

“Handing over early-intervention work to volunteers could make exchange and monitoring of information more complex to manage
Helga Pile, Unison, p18



BROMLEY LBC

One success story from Bromley LBC's project is mother-of-six Kim, who was helped to keep her children by volunteer John Cliff (both pictured).

John gave Kim assistance with parenting skills – including helping her get the children to school on time – and making sure the home was a safe environment.

As well as helping Kim and her children access crucial health and council services, he has helped keep some of the children occupied to give her breaks.

He has continued to support the family since Kim's children came off the child protection register.

Kim said it took about a month for her to begin to trust John.

"John started to give me practical help and the strength to start dealing with difficult situations for myself."

She said he had helped her regain control of her life and given her the confidence to begin a classroom assistant course.

ilies at any one time. Each coordinator costs approximately £25,000 a year to fund.

CSV is keen to set up about a dozen individual programmes to build up a good evidence base for its success, and Anglia Ruskin University is engaged in a two-year evaluation of progress.

According to Ms Gwaspari, families assigned volunteers are less likely to see their children returned to child-protection plans once they have left them, and it is suggested that early intervention help can obviate such plans in the first place.

She also stresses that volunteers tend to offer longer-term support than statutory services, whose support often ends when a protection plan finishes.

Julie Daly, head of safeguarding and quality assurance at Bromley LBC – which has run a programme with CSV since 2004 (see box, left)

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Kim, helped by the scheme (above)

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Julie Daly, head of safeguarding and quality assurance, Bromley LBC

– said the council recognised that social workers lacked the time to give parents the level of practical and emotional support they needed.

But she said the council had feared social workers would feel undermined by non-professionals having access to vulnerable families.

"Once social workers were reassured that the volunteers were properly vetted, well trained in child protection and well supported, they were happy to refer families to the project," she said.

Ms Daly said that in councils with a high turnover of social workers, volunteer mentors offered additional stability to families with problems. She added that Bromley had also benefited when several volunteers had gone on to full social-work training.

After an era in which, it has been argued, no one was championing the cause of projects such as CSV, the prospect of potentially saving millions of pounds and fulfilling election manifesto pledges could well see the organisation take its place at the forefront of a revolution.

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