

## **Work with other organisations**

### **Somali Children's Advocacy (SCA)**

#### **Background**

Two classes, funded and run by Somali Children's Advocacy, operate every Friday after school in Fulham Primary School. They are staffed by teachers from the school, who are employed and paid by Somali Children's Advocacy for their after school work. Although most children attending are Somali, the classes are open to all. Parents are very strongly encouraged to come along to help their children and learn alongside them, and are supported in doing so.

Children are given an individual assessment, and have individual learning plans. They do complete homework during the sessions, but the teaching emphasis is more on study skills, and how to do homework independently, than on the homework itself.

Monitoring takes place at a quarterly meeting with parents, where they get feedback on their children's progress. The next step will be to introduce more formal evaluation and individual tracking of children's progress to assess the impact of the project.

The classes differ from study support in that they focus on study skills, and because parents are so closely involved. The children benefit enormously from the fact that the lead teachers have close knowledge of the children, and can quickly find out about their needs through colleagues who are their class teachers.

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Children at Fulham Primary School in West London speak 43 different languages and there is a high level of mobility so the school wanted to increase parental involvement in their children's education and in the life of the school.

Somali Children's Advocacy had been operating for three years when the partnership with Fulham Primary School started. They began as an advice organization, helping parents to fill in forms, telling them about the English education system and signposting them to specialist advice. They had run outings for parents and children, a caravan holiday, and had acquired laptops to help parents learn IT skills.

Safia Saldeeye, the group's co-ordinator, sent her children to Fulham Primary, and acted as a volunteer, interpreting for parents who spoke Italian and Somali, translating for children during SATs and helping in the nursery. She was already involved with the PTA, and was a member of the Every Child Matters team exploring ways to involve parents more closely in their children's education. When she consulted parents through Somali Children's Advocacy she found that they wanted a supplementary school that would help them to help their children.

## **Challenges and solutions**

The initial challenge was lack of understanding between the mainstream school and the community. The school felt that parents just left their children at the school gate: the community felt that it would be insulting to the school to become involved with their children's school work, as teaching was the job of professionals. It was very helpful to have an experienced volunteer, who was

herself a parent, to make the link between parents and school. She could invite people in, translate and interpret, and run a genuine consultation.

Fundraising was (and is) a challenge. The community organisation raises all funds for the project, backed up by the school. A voluntary organisation can sometimes access funding that is not available to schools, and references from the mainstream school give valuable support.

Learning how to run and take responsibility for activities involving children was a challenge for Safia and the members of Somali Children's Advocacy. They were helped by training and surgeries run by the Peabody Trust in its role administering the Local Network Fund; Hammersmith and Fulham Community and Voluntary Sector Resource Agency (CaVSA); and North Fulham New Deal for Communities.

### **Top Tips**

- Parents should get involved with their children's school from the very beginning. Offer to help and learn how to help. Don't wait to make your first contact with the school 'Please may I rent some rooms?'
- Talk together from the start to find out what you can offer each other. The relationship must have some give and take and that comes from people communicating with each other.
- Make sure that teachers can assess each child, and get information from their class teacher, before they start supplementary classes. That way they can work with individuals according to their needs.