

Engaging families at risk to support their early years children's learning

Key messages:

1. Small group size helped learners with low confidence feel comfortable and share ideas;
2. Involvement of nursery teaching assistant helped to bring the course to life;
3. Opportunity for one-to-one sessions;
4. Learners progressed to further learning.

"I'm getting dad involved and teaching him... everyone was arguing but now it's a good relationship. Thinking more about what I want to do in the future."

This course was attended by a small group of five families who were considered to be 'at risk'. Two of the parents had left school at 14 because of pregnancy, none were employed and all had children with disabilities including visual impairment and possible ADHD. All families on the course were receiving or had received Family Support from a social care professional.

The size of the group meant that the parents received much individual attention. They said that they felt more comfortable talking and sharing thoughts and ideas in a small group. One learner said that she would never normally talk in a group but that she had felt confident enough to do it.

The course encouraged parents to seek ways to support their child's learning, to consider in what ways they are a good teacher of their children and also to reflect on their own skills and how they could enhance them.

The session on phonics was particularly powerful as the parents realised that they had been saying the letters incorrectly. One parent reported: "Now I know what he means when he's talking about 'Maisy and the mountain' and I say 'mmm not m-ugh'... he tells me I'm doing it right". Each child was given a placemat that included letters for them to practice and their name. As there were some speech issues with the children, elements in the course that related to speech and language, such as the Language Pyramid which looks at how children acquire language, were also very pertinent.

An integral part of the course included input each week from the teaching assistant. This worked incredibly well as each week she brought in resources from the nursery and explained how they were used. This gave parents an

insight into how the children were being taught, the importance and value of play and what the children were actually learning. The teaching assistant was very approachable and clearly had the respect of the parents. She also made time to give one-to-one attention at the end of each session.

As part of the course, the parents got 'hooked' on creating a storysack and really enjoyed the craft activity. The teaching assistant has arranged for them to come in for another session to work on the sack now that the course has completed. She is also arranging some 'arts and crafts with your child' for over the summer. Both the teaching assistant and Family Support worker are very keen to nurture this group and also to welcome new parents when they join in September.

One mother, whose son wanted her to draw for him but felt that she could not draw, was encouraged by the tutor to trace 'Rory the Racing Car' onto her storysack. She then spent four weeks carefully painting it with fabric paints. Her son was incredibly proud when he saw it.

Learners said that they had a much better understanding of how to help their children do well in school, they listened more to their children, they did more activities together, could understand and cope better with school. Some enrolled on further education courses.

"I want to better my life by going to college."

Trafford Family Learning