

Family learning in children's centres and extended services

A multi-agency approach



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Family learning in children's centres and extended services: a multi-agency approach

The aim of this topic paper is to provide a stimulus for those involved with children's centres and extended services to debate and discuss issues of work with families and parents. It also aims to support a multi-agency 'Think Family' approach, to provide the best services to meet the needs of adults and children.

Who it is aimed at

Managers and practitioners involved in working with parents, parenting skills programmes and family learning linked to children's centres and extended services.

About NIACE

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) aims to promote excellent practice in the delivery of learning and to encourage more and different learners to engage in all kinds of learning activities across England and Wales. NIACE's activities include dedicated research, development and consultancy; advocacy to inform and influence public policy; the provision of information and dissemination services; and publications and conferences.

Family learning at NIACE

NIACE's vision for family learning is of the development of a broad range of intergenerational learning opportunities for all families. We define both the family and the family learning curriculum in its widest sense. Learning within the family and as a family is often the catalyst to many wide-ranging changes, not just in relation to individual skills and qualifications but also to community cohesion and well-being. We work to promote this vision through advocacy, development, research, support and project activities with schools, children's services and adult learning providers.

Acknowledgements

With particular thanks to colleagues from Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) Family Learning Team, Westminster City Council; Westminster Children's Centres; Brent Adult and Continuing Education Service (BACES) Family Learning Team; and Brent Borough Council and Brent Children's Centres.

Thanks also to Brent Adult and Continuing Education Service, Sheffield City Council and Westminster City Council for supplying the images used in this paper.

Introduction

This publication forms part of a project, funded by the John Lyon's Charity, to develop a best practice programme of linked parenting skills and wider family learning in children's centres using a multi-agency approach. The aim of the publication is to use the learning points from the project so far to provide a stimulus for debate and discussion for managers and practitioners involved with children's centres and working with parents, parenting skills and family learning. In particular, it seeks to develop the concept of parents as adult learners contributing to learning families – combining approaches to parenting skills and wider family learning.

Family learning involves parents/carers¹ and children learning together with planned outcomes for both. Adults and children develop their skills and knowledge, and parents (mothers, fathers and carers) support children's learning. The term 'family learning' is used to describe a broad range of learning opportunities ranging from informal learning events to more structured family learning programmes. While developing parenting skills is not the primary focus of family learning, programmes often include elements of parenting skills, e.g. activities that help a parent and child to communicate and interact more effectively; build and cement the bond between parent and child; and improve family relationships.²

Background

The work of parent support, parenting and family learning has become central to many professional roles and is key to the work of children's centres and extended services. Alongside this is the fast-developing multi-agency and integrated team working which requires people from a wide range of professions and backgrounds to work together.

Ensuring that the 'Think Family' approach is embedded in practice means that those working with parents and families need to explore the differences and similarities of their professional roles and approaches. To do this it is important to develop trust and respect in the skills, knowledge and experience each person brings. Building this relationship of trust and respect requires time, determination and support both at a strategic and operational level.

A starting point for opening out the debate and exploring the differences and similarities is to look at the range of guidance and quality frameworks that focus on parenting and family learning. *Quality Matters: Think Family*³ drew together 24 guidance and quality documents to help professionals identify how their work links with the work of other roles and how to ensure quality of provision.

Family learning supports the development of the 'learning family', offering opportunities for families to work together and nurture the culture of learning, taking activities from and into the home environment. Family learning

1. Throughout this report, when referring to parents or parenting, we assume this includes the range of family members and carers involved in the parental care-giving role.
 2. Lamb, P., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K. and Thomas, M. (2008) *Families, Learning and Progression*. Leicester: NIACE, <http://www.niace.org.uk/development-research/families-learning-and-progression>.
 3. Lamb, P., Meade, C. and Kershaw, P. (2007) *Quality Matters: Think Family*. Leicester: NIACE, <http://www.niace.org.uk/development-research/quality-matters-think-family>



also offers opportunities that enhance and encourage positive relationships within the family.

The typology of family learning on page 10 provides a focus for opening up debate about what is meant when we use the term 'family learning'.

Policy context

At the heart of the children's centre movement is the enhancement of the life chances of young children and their families by providing services in areas of high deprivation.

Brought into sharp focus by the Victoria Climbié case in 2005 was the need for professionals to change their practice and work together to ensure better services for children and families. Initially, the *Every Child Matters* framework⁴ was seen as relating to integrating provision within children and families services. However, a child's well-being cannot be seen in isolation, relating only to him or herself,

but relies upon broader issues relating to the health and well-being of parents and carers as individuals and as carers, as well as issues with the whole family and the community where the child lives.

*Every Parent Matters*⁵ sets out the policy initiatives promoting the development of services for parents and the actions needed to involve parents in the shaping of services for families.

The 'Think Family' approach advocated in the Cabinet Office review of services for families at risk (Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force, 2007) refers to adopting a whole-family approach. It acknowledges the positive impact of intergenerational learning and the importance of parental interest in a child's education to raising attainment. This approach requires both; more flexible services to meet the needs of families with multiple needs, as well as more integrated provision beyond children's services to all services, including adult services and working with families at risk. This new approach to partnerships and integrated team working has brought new challenges, methods of working and terminology. We now have children's and young people's partnerships; local strategic partnerships; local area agreements; multi-area agreements; personal and community development learning partnerships; and public sector agreements.

The poverty agenda

Despite government policy, which has led to reductions in child poverty since 1998/99, there are still 2.8 million children living in poverty.⁶ In the 2008 budget, the Government announced a

4. HM Government (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. Nottingham: DfES.

5. DfES (2007) *Every Parent Matters*. London: DfES.

6. DCSF, DWP, HM Treasury (2008) *Ending Child Poverty: Everybody's Business*. London: Crown copyright.

range of initiatives to tackle child poverty.⁷ There are powerful arguments for moving people into employment as a means of ending poverty and social exclusion in families and, increasingly, policy and research are acknowledging the need for on-going skills development to ensure that a move into employment does not become a poverty trap of low pay.⁸ The current economic situation is highlighting the need for transferable skills which can respond to changes in the job market.

The recent Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) report *Deprivation and Education – The Evidence on Pupils in England: Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4* reiterates the connection between various social and economic factors and children's achievement including health, family stress, parental education, parental involvement in their children's education, experiences of schooling, low aspirations and levels of literacy⁹. The report emphasises the importance of differentiating between parental involvement in school, such as through answering letters or joining the parent/teacher association, and parental involvement in learning. The former produced no demonstrable impact on individual children's achievement. However,

what is clear is that a stimulating home environment and a family 'turned on' to learning provide a firm basis for children's achievement.

Other policy documents, whilst encouraging skills development and the move into employment, also recommend adequate attention to achieving a healthy work-life balance.¹⁰ The study highlights the importance of considering both parental time and household income, at the same time, when looking at reducing child poverty, since both are critical ingredients of children's well-being. There is a call for government and society at large to recognise and value the role of parents as carers.¹¹

Many current policy documents highlight the strong links between educational achievement and family background.¹² Research shows that the economic position of the family and the level of education of the parents affect children's achievement.¹³ In addition, there is an intergenerational impact on aspirations for moving into employment which impinges on social mobility.¹⁴ The impact of gender and the disadvantages in the labour market from taking a break from working, particularly for care responsibilities, are also highlighted in research.¹⁵

7. Ibid.

8. HM Government (2009) *New Opportunities: Fair Chances for the Future, Cmd 7533*. London: The Stationery Office; Lawton, K. (2009) *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Achieving a Sustainable Solution to Low Pay and In-work Poverty*. London: IPPR.

9. DCSF (2009) *Deprivation and Education – The Evidence on Pupils in England: Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4*. London: DCSF.

10. Burchardt, T. (2008) *Time and Income Poverty*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London School of Economics.

11. Cabinet Office (2007) *Building on Progress: Families*. HM Government Policy Review.

12. DCSF (2007) *Extended Schools: Building on Experience*. Nottingham: Department for Children, Schools and Families; DfES (2007) *Every Parent Matters*. London: Department for Education and Skills; Leitch Review of Skills (2006). *Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills*. London: HM Treasury; Cabinet Office, Social Exclusion Team (2007). *Reaching Out: Think Family, Analysis and Themes from the Families at Risk Review*. London: Cabinet Office.

13. Feinstein, L., Duckworth, K. and Sabates, R. (2004) *A Model of the Intergenerational Transmission of Educational Success*. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. Department for Education and Skills Research Brief.

14. HM Government (2009) *New Opportunities: Fair Chances for the Future, Cmd 7533*. London: The Stationery Office.

15. Nunn, A., Johnson, S., Monro, S., Bickerstaffe, T. and Kelsey, S. (2007) *Factors Influencing Social Mobility*. Department of Work and Pensions Report, No 450. Norwich: The Stationery Office.

The impact of family learning and the learning family

Family learning gives opportunities for children and adults to learn for themselves and as a family unit, creating a two-way sharing of knowledge and skills across the generations. Every learner is a lifelong learner in their own right. Approaches to learning are generally experiential rather than cognitive and give ample opportunities for the sharing of home cultures and experiences.

Family learning is recognised as playing an important part in providing opportunities for families, adults and children to not only develop skills and knowledge, but also to gain more generic outcomes,¹⁶ like confidence, and improving relationships within the family and in the community.

Family learning can also foster links with the community by:

- raising social and human capital in the community;
- preventing family fragmentation;
- encouraging neighbourhood renewal from active and participating citizens;
- encouraging adult learners to return to learning and develop skills useful to the local economy; and
- adding to health benefits for the individual and community.

Work undertaken by NIACE in 2009,¹⁷ describes the learning family:

"In a learning family...the intergenerational combination of encouragement and involvement in

each other's learning activities by all family members raises aspirations and creates a long-term change in the culture and patterns of learning. Such a family ensures that parents, grandparents and wider family members are active participants in their children's learning as well as learners in their own right."

It is this raising of aspirations and the creation of a culture of exploration and excitement to learn that brings about long-term changes for children and families. It helps to build resilience to change and creates community well-being, economic prosperity and social cohesion.

"I think it's always enjoyable and educational. You learn a lot in the short time we've got. It's always fun and not just classroom learning. [There are] ...so many ways in which to learn and by that I mean it doesn't have to be all boring in a hot, crowded classroom type of work, it can be fun indoors and outside.... Learning means I'm doing something for me, being 'me' again – my life isn't just about the baby!"

Learner on Wider Family Learning course¹⁸

Much detailed research¹⁹ highlights the critical role that parents play in supporting their children's learning and the key relationship in a child's early years of parents' and, in particular, the mother's educational qualification levels. The combined factors of the children's and the adults' learning is far too important to be lost between policy areas.

16. Lamb, P., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., and Thomas, M. (2008) *Families, Learning and Progression: A resource pack for practitioners and managers*. Leicester: NIACE.
<http://www.niace.org.uk/development-research/families-learning-and-progression>.

17. Lamb, P. (2009) *The Learning Family: a NIACE briefing note*. Leicester: NIACE

18. Lamb, P., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K. and Evans, S. (2009) *Providing the Evidence: the Impact of Wider Family Learning*. London: Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).
<http://www.niace.org.uk/development-research/impact-of-wider-family-learning>.

19. See the range of publications at <http://www.niace.org.uk/development-and-research/programmes-of-work/family-learning> for a detailed exploration of the research.



Young mothers group: Winchester House, Isle of Wight

Working together for better outcomes for children and families

Every Parent Matters, *The Children's Plan*²⁰ and the Cabinet Office's *Think Family*²¹ concept all promote the efficacy of joint planning and working. Each recognises the central role that the parent or primary carer plays in ensuring the health and resilience of the family and its members.

The role of extended schools and children's centres is central to the *Every Child Matters* programme, providing integrated, multi-agency services. The aim is that they provide a universal point of access for family support, health services, support into employment, and links to other specialist services. Working in partnership across services is essential if organisations are to provide the best service to meet the diverse needs and interests of the participants. Without this multi-agency approach it is unlikely that

the families who need it most will be able to make full use of the provision available.

In *The Links Between Family Learning and Parenting Programmes*,²² Lamb et al. look at the ways in which local authorities have worked to create a cohesive strategy across family learning and the parenting skills agendas, and the importance of recognising the needs of adults as learners in any group working with parents.

The on-going evaluation of Sure Start services is showing the importance of a collaborative approach of services to families. The report on improving the employability of parents in Sure Start Centres quotes the collaboration with the other agencies as determining the success of Sure Start local programmes in tackling the issue of employability, and especially the links and networks that programme managers and staff bring with them to the programme.²³

The Ofsted inspection regimes for children and adults have moved closer together with the introduction in September 2009 of the new *Common Inspection Framework for Further Education and Skills*²⁴ which links the outcomes for learners to areas which reflect the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*.

A report published in July 2009 by Ofsted²⁵ identifies how the best

20. Department for Children, Schools & Families (2007) *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures*. Cm 7280. Norwich: TSO.

21. Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force. (2008) *Think Family: Improving the Life Chances of Families at Risk*. London: Cabinet Office.

22. Lamb, P. Casey, L. and Spacey. R. (2007) *The links between family learning and parenting programmes*. Leicester: NIACE. <http://www.niace.org.uk/development-research/links-between-family-learning-and-parenting-programmes>.

23. Meadows, P., and Garbers, C., (2005) *Sure Start Local Programmes: Improving the Employability of Parents*, *National Evaluation of Sure Start*. National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

24. HM Government (2009). *Common Inspection Framework for Further Education and Skills 2009*. Manchester: Ofsted.

25. Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (2009) *Family learning: An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community*. Manchester: Ofsted. www.ofsted.gov.uk.

provision in family learning is boosting the skills, qualifications and confidence of children and adults in England. The report focuses on targeting families most in need of support, the features of effective learning programmes, the impact of family learning on participating children and adults, and the models adopted to promote community cohesion.

The Ofsted Chief Inspector, Christine Gilbert, said:

“Family learning can transform the lives of children and parents, helping them to break the cycle of deprivation and educational underachievement. This report includes a range of examples of good practice which I hope those interested in achieving success in family learning will learn from.”

Family learning in children's centres and extended services

The following typology gives a framework for exploring the features and distinctions between aspects of family learning. This typology will support children's centres, extended services and family learning managers and staff to discuss and explore the different types of provision which are often referred to as 'family learning' and to find ways to work together to provide the best possible support and opportunities for learning for the families they work with.

The typology should be read from top to bottom. It starts at the top with the fundamental infrastructure that an organisation needs to have in place so that families can access provision. It proceeds downwards leading to a more structured family learning offer.

Use the typology and the table below to identify the family learning you already provide as part of your offer and to identify actions for improving practice.

	Where you are now	Action plan to improve practice
Infrastructure		
Engagement and universal contact		
Informal family learning		
Structured informal and/or formal family learning		

Children's centres and extended services – a typology

Infrastructure

Core infrastructure support

- Family friendly signage
- Family friendly facilities
- Family friendly spaces, entrance, buggy space, etc.
- Information on services for families available
- Accessible entrances
- Child protection/safe-guarding policies
- All staff trained in family learning/parental engagement
- Strategic commitment

Outcomes

- Increased family participation
- Increased staff confidence
- Increased family confidence
- Increased staff ownership
- Increased internal/external support

The fundamental infrastructure support needed to ensure families can access children's centres and extended services.

Engagement and universal contact

Engagement and universal contact (all services are accessible to families)

- First contact with centre
- First links when child begins to attend nursery/drop-in
- Nursery class/under threes – regular parent/carer/staff meeting
- Ad-hoc meetings with nursery class/under threes parent/carer/staff meeting
- Drop-in/crèche

Outcomes

- Increased family participation
- Increased staff interaction
- Increased staff confidence and job satisfaction/ownership
- Increased confidence
- Signposting to other services

Consideration about appropriate family focus for all contacts, activities and events. Adults and children's needs included.

Informal family learning

Universal drop-in and outreach activities for families

- Informal meetings/one-off sessions, e.g. coffee morning sessions on specific issues; toilet training/sleeping and curriculum topics – reading with your child
- Family events
- Holiday events
- One-off drop-in events for parents/carers on specific topics; events for specific target groups, e.g. Dads, grandparents
- Regular drop-in sessions for toddlers and parent/carers

Outcomes

Engagement Outcomes PLUS

- Learning as a family
- Increased communications
- Children's Centre seen as fun learning environment for the whole family
- Shared ownership of Children's Centre space
- Signposting to other services
- Community involvement

Activities and events where parents/carers and children *learn together* and parents are able to support their children's learning. Can be one-off events, self-directed family activities or activities to be completed at home. Does not include children-only activities.

Structured informal and/or formal family learning

Linked programmes of activities/sessions

- Family learning and family literacy, language and numeracy workshops and courses – clear outcomes for adults and children
- Work with parents/carers and children on specific topics or with specific target groups, e.g. dads
- Parenting programmes
- One-to-one parenting sessions with parents around parenting issues
- Using children's centre space for family learning programmes, focused sessions with specific aims and/or target groups

Outcomes

Engagement Outcomes PLUS

- Sustained learning as a family linked to the programme/sessions
- Increased communications
- Increased understanding or parenting issues
- Children's centre seen as fun learning environment for the whole family
- Shared ownership of children's centre space
- Increased community involvement
- Qualifications for adults
- Progression to other provision, increased skills and knowledge, work placements, employment

Activities and events where parents/carers and children *learn together* and parents are able to support their children's learning. Structured informal learning refers to a series of sessions on a theme. Structured formal family learning involves parents/carers completing a course, usually with accreditation attached. Does not include children-only activities.

Policy into good practice: case study examples

Brent and Westminster

In Brent and Westminster, funding from John Lyon's Charity has enabled focused work at both strategic and operational levels. The three-year project has provided support from NIACE to work with multi-agency teams to develop wider family learning courses with embedded elements of parenting linked to children's centres. The Family Learning teams at Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) and Brent Adult and Continuing Education Service (BACES) have provided local expertise, time and resources to enable the project to embed the programmes and to make the outcomes sustainable.

The project has given the opportunity to bring together key people to explore a more strategic approach and to develop, plan and deliver programmes that meet wider strategic aims. It has provided practitioners the chance to explore a more sustainable way forward to meet the needs of children, families and the community in these exciting and challenging times. The project has also enabled the production of a resource pack to support practitioners and managers. The resource pack includes examples of course materials, scheme of work and session plans as well as this document to stimulate discussion. These will be available on the NIACE website at www.niace.org.uk/development-and-research/programmes-of-work/family-learning.

The project administrators have also been working closely with Westminster Children's Services to support the Child Poverty Pilots through researching and writing best practice guidelines for children's centres on making learning accessible to parents and carers. This involved consultation with children's centres and adult learning services in Westminster and other authorities, as well as research to identify issues and good practice. The publication includes a checklist for adult learning providers and children's centre staff. It can be downloaded as a PDF at www.niace.org.uk/development-research/adult-learning-childrens-centres.



This multi-agency approach involved children's centre heads and key staff coming together with family learning staff to plan the workshops and courses. It ensured a shared understanding of the aims and outcomes of the learning opportunities and a commitment to working together to recruit and deliver them. The flexible approach of the project enabled the workshops and courses to be planned and delivered with specific reference to each setting and context.

The key points from the evaluation of the delivery of the programmes were as follows:

- flexible approaches with practical activities alongside the introduction to parenting topics were very effective;
- the materials were very clear, relevant and clearly mapped to *Every Child Matters* outcomes, Early Years Foundation Stage and adult learning;
- the programmes linked very well with other work with parents and parenting support;
- working together across children's centres and family learning, sharing expertise, knowledge and skills was very beneficial for families attending and also for sharing knowledge across services;
- it is important to plan time for parents to settle children with a little time for pre-course crèche sessions or additional crèche time at the start;
- the strategic approach to planning programmes was very effective;
- this model could be embedded in other Wider Family Learning courses.

To embed a multi-agency approach it is important to:

- establish clear links with national policy and embed the work in broader strategic developments within the authority;
- ensure senior strategic managers are involved in and committed to a sustainable approach to family learning and parenting;
- establish joint planning and training across organisations and departments working with families to ensure understanding of the needs of both adults and children as learners;
- establish effective partnership working arrangements and systems to ensure and improve the quality of provision;
- allocate time and resources to establish and maintain effective multi-agency links; and
- establish a strategic group which monitors and ensures quality of provision and involves all organisations and services working with parents/carers and families.

For further information contact:

clare.meade@niace.org.uk,
Mgarvey@WAES.ac.uk or
sarah.foster@brent.gov.uk



Sheffield

Strategic partnership is a key strength in Sheffield's Family Learning Service self-assessment report. The partnership between the Early Years, Parenting and Extended Services is particularly strong. These partners have developed a model and an intensive way of working that includes practitioner training, Exploring Together workshops and intensive support from the lead Early Years development worker.

Practitioner training in Sheffield

Lifelong Learning and Skills Service's (LLSS) Family Learning in Sheffield developed a training programme for practitioners working in early years settings to address communication, engagement and involvement of parents in children's early learning and development. Adapting the Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) model, LLSS delivered training to 30 practitioners in two service districts. The aim of the training programme was to encourage practitioners to reflect on their current practice and identify areas for development. One of the main objectives was to address the attitudinal barriers of working in partnership with parents whilst highlighting the importance of the role of parents as their child's first educator. The training programme also demonstrated a range of practical ways to engage parents in their child's learning.



Exploring Together Workshop



What works?

Family Learning meets termly with colleagues from Early Years, Parenting and Extended Services to share details of citywide programmes of Family Learning provisions to plan together and ensure the inclusion of priority settings, the adoption of provision and that Family Learning funding is being spent effectively to meet the needs of parents/carers and children in Sheffield.

The intensive way of working that has been developed gives practitioners in settings swift and regular access to dedicated development worker support for working with parents and carers, enabling even the most nervous and inexperienced of practitioners to gain confidence and knowledge in this vital area of their work.

For further information contact: karen.hanson@sheffield.gov.uk

Whitby and District

In 2008, Whitby and District Sure Start Children's Centres' Working Group produced a discussion paper, *An Entitlement to Learning: Helping Families to support their Children*.

This document sets out the key principles for planning and delivering a coherent programme of learning opportunities for parents of children from birth to five years old to reflect the vision of *Every Child Matters* of all parents being able to support their children to achieve the five desired outcomes.

The vision underpinning the key principles is founded on a multi-agency approach which integrates and embeds learning opportunities as an entitlement which every parent can expect to access. The Children's Centre Services will act as a brokerage mechanism linking parents with the skills and learning opportunities that stabilise and support family life.

This integrated approach places the parent/learner at the heart of the planning process with learning becoming part of the daily living of the specific community it serves.

Progression through the programme is monitored through family friendly achievement records developed by the partnership and maintained by the family. It includes guidance on routes into employment within the community and/or progression onto other learning opportunities.

Quality of learning opportunities

To ensure quality, all partners delivering the programme work to a quality framework irrespective of setting, programme or provider. Learners, both adults and children, are entitled to provision that is excellent.

In order to ensure the learning experience is consistently good whoever delivers it, it is proposed that the partner agencies work within the following framework:

1. learning and teaching;
2. curriculum development and planning;
3. working in partnership;
4. leadership, management and organisation; and
5. continuous improvement.²⁶

The Common Inspection Framework for inspecting education and training provides recognised criteria that could be followed to help ensure consistent high quality in all learning opportunities.

For more information contact: philippa.thomas@northyorks.gov.uk

²⁶ Haggart, J. and Spacey, R., (2006) *The Building Blocks of Quality in Family Learning*. Leicester: NIACE.

Albemarle Barracks (an outreach post of Prudhoe Children's Centre)



Albemarle Barracks is located in Stamfordham Ward, five miles north of Prudhoe Children's Centre and is home to approximately 50 children under five and their families. These families living at the Barracks are particularly isolated due to the rural location and lack of public transport. Over the past 12 months, services have been meeting on a regular basis, working in partnership to try to alleviate some of the problems that families living in isolation face. Services including the Health Service, Prudhoe Children's Centre, the Unit Welfare Officers, Ponteland Extended Services and their Parent Support Worker, Family Learning, Ponteland Youth Centre and the educational psychologist have all contributed to the vision of improving the outcomes for children and parents living at Albemarle Barracks.

Part of that vision was to improve the premises at the Barracks to make them more accessible for families with young children. Having access to grant funding, Prudhoe Children's Centre and the Unit Welfare Office have since been working together and have successfully been able to make extensive improvements to part of the premises. A nursery nurse from Ponteland Health Centre was commissioned to consult the families about the new toys and equipment and to help to design the layout of the large hall. The renovation project also included a new kitchen, painting the walls, new carpets, children's murals, notice boards and the creation of a new meeting room. Prudhoe Children's Centre provided a range of toys and equipment to furnish this fantastic new facility, which is also available to Army families living in areas other than the Barracks.

Extended services are now helping to fund a gardening project for parents and children at the Barracks to convert some spare land next to the children's centre into a garden.

For further information contact: Margaret McCormick, Assistant Coordinator, Ponteland Extended Services at mmc7080@yahoo.co.uk.

Key questions for debate:

- How can staff be supported to work collaboratively in multi-agency teams to provide the best possible services for families?
- What needs to be in place to ensure quality provision for adults and children for parenting and family learning provision?
- How do family learning programmes contribute to meeting local area agreement priority indicators?

Useful websites

www.niace.org.uk

<http://skillsforfamilies.excellencegateway.org.uk>

www.ofsted.gov.uk

www.dfes.gov.uk

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk

www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents

www.literacytrust.org.uk

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

www.parentscentre.gov.uk