leaders were also part of a 1,200-person political assembly during which the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, pledged his support.

In addition to supporting the Children into Citizens campaign, King's been instrumental in setting up the [Citizenship Payment Plan](#) to provide interest free loans to parents to pay for their children's citizenship applications and avoid them taking out risky and expensive debt.

### Parent Commissioner for London

Members of Parent Power are calling on the next Mayor of London to establish a Parent Commissioner for London, who will amplify and advocate for parent voices. This cross-cutting role will ensure that the concerns of parents are embedded in Greater London Authority (GLA) policy making and implementation, thus making parents part of the solution rather than the problem. They hope that the establishment of a Parent Commissioner for London will develop groundbreaking early and specific interventions and peer support programmes, like Parent Power. See the [London Citizens Manifesto 2020](#) for more details.

## Related publications

- Ellie Mulcahy and Dr Sam Baars, '[Partners in Progression: Engaging parents in university access](#)', Report by LKMco, commissioned by King's College London's Widening Participation Department, 13 July 2018
- Russell Group, '[Pathways for Potential: How universities, regulators and Government can tackle educational inequality](#)', May 2020, p. 14.

## Press coverage and recognition

- Judith Butler, '[I missed out on university but my son won't](#)', *BBC News*, 18 February 2018
- Helen Rumbelow, '[Can you learn to be a pushy parent?](#)', *Sunday Times*, 6 March 2018
- 'Highly Commended, Benefitting Society, Kings College London', [Green Gown Awards 2018, Winners' Brochure](#), November 2018, p. 52.
- '[Social and community impact: award winner and runners-up](#)', *The Guardian*, 10 April 2019
- Paul Webb, '[Unleashing the power of parents](#)', *Wonkhe*, 13 June 2019
- Sophie Bailey, 'Ties that Bind (Town & Gown)', [EdTech podcast](#), 30 September 2019
- '[Guardian University Award winners: "We were jumping for joy"](#)', *The Guardian*, 14 January 2020

## Hear from the Parent Power leaders

- Citizens UK and King's College London, '[Parent Power](#)', Vimeo, 7 March 2018
- Cambridge University, '[Parent Power at Pembroke College](#)', YouTube, 4 April 2018
- King's College London, '[King's Civic Challenge: Education and Attainment](#)', YouTube 21 October 2019

## Testimonials

*'I've really enjoyed meeting other parents as part of the Parent Power programme. It is great to meet parents who have the same concerns and care about the same issues. It's also really shown me that if you come together as a group you can achieve things as parents that you would not have been able to achieve alone.'* – April Higgins, Parent Power Leader

*'Winning this trip, and the Parent Power programme more generally, has shown me that we really do have power. We have power to open doors which otherwise seem closed. Through building a community of parents we have the power that we otherwise wouldn't. There is power in numbers as they say.'* – Miata Noah, Parent Power Leader (following the trip to Oxford University)

*'Parent Power is fantastic. It is empowering us to help our children, and building such a fantastic relationship with King's. We are not alone in this fight for education and now I know that King's is only a text away.'* – Betty Iziku, Parent Power Leader

## Conferences and public talks

Parent Power has been recognised as an innovative community engagement programme by the higher education sector, with parent leaders and King's staff being invited to speak at governmental events and national and international conferences:

- 'A new approach to securing positive student outcomes: empowering communities to make a change', [NEON Summer Symposium 2019](#), 13 June 2019
- '[Waving Citizenship Fees for Children](#)', a panel discussion arranged by the International Observatory of Human Rights, House of Commons, UK Parliament, 17 June 2019
- 'Community perspectives on university engagement – parent perspective', [Global University Engagement Summit](#), 10 September 2019
- 'Organising Our Universities', [Organising Cities Global Gathering](#), Sydney Policy Lab, Australia, 31 October 2019
- 'Parent Power: A New Approach to Widening access', [Wonkfest](#), 5 November 2019
- 'Parent Power – Successful Parental Engagement', [HELOA National conference and AGM](#), 16 January 2020

## Empowering parents across the UK

In order to engage with communities that have been identified as having particularly low participation rates for higher education across the UK, the Parent Power model has also been adapted in Oldham and Hastings by the King's Widening Participation Department:

- **Oldham:** In January 2020, King's worked with the Greater Manchester Uni Connect partnership and Opportunity Area to support their launch of Parent Power in Oldham.
- **Hastings:** The Hastings Project is run in collaboration with Eggtooth, a creative learning organisation based in Hastings. Community organising methods have been used in Hastings as part of an effort to engage with local parents and equip them with the confidence and information to improve access to higher education in a community that has particularly low engagement rates.

## Empowering parents during COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Parent Power meetings moved online to ensure that the parents continued to be supported. As well as taking part in short sessions about the UK education system and community organising, parents have been given the opportunity to speak about how lockdown is affecting them and their children.

Find out more: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/empowering-parents-across-the-uk>