We learnt so much from the first Challenge Prize. Look out for our key learning points in the report.
Who has all the answers?

People sometimes think of public services as traditional, not very forward thinking or old fashioned but not in Essex. Here we do things differently. We want to harness the ideas and experiences of our residents and our workforce to drive innovation in the pursuit of prosperity. In Essex ‘different’ is welcomed and new ideas are embraced because if we keep doing the same thing we will only ever get the same results.

As a Local Authority we don’t have all the answers and we are not always best placed to provide the solutions to the problems our residents face. That’s why back in 2015 Cllr Finch, Leader of Essex County Council announced the investment of £1m into the development and testing of Challenge Prizes as an alternative and innovative way of getting answers to some of the complex problems facing our county. Essex County Council were the first Local Authority to use Challenge Prizes to tackle problems facing residents and our partnership with the Nesta Centre for Challenge Prizes has enabled us to learn from the experts.

This summary aims to share some of the learning from the first Essex Challenge Prize – Families Included and to demonstrate the value of the Challenge Prize methodology in shining a light on neglected issues or engaging people to think about solutions to difficult problems.
So what is a Challenge Prize?

Challenge Prizes are a great way to encourage and test new ideas. By offering development funding and practical support to innovators, challenge prizes encourage people to think about solutions to important problems, problems that might feel too difficult or too big to tackle. Challenge Prizes can engage with an entirely new audience who may have little or no relationship with the people funding the prize, in this case Essex County Council.

Learning Point
Not having a solution is a strength – We often decide what we want before we ask somebody to provide it for us. The Challenge Prize enabled us to throw the question out to the wider community and to let them decide what success should look like.
The Pilot Prize

The Pilot Challenge Prize was set up to tackle isolation and loneliness in parents with pre-school children. A strong, resilient family is an important part of ensuring that children in Essex get the best start in life and Essex families had repeatedly told us that they were facing day to day pressures in raising a small child that left them feeling lonely and isolated. Parents and Carers that we talked to said that these feelings affected their confidence and left them feeling less able or willing to access the support they wanted and needed.

Everybody feels lonely at some point in their lives, it is a human emotion but not everybody has somebody to turn to for support when things get difficult and they have to deal with the challenges of each day alone.

“We the most challenging part of being a parent of a young child is that you can be surrounded by people and feel you are on your own.” Mandy, Basildon

We talked to well over a hundred mums who told us how lonely and isolated they felt after having their child. It didn’t seem to matter what background they came from, whether it was their first or third child or whether they were single or with a partner. Something about the life changing nature of having a baby can feel lonely.

**Learning Point**

Make people part of the journey – Talk to residents, hear their stories and experiences. They can articulate real life much more effectively and with much more passion than we ever can. Working with residents to really understand the issues they face day to day is a critically important aspect of framing the opportunities for innovation.
What did Families Included set out to achieve?

Taking the issue of social isolation and/or loneliness of parents with children aged 0-5 years in Essex the Challenge prize provided us with an opportunity to throw open the topic to the ‘Unusual Suspects’ asking everybody in Essex to get their thinking caps on and to share their ideas and solutions. From local voluntary organisations and groups of parents or neighbours of our recognised partners, everybody had the same opportunity to share their ideas.

For ECC the Families Included prize was about ‘putting innovation into action’, looking beyond the Local Authority for great ideas, projects and solutions from Essex that involved local families with young children in opportunities that could enrich their lives. Ideas could address any aspect of life including personal, professional or social experiences and the scale of the idea could have been anything from an issue in a specific community or something that worked across the whole of Essex.

The objectives for the prize were:

1. To stimulate networking and the building of relationships among parents and communities within Essex
2. To increase awareness of social isolation as an issue
3. To incorporate a co-creation element into the development and/or delivery of solutions, with parents being involved in or leading the solutions

Learning Point
The Unusual Suspects – It is very easy to limit the number of people thinking about a problem, in turn limiting the ideas. Challenge Prizes create an alternative approach to commissioning which can inspire innovators from our communities and from organisations and groups who might not usually be involved.
The Essex Challenge Prize process

1. Defining the problem

**Summarising the problem the prize is trying to solve**

Challenge prizes work best when they are developed with input from a range of stakeholders. This ensures that the prize is based on a sound understanding of the problem it is trying to solve.

For the Families Included Prize this included internal Commissioners, Directors and Subject Matter Experts alongside a number of operational colleagues from a broad range of organisations working day to day with families in Essex.

Through a mixture of workshops, desk research and interviews with these stakeholders and with Essex parents, the team were able to narrow the focus of the prize and to identify and understand the problem the prize would tackle.

2. Creating the Challenge Statement

**The statement framing the problem**

Defining the problem enabled the development of a Challenge Statement; this is a clear articulation of the issue. It is this statement that is shared with all interested parties and that forms the basis of the way in which ideas are evaluated, the way impact is measured and the way a decision is taken on the best idea.

Through discussion around the problem definition and rigorous testing and iteration of the challenge statement with stakeholders the following Challenge Statement was created for the Families Included Prize.

**Challenge Statement**

The Families Included Prize is looking for great ideas, projects and solutions from Essex that involve local families with young children (0-5 years) in opportunities that enrich their lives. Ideas can relate to any aspect of life including personal, professional and social experiences.

3. Eligibility Criteria

**Sets out who can enter the prize**

The Families Included Prize eligibility criteria were created with the aim of:

- Supporting new or innovative solutions that would help families in Essex
- Encouraging ‘unusual suspects’ to enter the prize, especially individuals and groups
- Ensuring that solutions were ‘from Essex, for Essex’ so that they would be effective in Essex and that funding would be spent in Essex for the benefit of local residents

The Families Included Prize was open to individuals, groups and organisation. How well developed a solution had to be at the time of entry was intentionally set low.
Learning Point

Involving people close to the issue – Clearly articulating the problem to be addressed by potential solutions is critical to the success of any Challenge Prize. By collaborating with parents and operational colleagues over a period of months prior to the launch of the Challenge Prize we were able to shape the Challenge Statement to reflect the day to day impact social isolation has on families in Essex. By co-creating the prize with parents in Essex we also made the prize more relevant to parents and encouraged individuals with first-hand experience to get directly involved with solutions.

Entrants only had to have an idea and be able to articulate how it would reduce the social isolation of families in Essex to enter. This allowed anybody in Essex to enter as long as they had the capacity to develop their idea and were willing to test it with local families.

4. Judging Criteria

Sets out the measures against which entries will be assessed

The judging criteria reflected the aims and objectives of the prize, setting out how success could be measured. All entries were assessed against the judging criteria and the same criteria were used throughout a prize. At the entry stage, entrants were judged according to how well they demonstrated their ‘potential’ against the criteria but when it came time to select the winner, emphasis then shifted to how well they could demonstrate that they met the following judging criteria.

Criterion 1: INNOVATION
The entry should be new, adapted or repurposed products, solutions, services, systems and/or technologies.

Criterion 2: IMPACT
The entrant should demonstrate a real understanding of the situation that their entry is helping to address. We will also be considering the degree to which the idea contributes to reducing social isolation and loneliness among Essex-based families with young children (0-5 years) by providing them with opportunities that enrich their lives.

Criterion 3: ACCESSIBLE & AFFORDABLE
The entry is accessible and affordable to Essex-based families with young children aged 0-5 years regardless of income. Entrants should consider how families will access their solution and what the costs of doing so might be. Cost and accessibility should not be barriers to the families that the solution is designed to support.

Criterion 4: COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING
Entrants should be able to demonstrate how they will appropriately advertise to attract families, especially those who are less engaged with existing services.

Criterion 5: GROWTH POTENTIAL
Entrants should consider how their entry can be replicated and/or expanded within Essex to reach Essex-based families who could benefit from the solution. They should be able to demonstrate how they will make their entry sustainable, so that it will continue beyond the life of the prize.
5. Assessment and Judging
Creating the right assessment and judging process is key to the success of any prize.

A two-stage process was created and used throughout the Families Included Prize – selecting first the finalists and then the winners.

**Stage 1** – A team of assessors reviewed and scored participants documents against the judging criteria providing comments and shortlisting recommendations to the judges.

**Stage 2** – A judging panel were tasked with selecting the most promising entries and, ultimately, decide who would receive the £10,000 award.

6. Prize Structure and Incentives
Created to facilitate the achievements of a prize’s aim and objectives within the budget and time available

The scale of the financial prize on offer at the end of the process does not necessarily reflect the level of ambition or aspiration set out in the Challenge Statement. Some of the most advanced solutions to complex problems have been generated in response to relatively low financial incentives. Key to success is the association of finalists with the organising body and support partners. In the case of Families Included, finalists were able to reference directly working with Essex County Council and NESTA in future bids for funding.

In the delivery of future prizes we will seek to develop a strategic partnership with companies or organisations that add value to the prize and encourage participation. Funded through public money ring fenced for driving innovation in Essex there were restrictions placed on the way in which Prize Money was spent with a requirement set that the Prize Winner would utilise the £10,000 award to further develop and grow the idea.

The Challenge Prize process seeks to nurture ideas and provide finalists with the support and challenge to develop their concepts between shortlisting and final judging. In the case of Families Included the support partners were Chelmsford Centre for Voluntary Action and Colchester Council for Voluntary Service (CCVS). These organisations combined to provide a bespoke package of support to each finalist based on an initial needs assessment with each finalist to support the development of their idea as well as the development of the organisation, financial plan and business plans. Finalists responded positively to the support on offer with the winner of the Families Included Prize having taken full advantages of the free professional help on offer.
Who made the decisions?

We wanted to make sure that the Judging Panel had a range experience. We invited people who understood the issue and people who worked with children and families every day across Essex.

The judging panel was Chaired by Cllr Dick Madden (Cabinet Member for Children) and included two Essex based Children’s Authors, a Health Visiting Team Leader and an Essex mum who had previously talked on the BBC about her own experiences of isolation.

**Councillor Dick Madden**
Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Adults and Children (Chair)

**Amanda Brandon**
Children's author and journalist

**Constance Agyeman**
Senior Programme Manager, Challenge Prize Centre, Nesta

**Emily Jones**
Essex mother and social media manager

**Chris Martin**
Children’s Commissioning Director, Essex County Council

**Emma McNally**
Children’s author, illustrator, performance coach and trainer

**Paulette Stephens**
Health Visiting Lead, Virgin Care

**Dr Barbara Patterson**
Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing, East of England Public Health

**Sam Keeling**
Founder of 8 out of 10 Mums

**Caroline Taylor**
Chief Executive, Essex Community Foundation

---

**Learning Point**

Judges are really important people – They can use their contacts and their knowledge to promote and endorse a challenge prize through conversations, emails and particularly social media.
Delivered over four phases, the Families Included Prize launched in May 2016 with final judging in January 2017 and the Prize Award Reception in February 2017.
Phase 1 Promotion and Application
With a launch in May 2016 the Challenge was promoted through existing Early Years networks as well as through a promotional video and dedicated Challenge Prize Website.

50 organisations, groups and individuals responded to the opportunity and submitted an application setting out their initial ideas.

Phase 2 Selecting the Finalists
Following the judging process, ten finalists were selected from the 50 entries. The judges felt that each of the ten finalists had an idea with real potential that would benefit from further support and testing over the four months that followed. The ten finalists were invited to the induction event in August 2016 which offered an opportunity for all of the finalists to meet the Challenge Prize Team and to meet each other.

“Overall it was more than a grant”
Claire, Mums and Families UK

“Without this opportunity we wouldn’t have done it [developed the project] in the same way”
Nic, Home-Start Chelmsford

During the development and testing phase of the prize the financial support offered in the form of the micro-grants was enhanced by non-financial support. This was delivered directly by ECC with tailored sessions from subject matter experts on Information Governance and Safeguarding and by our Support Partners; the Centre Supporting Voluntary Action (CVS Chelmsford) and Colchester CVS.

From a series of 1-1 interviews with all of the finalists at the Induction event the CVS teams were able to assess the specific needs of each finalist and begin work on a bespoke plan of support for each over coming months. Through a series of 1-1 face to face and telephone support sessions and themed support sessions, finalists had access to mentoring.

Phase 3 – Development, Testing and Support
Fundamental to the success of any Challenge Prize is the time period during which finalists are able to develop and test their idea with service users, in this case families with children under 5 living in Essex.

Each finalist was given a micro-grant of £1,500 to spend however they wished in order to further progress their idea and enable testing to take place.

“The Challenge prize was great because some were just mums who came up with a good idea” Sally, Parents 1st

Learning Point
It’s good to talk – We know how important it is for people to talk to each other and share what they are doing. We worried that bringing individuals, groups and organisations together might be difficult because they were all competing for the same prize but we couldn’t have been more wrong. In the case of the Families Included Prize the finalists relished the opportunity to network and to share thinking. The networking events created a genuine sense of camaraderie and even led to organisations planning to work together beyond the life of the Challenge Prize.
Learning Point

**Invest Early** – Many individuals, groups and organisations don’t have the money or time to develop or test new ideas having to prioritise day to day service delivery. We have been struck by how powerful a very small financial investment can be in creating that space and time for people to think, plan and try out their ideas in a low risk way but a way that offers a great deal of learning. Without the rigidity of a grant or a contract a micro-grant of £1,500 in the case of the Families Included Prize acted as the catalyst needed to allow people to think freely and innovate. The space for ideas to fail and need re-design is critical to the long term success of any concept and a core element of successful innovation.

---

“**Guidance from the CVS and the support from Amy [Information Governance] was incredible, the whole process allowed us to be independent**”
Claire, Mums and Families UK

**Phase 4 Business Case Submission and selecting the winner**
Each of the eight finalists put together a detailed business case for their project responding to a series of pre-set questions that linked back to the original Challenge Prize Statement and Judging Criteria.

All eight finalists were asked to prepare a presentation for the judging panel giving them ten minutes to sell their idea and share their learning from the testing with families.

The standard of the presentations was high with each of the finalists demonstrating how hard they had worked over the four months prior to bring their original idea to fruition.

“**I was blown away by the quality of their work and their ideas**” Emma McNally, Families Include Judge

At the end of a rigorous judging process the panel unanimously decided on the winner of the first Essex Challenge Prize and created a Runner-Up prize.

Learning Point

**It’s okay to fail** – A Challenge Prize creates a clear space during which finalists can develop their and test the potential impact. This period of time can seem to some like an unnecessary delay, slowing the process but it is this time that gives the finalists a chance to take an idea on paper and to test the limitations in a low risk, low cost way. It is important to give people the time and space to realise the limitations of their idea or the limitations of their capacity before they take on more commitment. Some will use this to learn and to develop or rethink their ideas but some will fail and this is part of the process.
Each of the eight Families Included finalists showed an understanding of the issue, an understanding of the impact and had an idea with real potential.

Hello, I am Nicole Blom and my project was called LIGHT. I named it LIGHT because it felt like I wanted to shine a spotlight on how hard it can be for parents with children who have additional needs to get expert advice in a safe and open environment.

Ciao! I am Luissa Messina and I work for Volunteering Matters. It has been my pleasure to develop an idea that builds on our core work and to look at how we might use trained volunteers to give emotional and practical family support to mums-to-be and vulnerable mums.

Hi, I’m Claire and my personal experience of postnatal depression, anxiety and OCD made me determined to set up a group led by mums to support others who have low levels of emotional well-being or who might be feeling overwhelmed with the changes that being a parents brings.
We are Sally and Lorraine from Parents 1st an organisation passionate about developing peer support networks. Our idea was to develop postnatal exercise sessions for mums that enabled them to bring their babies with them.

Hello I am Nic and I work for Home-Start Chelmsford. We wanted to do something that made a difference to parents who were socially isolated and struggling with low self-esteem and mental health issues. Our idea was to develop a wellbeing groups to enable face to face contact and an opportunity for parents to talk supported by provision of a crèche.

Hello I am Nic and I work for Home-Start Chelmsford. We wanted to do something that made a difference to parents who were socially isolated and struggling with low self-esteem and mental health issues. Our idea was to develop a wellbeing groups to enable face to face contact and an opportunity for parents to talk supported by provision of a crèche.
Hello there, I am Rosie Juhl and I am the Project Manager for the Uttlesford Buffy Bus Association. Buffy Bus has been operating in West Essex for over 20 years taking Early Years play services out to rural communities using a double decker bus. We wanted to add value to this service and use the Challenge Prize to test the idea of taking early intervention and specialist support and advice out to parents who might otherwise not get it.

Hello we are Claire Snell and Sue Bayles, we work for Healthy Living Solutions and our idea was ‘Hug-In-A-Box’. It is really a box of nice items, information and advice for new mums who may be lonely, socially isolated and have the potential to develop post-natal depression. The box gives us something to talk about with mum and might encourage them to engage with support offered through our programme of Home-visits.

Hi I’m Gemma from The Dance Network Association and I am just so excited to have the opportunity to test my idea which is Interactive Family Dance Classes. Classes for parents and children together that will explore the impact of creative dance, paired with basic nutritional information on issues such as childhood obesity, loneliness and isolation.
Meet the runners up

Gemma from Interactive Family Dance was awarded £5,000 by the judges in direct response to the quality of her idea. This prize was created at the unanimous request of all ten judges.

I’m so excited to have been selected as the Runner Up of the Families Included Prize, we didn’t even know there was going to be a second prize so that made it even more special. We set out to see what we could do by putting together creative dance with basic nutritional information to address various health issues including childhood obesity, loneliness and isolation. The sessions included elements of education for young dancers and their parents but were mainly about the dance and about them having fun in a safe environment that doesn’t patronize them and gets mums and children involved in physical activity. After the dancing we talk and make friends over a cup of tea and a healthy snack.

gemma@dancenetworkassociation.org.uk
http://www.dancenetworkassociation.org.uk

“Winning this money means we can get going on the project and bring the programme to the families in Harlow”

Gemma Wright
Interactive Family Dance
Meet the winners

Claire Hawtree and Heather Collins
Mums and Families UK

“It is like a dream come true, it has changed everything”

Claire and Heather were awarded the top prize of £10,000 to invest in the development of their idea and to support the growth of Mums and Families UK. Judges were impressed by the passion shown by Claire to prevent other mums from experiencing the isolation she had personally felt. Combined with the level of commitment to the process and testing of the idea, the judges had an easy decision to make.

I’m Claire and I am the founder of Mums and Families UK. We provide a free programme to mums and families of children aged 0-5 with a focus on perinatal emotional health and wellbeing. Our programme is empowering women and their families to adjust to being a parent and to deal with the multitude of issues family life can bring. My personal experiences led me to create Mums and Families UK because I wanted to do more for other mums based on what was at the time a sad, traumatic and lonely experience. Having received the right support and made a full recovery something truly positive has now been established.

Being part of the Challenge Prize was the most amazing experience and has played a significant part in giving us the ability to accelerate the plans we had for Mums and Families UK.

info@mumsandfamilies.org.uk
http://www.mumsandfamilies.org.uk/

Learning Point
The end is not the end – This is only the start of the Essex Challenge Prize programme. We want to take what we have learnt from this experience and use it to develop a series of further prizes addressing important issues affecting Essex residents. We will also be sharing our experience of running a Challenge Prize with colleagues offering a new tool to stimulate innovation and improve public services. Most importantly we need to look at the ways in which we can use the individual journey of Mums and Families UK to inspire others in communities across Essex to realise their potential.
Thank you to our partners

Special mention needs to go to Charlotte Macken and Zofia Jackiewicz from Nesta’s Centre for Challenge Prizes for their support and mentoring throughout the design and delivery of the Families Included Prize. From the initial scoping, through design and implementation to the final Award Reception Charlotte and Zofia were there for the highs and the lows.

The Challenge Prize Team would like to thank Lorraine Jarvis and Tracy Rudling along with their passionate and dedicated teams from Colchester CVS and the Centre Supporting Voluntary Action (Chelmsford CVS) for the programme of support that they implemented during the prize to develop the capacity and potential of the finalists.

The team would also like the thank Amy Hamilton (ECC) for support with Information Governance and Sonal Mathur (ECC) for support with Safeguarding training and policies.

Finally thanks to everybody who was involved in the assessment and judging process.

Families Included finalists 2017