

PARENTS STILL LEADING THE WAY

GROWING AND SUSTAINING PARENT VOICE, LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT WITHIN AND BEYOND
SSBC

OCTOBER 2021



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INTRODUCTION

WiT Partnership were commissioned by SSBC to work with current parent champions and parent ambassadors to explore their experiences of working with SSBC, and their ideas for the future role of parents and parent voice within and beyond SSBC.

To prepare this report we have had one to one conversations and worked with a total of 12 parent champions and parent ambassadors between July and October 2021, including an online workshop in August 2021 and a face to face workshop in September 2021. Our interpretation of the ideas developed through this work were checked out at open workshops attended by 6 of the participants in October 2021 prior to producing this report.

Through this work we have looked at:

- Parents involvement – how and why they became and continue to be involved, the support they have received, their joys and successes, and the challenges that they face.
- What really matters to parents.
- Their ideas for continuing and extending the involvement of and support for parents in the future – what might be.

We have also started to explore how some of the ideas that parents want to focus on might be supported and taken forward.

Our thanks go to all the parents who have been involved in preparing this report – for their huge energy, wonderful ideas and whole hearted commitment.

GETTING AND STAYING INVOLVED



Parents initial involvement mostly came through referrals to SSBC, and subsequent involvement through their family mentor and SSBC activities. Many spoke about the importance of the family mentor in encouraging and supporting their initial involvement. Once involved in SSBC activities, support and encouragement from SSBC and training opportunities led to further involvement as parent ambassadors or champions.

Making a difference and contributing are key reasons why most parents chose to become and stay involved. Many also really value the support and social contact the role offers. For some it also is a way to keep learning– both for personal development and to benefit their children.

Most are keen to remain involved in the future, and some hope that this involvement might lead to further learning and career opportunities.

For more detailed mapping of Getting Involved inquiry responses, see p12

JOYS AND SUCCESSES



The impact they feel they are having is one of the main things that parents feel pleased about: that they are being listened to, that they are making a difference, and that they are contributing to the success of SSBC.

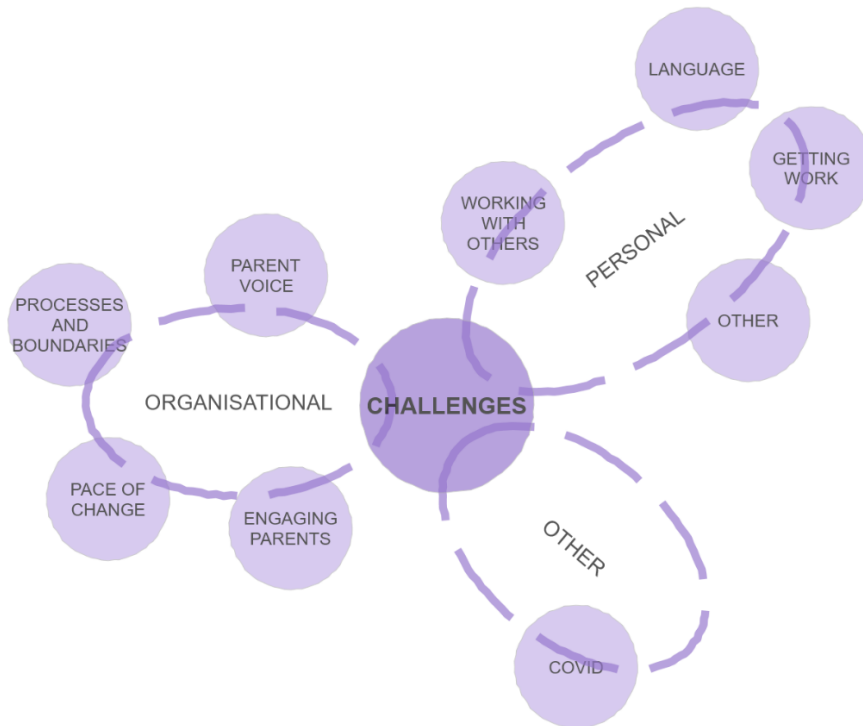
The fact that they feel that their contribution is recognised and valued is a source of real pride.

At a personal level, parents really appreciate the learning, growing self-confidence and opportunities for professional and career development that their involvement gives.

The social side of the role is also hugely important, being with other parents, sharing the good times and the challenges, and making friends.

For more detailed mapping of Joys and Successes inquiry responses, see p13

CHALLENGES



For more detailed mapping of Challenges inquiry responses, see p14

Parents are well aware of the many challenges they face.

At an organisational level, these include understanding and working with the processes and boundaries around SSBC, and frustration with what feels like the slow pace of change that this can produce. Some have also felt some resistance to parent voice from parts of SSBC – although they feel that this is improving. It is also a challenge encouraging other parents to become engaged.

There are also more personal challenges. For some it can sometimes be difficult and frustrating working with others and accommodating other people's ideas and perspectives. Language – both technical and where English is not someone's first language – can make it hard to participate fully. Some are also frustrated with how hard it is to transfer the skills and knowledge that they know that they have, and that they have developed through being parent ambassadors or champions, into paid employment opportunities.

On top of all this, of course, over the last eighteen months have been the many challenges of Covid, and how this has affected and isolated families, and limited opportunities for support, engagement and the shared activities that are such an important part of the role of parent ambassadors and champions.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS AND WHAT MIGHT BE



For full mapping of the What Might Be conversation responses see p15

Parents voice is of key importance to current parent champions and ambassadors. People feel that this is really important and makes a real difference. There is lots of energy to sustain this, and also possibly to extend it to include older children, and across other areas of Nottingham.

Growing the role of community and neighbourhoods – ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ – are also of huge importance to parents. This includes growing what is already there and strengthening connections across neighbourhoods and communities. It also includes working to make communities more caring and supportive of one another. Alongside this parents see a need for more support for parents and more activities for parents and their children at the neighbourhood level. They see a real need for creating environments and opportunities for children to be out and about, active, and physically and socially engaged.

There is much enthusiasm for continuing the work of SSBC within the 4 wards, and for extending it wider. Sustaining the role of family mentors is seen as of particular important for the health and wellbeing of parents, families and children. There are also concerns that future financial pressures might lead to targeted and therefore stigmatised services which would seriously reduce their impact and success.

Parents are already starting to think about ways that some of these activities might be developed through a parent led social enterprise or community interest company. Through the experience of Covid they are also seeing many opportunities for using virtual media to enable greater and more effective involvement.

Opportunities and support for parents to develop and move into employment have been really important – and parents would like to see these opportunities and support sustained and grown in the future.

There is also a strong understanding that they will need continuing support from SSBC to enable their work to continue and grow.

Building on what really matters and what might be, four possible streams of work have been identified:

1. PARENT VOICE

Start to explore the longer-term sustainable options for developing a social enterprise or similar organisation to sustain and extend the practice and influence of parent voice. This work to lead towards:

- Creating a financially sustainable organisation to promote and provide parent voice across a range of services across Nottingham.
- Through this organisation, create continued opportunities for skills development, training and future employment for parents.

2. SELF-ORGANISING PARENT-LED GROUPS

Start to experiment with and encourage the development of parent led support and play groups, and explore the social and physical infrastructure that might help to make these sustainable in the future. This work to lead towards:

- Creating an infrastructure to support self-organising parents groups.
- Enabling the continuation of self-sustaining parent led/ peer support for parents beyond the life of the SSBC programme.
- Enabling the continuation of self-sustaining parent led play groups and other activities beyond the life of the SSBC programme.
- Through these activities, to develop and sustain ongoing neighbourhood support networks beyond the life of the SSBC programme.

3. EARLY LEARNING HUB

Start to explore the possibility of creating a parent focussed learning hub or resource (physical and/ or virtual) for early years childcare, development and play, building on the learning and practice from SSBC. This work to lead towards:

- Creating some form of parent centred space(s) for parents and children.
- Creating some form of continued resource and support for parents around early years development, play and childcare.
- Through this resource, to have created continued opportunities for skills development, training and future employment for parents

4. FAMILY MENTORS

Start to explore how the most important parts of the family mentor support for parents might be sustained beyond the current SSBC programme.

GETTING THERE

Work to start now across each of these four streams. This work should bring together current parent champions and ambassadors around their areas of interest and expertise, supported by family mentors and/or other SSBC staff as appropriate: it might also be used as an opportunity to encourage more parents to become engaged in shaping the future of parent led activities in Nottingham.

Over the next twelve to eighteen months, this work should focus on three main areas:

- Research: finding out more about each of the areas – what is out there, what is already working, who to connect with, who might help, possible future funding and organisation etc. etc.
- Experimentation – light touch and quick. Trying things out on the ground, and learning, evolving and reshaping future possibilities from these experiments.
- Shaping: based on the research and experimentation, start to shape and test longer term, sustainable ways to support the work in the future.

To start conversations around this work we are suggesting some possible initial areas of research and experimentation across the four streams.

1. PARENT VOICE

RESEARCH	EXPERIMENTATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What other parent voice/ expert advocacy groups are there in Nottingham and beyond, and what can we learn from them?○ What other groups are doing similar work that might offer support/ possibilities to link/ connect?○ What are the different social enterprise and organisational models, and which might best suit our needs?○ Where is the 'demand' for parent voice and what does this mean for the services we might offer?○ What are the possible sources of finance/ funding?○ What initial and ongoing support might we need – and who might provide it?○ Who might be/ become our allies in sustaining and extending parent voice?○ Who do we need to win over – influencers and barriers?○ How might we also provide opportunities for skills development, training and future employment for parents through the parent voice activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Offers of parent voice 'consultancy' to other services

2. SELF-ORGANISING PARENT-LED GROUPS

RESEARCH	EXPERIMENTATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What self-organising parent led support and play groups already exist in or beyond Nottingham, and what can we learn from them? o What other self-organising/ neighbourhood/ community/ self-help groups already exist, and what can we learn from them? o What self-organising parent/ neighbourhood/ community/ self-help groups already exist in Nottingham that we might connect with? o Where might we find support? o What social and physical infrastructure/ support would help us establish/ sustain self-organising parents led support and play groups – and where might we find this? o What other groups exist around the issues that concern us (eg mental health) and how might we connect with these/ help them become more accessible to parents? o What are the possible sources of finance/ funding? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Set up, run and learn from parent led play groups (supported as appropriate by SSBC) o Set up, run and learn from parent led support groups (supported as appropriate by SSBC)

3. EARLY LEARNING HUB

RESEARCH	EXPERIMENTATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What organisations already exist in Nottingham providing some of the possible services/ activities/ support we are hoping to create or sustain – what can we learn from them and how might we connect? o What similar parent led organisations exist beyond Nottingham and what can we learn from them? o What are the most important activities/ services/ support that we would hope to create/ sustain? o Which elements of the activities/ services/ support that we hope to create or sustain might be offered virtually, and which would need physical infrastructure? o What are the possible sources of finance/ funding, and what activities might provide income generation? o Who might be/ become our allies in creating this centre? o How might we also provide opportunities for skills development, training and future employment for parents through the activities and working of the centre? 	

4. FAMILY MENTORS

RESEARCH	EXPERIMENTATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What similar programmes/ services exist elsewhere and what can we learn from how they are financed and run?○ What are the key elements of the family mentor role that we want to retain?○ What are the possible sources of finance/ funding?○ What, if any, of the elements of the family mentor role might be parent/ community led – and how might this be funded and organised?○ Who might be/ become our allies in sustaining family mentor services?	

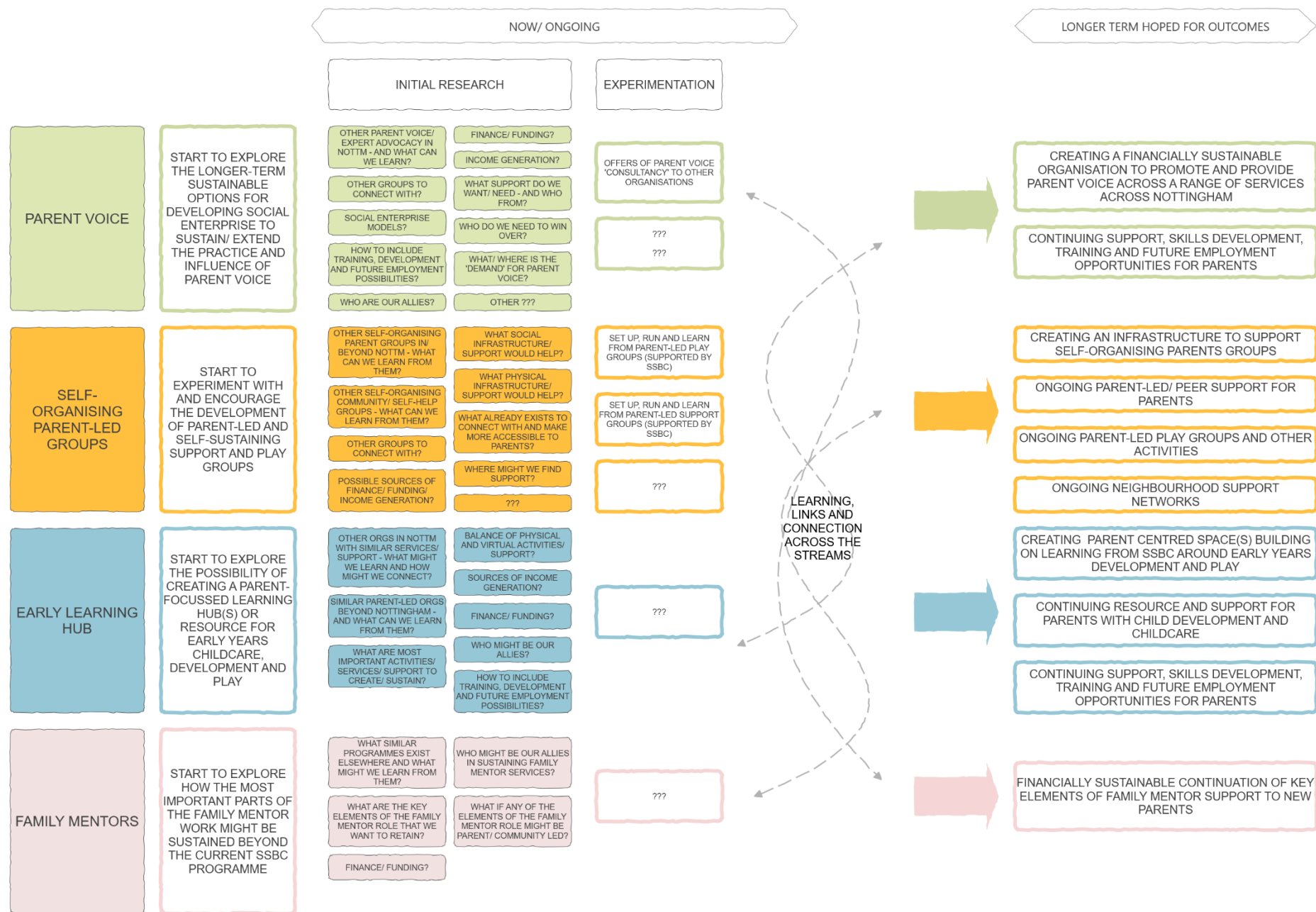
BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

While each stream is explored separately, it will be important to keep connections, information and learning flowing between each of the streams. Towards the end of an agreed initial period of time, we would suggest that all participants are brought together to share progress and ideas, and to explore and agree on ways forward.

There is every possibility that some or all of the streams will reconnect as the work proceeds. For example, the social enterprise being considered for developing and sustaining parent voice might be an appropriate organisation to support self-organising parent groups, or the early learning centre hub might be a host for continued parent mentor activities...

Connections and relationships will be crucial across all this work. Real attention will need to be given to supporting and sustaining current connections and relationships between parents, family mentors and the wider SSBC community. Even more attention will need to be given to extending these connections and relationships, within different groups, between different groups (e.g. parents and family mentors) and connecting parents and practitioners across the four ward boundaries.

It is evident to us that there is a real energy, commitment and creativity among parents to help to make these things happen, and that now is the right time to begin this work – building on the current energy, and recognising the limited time before the end of the SSBC programme.

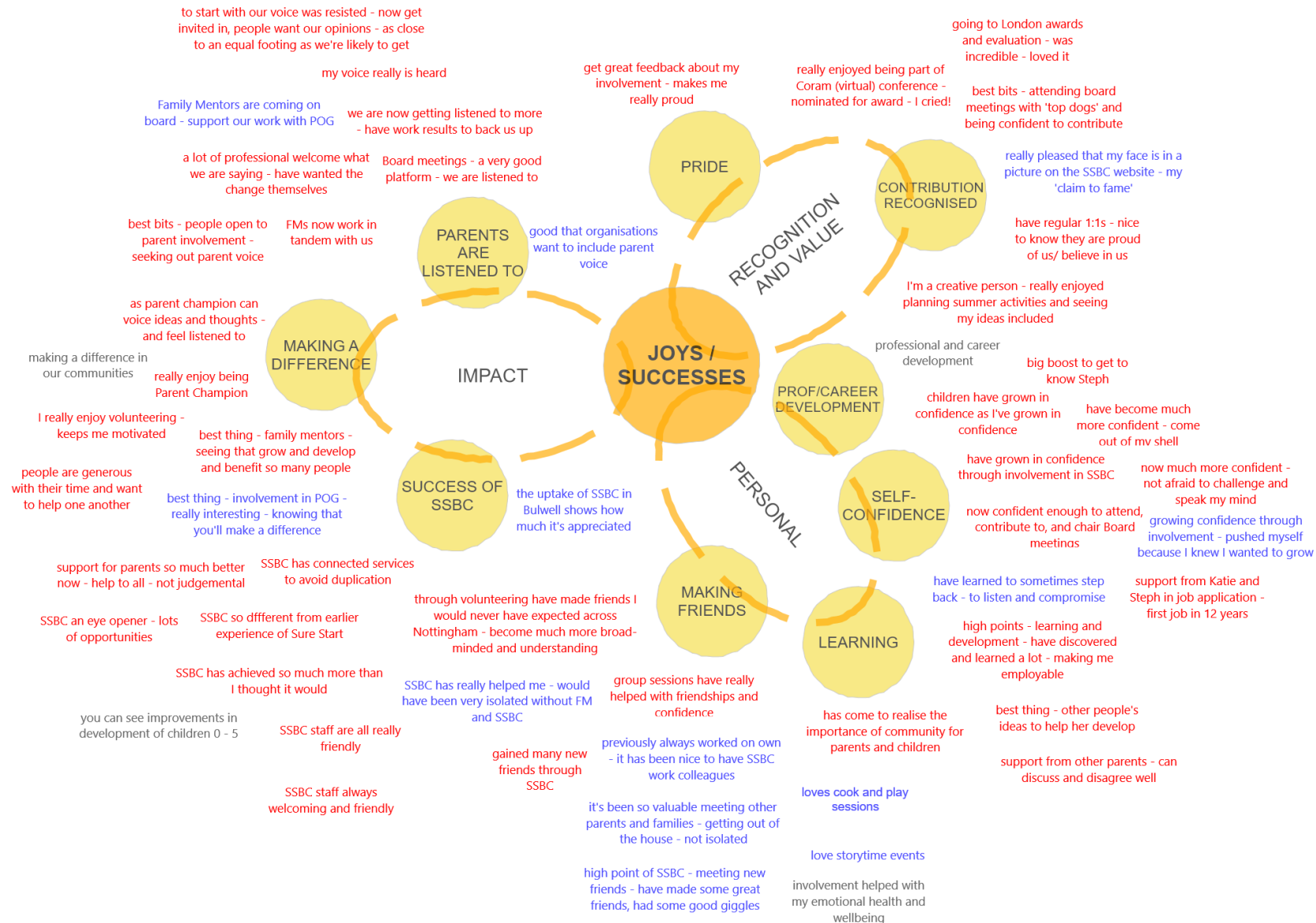


APPENDICES

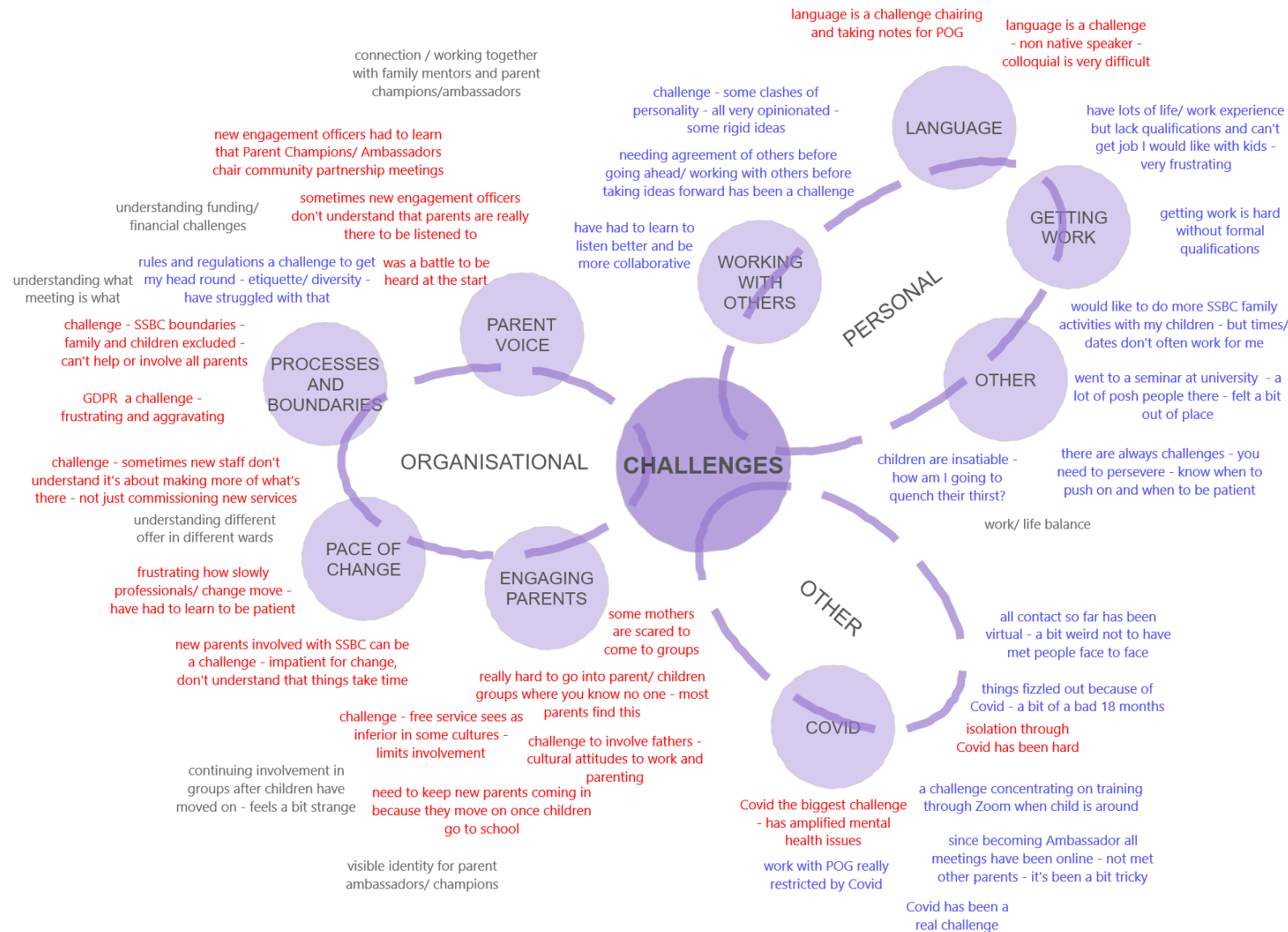
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MAPPING OF INQUIRY QUESTIONS: JOYS / SUCCESSES



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