

Engaging families at risk in Early Years Foundation Stage course

Key messages:

1. Embedding the social and emotional aspects of learning, skills for life and the EYFS within the Every Child Matters framework;
2. Parents learned the value of play in their child's development;
3. Joint planning and development between the family learning service and the school ensured the programme was relevant for the school and the families;
4. FLIF funding enabled a useful trip to be incorporated in the programme, which families would not have been able to afford otherwise;
5. Following the course, parents set up their own group to raise money and provide activities.

“ [My daughter] looked forward to the day mum was going to be in nursery with her. The chance to read books as a group and take part in games.”

Bolton's Family Learning Service invested time working with the local Every Child Matters Partnerships and individual Nursery Heads. They jointly identified settings with a diversity of need, and individual families within these settings that the nurseries felt would benefit from joining a family learning course. They agreed to offer a programme that embedded Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning and Development, Skills for Life and the Early Years Foundation Stage within the Every Child Matters Framework. The nurseries also identified early numeracy as an emerging need for some of their parents and children. The principle of the 'Unique Child' became the central focus of the courses and adult learning literacy activities were developed using reflective play observation records, little learning passports and an end of course Family Circle Time memory book.

This particular Early Years Foundation Stage course was held in a children's centre nursery school in a deprived area of Bolton, where the intake is approximately 90% families of Indian origin. The nursery was keen for the Family Learning Service to work with the parents, as they wanted to engage them more actively in the school and with their children.

12 women attended the course. 10 of the learners were of Indian heritage, 1 Pakistani and 1 white parent. The white parent, in particular, had low esteem and the Indian parents gave her a lot of support. When one of the mothers could not attend because she was giving birth, her husband joined the course

in order not to disappoint the mother and child. He fitted in well and continued until his wife came back. He joined the group on a trip to a farm.

The course helped the learners to build relationships and share experiences as well as gaining new skills. Many of the mothers did not previously 'play' with their children as they did not see the value of it as a learning experience. The course was arranged so that the parents had the time to play and experience activities before their children joined them. This helped the families to enjoy the activities together without the parents wanting to do the activity for the children and make it 'perfect'.

Playing with, listening and speaking to their children was a real learning curve for the parents. Some had previously thought that quiet and passive behaviour - being 'seen and not heard' - equalled good behaviour. They learned to value the importance of play and early learning on the development of the children and improved their 'readiness for school' with a range of skills for themselves and the children.

Joint planning and development of the course between the Family Learning Service and the school, ensured that it was relevant for the school as well as the parents. The school provided a good physical space to work in and additional childcare. Family Learning Impact Funding enabled the provider to invest in quality resources and learning materials. It also made possible a trip away from school to a farm where the families were able to use the skills learned on the course in a real life situation. Without the Family Learning Impact Funding to cover transport and entrance fees, the trip would have been financially out of the reach for most of the families. The more informal and creative atmosphere generated by the trip was highly valued by the families, and the Service is planning to introduce trips and social events earlier in the course in future.

At the end of the course the mothers set up their own group in order to raise money to enhance the outdoor play area. To raise funds, they plan to hold activities that parents will value, for example 'pamper days'. The parents also requested family learning courses for their older children and this is being looked at with the three schools involved. One of the things that parents found the most difficult to do was to give praise. By the end of the course, they were finding it easier to say positive things.

"Parents have come to every session and enjoyed meeting each other each week. They have built up a support network which extended to their support of other areas of the school." (Nursery school head)

Bolton Family Learning