

# Case study

## Family learning at Four Dwellings High School

**With the support of Birmingham Family Learning Service, Four Dwellings High School was the first secondary school in Birmingham to offer family literacy and numeracy programmes. By encouraging families to read through drama and social opportunities, the school is endeavouring to break the cycle of underachievement. Christine Smith, family learning coordinator, describes a Four Dwellings' basic skills project that encourages pupils and their families to engage with books.**

Year 9 pupils were referred to me by teachers and I invited their parents in for an informal coffee morning, during which the benefits of the 10 week programme were explained. Once recruited, the families spent two hours in a joint session each week, as well as students spending four hours with a teacher and adults spending four hours with an adult tutor.

To engage the families with reading, the initial choice of book was of utmost importance. 'Refugee Boy' by Benjamin Zephaniah was a popular choice, as this author was born in Birmingham and still has strong links with the West Midlands. We read the book aloud together during the sessions. Initially some parents were reluctant to read in front of other families, so they started off just by listening or by reading one sentence/paragraph to increase their confidence. The students were great in encouraging their own parents to take a turn in reading.

To keep families motivated, we needed to make sure the reading message we were promoting was delivered and reinforced in a variety of ways. 'Refugee Boy' raised an awareness of lives of refugees and a visit to the theatre to see a play about similar issues left the families keen to work together to explore this area in more depth. We researched the topic using a variety of materials, including local and national newspapers, the internet, poetry and

magazine articles. In addition, links were made with another secondary school from a different part of the country as a way of encouraging the families to share experiences with a variety of families and to foster a caring atmosphere in the classroom and beyond. The work the group produced was of a very high standard, and families were encouraged to read each other's work and offer suggestions for improvement.

As a result of the sessions, students and adults developed the confidence to read aloud, to use ICT skills for research purposes and to start a journey on which they learned to appreciate literature and other reading materials. However, the impact of the project can really be measured when considering the families' enthusiasm during and after the sessions. We were delighted that many of those involved were keen to repeat the experience, borrow other books and to continue to share what they had learnt with their children.

**"With continued collaboration between Four Dwellings and the wider community, Family Learning intends to further expand the learning and social opportunities for all in the next few years."**



Find out more at [www.fourdwellings.bham.sch.uk](http://www.fourdwellings.bham.sch.uk)