

## Lone mother whose family is involved in gangs

### Key messages:

1. The family learning team had to learn about a new area, and the knowledge and expertise of the partner organisation were invaluable for this;
2. The learner's confidence was built up gradually through attending several family learning courses;
3. The learner progressed from low levels of confidence and Entry Level 3 literacy to putting together a paper for the Prime Minister and becoming a role model for her sons and for other parents.

*"This is the first time that I've had all my boys together."*

'8 til late' is a mentoring scheme run by the Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy team (MMAGS), working with 8-11 year old boys who are on the periphery of gangs in Manchester. The project works with approximately 25 boys at any one time and each child has a mentor who works with them. The mentors are males aged 18 –25 who can act as role models for the boys. Manchester Wider Family Learning team were asked to work with the parents as the 8 til late team recognised that many of the parents had poor communication and parenting skills. The Wider Family Learning team worked with 6 parents and 7 children. The knowledge that the 8 til late project had about the learners was invaluable to the team, as they had to learn about the guns and gang culture so that they could communicate effectively with the learners and also *'know the limits of our knowledge and specialism and the referral agencies'*.

This particular mother was a single parent of mixed heritage with 5 sons aged from 5 to 17. There were two dads involved on the periphery of the family. She came from a gang family in Manchester. Two of her brothers were killed by guns, and two were currently in prison. Her eldest son was also in prison and she was worried for her other sons who were now involved in gangs. She had broken contact with her family except her mother, in order to try to distance her sons from the influences of the gang culture.

Her eldest son was in prison because she took him to the police station herself and handed him in. This was the only way she could see of keeping him safe from being a target himself. Her actions caused a huge rift in the family and between mother and son. The mother was distraught at what she had done, but believed it was for the best.

Supported by the 8 til late project workers, she first attended a coffee morning with her friend and then joined the Wider Family Learning courses 'Confident

Parent, Confident Child'. She attended the course for the six weeks and did not miss any sessions. Her literacy skills were assessed at Entry 3, mainly because she had left school at the age of 14. She completed the course and was pleased at her own progress and the ideas she had gained to improve her relationship with her children.

Following this course, she progressed to a 16 week Parent Survival course delivered by the Children and Parent services team and the family learning team kept in contact with her during this time. She then joined the longer Wider Family Learning 12 week course 'Communication with Children' and the children attended for 2 sessions with their mentors.

As a result of these courses, the mother gained confidence and improved her relationship with her children sufficiently to take the giant step to visit her son in prison and talk to him confidently. It took a few visits, but she reported that a positive relationship was developing.

An extension of the course was run for two Saturdays and that culminated in a residential course with the full 8 til late team at Center Parcs in the North West. This was the first time that the family had been away together and, despite some initial worries, they had a very productive weekend.

For this learner and her family, spending quality time together and being able to put the skills learned on the course into practice was invaluable. Walking through the forest together was the first time the boys had walked in the open air and felt safe:

*"The boys are walking about with their hoods down because they are not afraid of being shot."*

Since the course, the learner has passed her Level 1 Literacy and Numeracy; enrolled for a Level 1 First Steps in Working with People and Mentoring course and joined a voluntary organisation supporting families in a similar position. She was putting together a paper for the Prime Minister, as she wanted to raise awareness of guns and gang families and the issues they face. She has also taken up the mantle of role model for other mothers who want their children to escape the guns and knives culture: she has a regular Wednesday afternoon spot on a community radio station, where she answers questions from listeners and gives advice to parents in a similar position to herself.

All this she attributes to the opportunities that were opened up to her by joining the family learning course. She appreciates the fact that the course content was really relevant to her and other parents in the group. She has gained skills and confidence and knows that the example she is showing by joining classes and learning has rubbed off on her sons and is trying all she can to keep them safe.

Manchester Family Learning