

[Title] Surrey Heath parent awareness seminars

[Heading] Summary

Seminar sessions are increasing parents' understanding of computers and the internet, and stressing the need to engage and communicate with their children.

Services

- Two drop-in seminars run in conjunction with drug and alcohol awareness sessions

Highlights

- Experienced facilitators
- Strong emphasis on communication
- Parents' feedback shaping future provision

[Heading] Background

Headteachers at schools within the Surrey Heath confederation were becoming increasingly aware of the need to educate parents about computers and the internet. "The evidence for need was mainly anecdotal," says confederation project manager Sarah Sewell. "But the response from parents attending the two seminars we've run to date suggests that this is a topic where there's a real need for clear information and practical, realistic guidance."

[Heading] Services

The two seminars ran from 7-8.30 pm, and were held at junior schools in different areas of the borough in order to maximise take-up. The Lucy Faithful Foundation, a child protection charity, provided funding and led the sessions. Schools were responsible for advertising the sessions, which were run on an informal, drop-in basis.

The sessions focused on raising parents' awareness of how their children might use the internet, including looking at social networking sites. There was also a strong focus on managing computer use and keeping channels of communication open. "We wanted to give parents simple practical strategies – for example, not letting their child have a computer in their bedroom," says Sarah. "But underlying that is the need for parents to stay engaged with their children. We wanted to give them the vocabulary to be able to do that."

The charity's facilitators include speakers with experience of working with the police. The headteacher leading the confederation group looking at the issue of internet safety also attended, and gathered feedback from parents. This was generally extremely positive, with many parents reporting that they had passed on key messages to friends and family.

[Heading] Future plans

Three further sessions are planned for the autumn and spring terms. "There are definitely lessons to be learned," Sarah Sewell admits. "For a start, the sessions could be advertised more effectively. Next time, we plan to use the confederation website. We also need to create stronger links between the sessions and the messages being put across in schools. But it's clear that we're meeting a real need among parents for down-to-earth, factual information. I think these sessions are just the start."

