

Helping parents with skills for life needs to become more involved with the school system

Key messages:

1. Using different partners to help with delivery added value to the programme and helped to engage and retain learners;
2. The head teacher's pro-active involvement was key to recruiting learners;
3. Parents felt better able to support their children's learning and were more involved with the school;
4. 15 of the 17 learners progressed to skills for life courses;

This School Information for Parents programme was originally funded for 12 hours, but was extended to 16 hours in order to include a celebration event where parents came in to school to have lunch with their children.

Parents were targeted for the programme who were considered 'hard to reach.' The school head teacher identified that these families consistently did not attend any school events. The parents had little or no engagement with the school and were typically described as parents who 'leave the children at the school gates.' The aim of the programme was to get these parents more involved with the school system and to look at their own personal progression in order for them to help their children. The programme gave the parents a voice and provided opportunities for them to take responsibility for their own learning.

The learners met a number of the 'families at risk' categories. They all had English as an additional language and had no formal qualifications within the UK. The families were all on low income and, in some cases, no parent within the household worked. Some of the other baskets of need were also identified but due to the sensitive nature of these, the school preferred them not to be disclosed.

17 mothers attended the programme, which was over and above the expected number. They were all from different ethnic backgrounds and had not pursued employment or furthered their education since arriving in the UK. Although it was slightly disappointing that the programme did not attract any male learners, it was felt that due to the cultural and religious backgrounds, this would have proved difficult.

The focus of the programme was to raise awareness of the school's policies and procedures. The parents were shown how their children learn in school, looking at the importance of the literacy hour and other aspects of the school

curriculum. They were made familiar with the key people within the school that had involvement in their child's learning. The programme was developed and delivered in a fun practical way which involved working with children's centres, libraries, local colleges (for Information, Advice and Guidance) and the Primary Care Trust. Using different partners added value to programme delivery as they provided the expertise within their own areas, and helped to keep the programme interesting and to engage and retain the target learners.

The course was successful as a result of the strong leadership within the particular school. The head teacher took personal responsibility for targeting the learners most suitable for the transition programme. She spoke to the parents informally and individually at the school gate, which personally engaged every learner that enrolled.

The learners fed back that they were more aware of their children's education which in turn, would help them support their children with their learning. For example, sharing books and bedtime stories raised awareness of the benefits of reading together, and parents fed back that in some cases the relationship between themselves and their children had improved. They were made aware of the key people within the school and now felt more comfortable in approaching various people. 15 of the 17 learners are pursuing further Skills for Life learning and some of the parents have opted to do volunteer work within the school.

An evaluative DVD is in production which will be uploaded to the council's website and will be used to promote family learning within Staffordshire.

Staffordshire Family Learning