Community Participation Case Study

Preparation and planning questions
The ‘Little Kids Playgroup’ was set up by a community health service working with the local Child & Youth Health Service. It is a specialised playgroup for children up to 4 years old with developmental delay and their carers. The local area is one of extreme disadvantage and limited access to services. The playgroup is designed as an early intervention strategy aimed at lessening the need for intensive therapy at a later date and was thought to be a more inviting option for parents than individual sessions. A speech therapist, dietician and child care worker/project officer facilitate the playgroup on one morning per week. The playgroup format includes free play time, craft time and song or story time. Carers are encouraged to interact with their child during this time. There is also a 30 minute session for carers without the children present when information and education sessions are run and parents can socialise.

1. Imagine you are either one of the playgroup facilitators or a carer of an attending child. Discuss and answer the ‘Preparation and Planning’ questions.

Process questions
Attendance at the playgroup was achieved through personal referral and advertising in the local press. An average of 6 families attended each week with a range from 2 – 12 families. However in the last six months number have decreased and advertising for new members has started.

Discussion on the previous week’s session are facilitated in parent chat time each week. Parents are encouraged to help design the content and are involved in planning although this requires considerable direction from workers. Parents are able to vote from a list of topics for sessions. Following questions raised by parents about children’s eating and nutrition, a Breakfast Club was established where carers and children are offered healthy breakfast and morning tea choices. Workers report that as parent confidence grows so does the parents’ role in directing the playgroup by asking questions, expressing concerns and sharing information at group or individual level.

2. Complete the ‘Process questions’ to evaluate current status of participation.

Impact and outcomes questions
End of term carer questionnaires are used to elicit written feedback. Parents valued the parent chat time most as this was often the only ‘child free’ time they had in the week. All respondents indicated positive changes in their child’s language or behaviour.

The ‘Little Kids Playgroup’ is half way through its 2 year funding and there are many plans for next year. These have been guided by the directions already taken and in consultation with parent participants. One plan is for a buddy system whereby a parent takes on the role on welcoming and orientating a new participant. It was initially hoped that the playgroup would become self-running with parent volunteers trained in child care. This now seems unlikely given the small number of parents involved. A ‘Planning Committee’ is to be set up to examine sustainability once funding for a project officer ceases.

3. Complete the ‘impact and outcome’ questions.