



A Snapshot of Local Support for Literacy: 2010 survey

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Introduction

In August 2010 the National Literacy Trust sent out a survey to seven areas taking part in the Partners in Literacy pilot to determine how literacy support is offered locally. This report summarises key findings from the 552 people who responded and compares them to a similar survey conducted in 2009. It provides an overview of how local partners provide support, and the barriers that prevent them from doing so. It also maps changes in the awareness of literacy issues over the intervening year.

Key findings include:

- 83% of respondents reported that they sometimes or frequently met people with literacy difficulties.
- 73% of respondents said they would have a conversation with people they met with poor literacy skills about what support they would find useful.

- Children’s centres were reported as the most successful organisation at building relationships with “hard to reach” families.
- The majority of respondents who signpost people with literacy difficulties to local services make referrals to adult education or children’s centres.
- Respondents identified the main barriers to supporting literacy difficulties as:
 - i. Stigma
 - ii. Lack of training, including how to approach the problem
 - iii. Identifying literacy difficulties
 - iv. Lack of knowledge of local services and where to signpost for support.
- 66% of respondents reported that low levels of literacy caused problems for them or the people they support.
- 56% of respondents had heard more about literacy in the last year.

Context and purpose

Partners in Literacy is a pilot project, funded from April 2009 to March 2011 by the Department for Education and delivered by the National Literacy Trust in partnership with local authorities. The aim of the project is to support more families to create language rich homes, promoting speaking and listening, reading and writing. The project works with local authorities to build strategic and multi-agency commitments to literacy with a particular focus on using partnerships to extend reach to disadvantaged or at-risk families. In line with research, it also has a focus on families with children aged from birth to five.

The survey was drafted in consultation with the local authorities and seven authorities sent it out to a range of local partners. Response rates ranged from just one response (from an authority newly allocating resource to the project) to 251 responses, with 552 responses across the seven authorities.

The seven local authorities that sent out the survey adopted a variety of techniques to ensure that it was answered by as broad a range of partners as possible.

The full survey is listed at **Appendix A**. An overview of who the survey was sent to and how it was distributed is at **Appendix B**.

The 2010 survey followed a similar survey sent out in 2009 that had an uptake of 553 responses. The report *Partners in Literacy Survey 2009: A Snapshot of Local Support for Literacy* can be found on the National Literacy Trust website (www.literacytrust.org.uk)

Partners in Literacy works with local authorities developing a flexible model to support the development of multi-agency and strategic partnerships. Work includes:

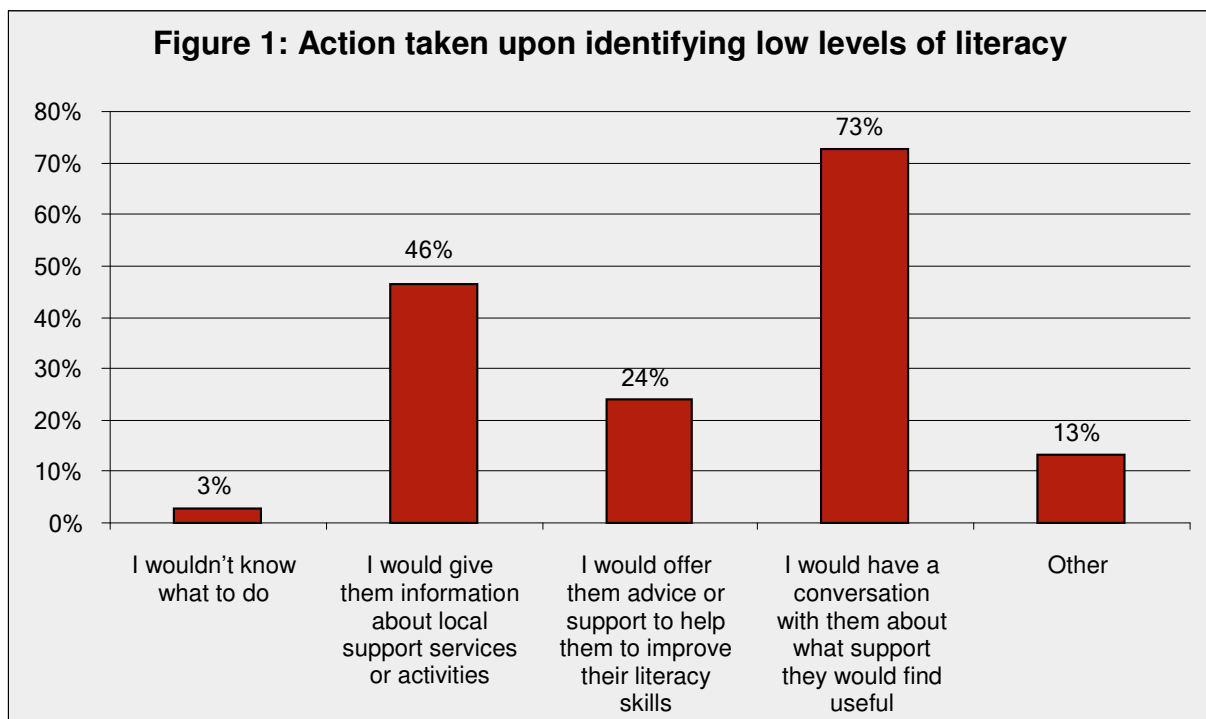
- Auditing local provision which supports literacy in the home.
- Joining up provision, improving referrals, signposting and identifying gaps and duplication in provision.
- Engaging and involving partners who work closest with priority families.

The survey was designed to be part of a range of mapping and base lining activities. Wider activity included consultation with families, face-to-face meetings with partners and analysing a range of data sources (for example MOSAIC data and Indices of Social Deprivation) to identify priority families and key partners.

It was hoped that the survey would help to baseline which partners support literacy locally and how, and would be one way of tracking the impact of the Partners in Literacy model.

Supporting families with literacy needs

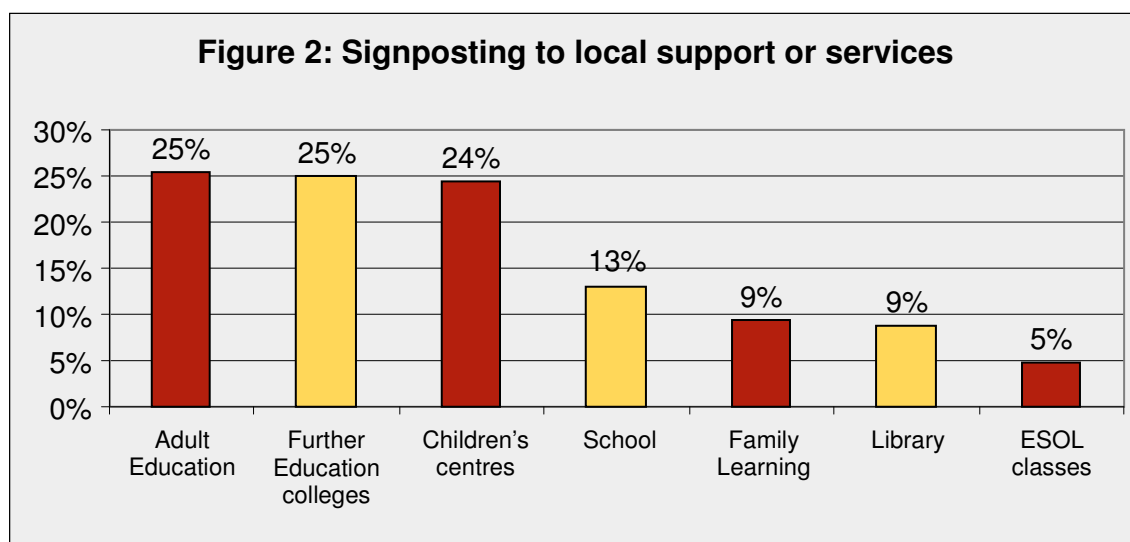
Respondents were asked what action they would take if they identified someone with low levels of literacy, as illustrated in Figure 1. Nearly three quarters of respondents reported that they would have a conversation with the beneficiary about what support they would find useful and nearly half would signpost to local services. Only 3% reported that they would not know what to do in such a scenario.



Analysis: 97% of respondents who identified someone with literacy difficulties would take some action. This is a marked difference to the 2009 survey results, where 65% of respondents stated they would offer support to parents for their children and just 40% would offer parents advice for their own skills.

Analysis of the figures shows that a large proportion of responses came from Sheffield. Sheffield had 251 partners answer its survey, considerably more than elsewhere, demonstrating a network of partners that are influenced by Sheffield's prominent city wide literacy strategy developed as part of its work with the National Literacy Trust. However, even excluding responses from Sheffield, nearly all respondents (99%) still stated that they would take some action to support the literacy needs they had encountered.

Where respondents identified that they would signpost people identified as having poor literacy to local services, Adult Education, Further Education colleges and children's centres were the most common (Figure 2).



Respondents identified a number of areas of support them that would allow them to better support people with poor literacy skills. These included:

- i. Knowledge of what services are available locally and where to signpost to.

“Being able to signpost more effectively. It is not clear what routes are available, who the providers are and what exactly is offered.”

- ii. Access issues – many people with literacy difficulties are often not able, or do not want to, access external provision.

“Many people with literacy difficulties find accessing or understanding services very difficult to understand. Signposting does not always work as people need more encouragement such as a direct and seamless referral.”

- iii. Training issues, around how to identify problems and how to approach them.

“Training on how to handle to situation well, without just pointing out that they are obviously struggling with writing/reading etc. which can obviously come across as rude.”

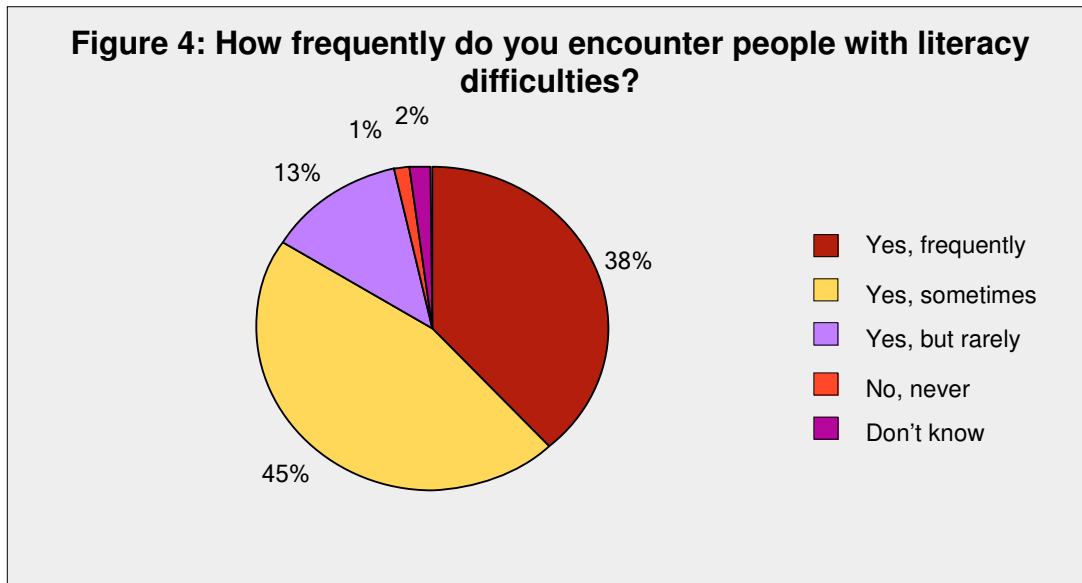
Analysis: Few respondents cited community and volunteer support for literacy as provision they would signpost to. This is interesting as, on other occasions, local areas have reported this can be a vital bridge for people into formal service provision.

Responses show more work is needed to share the detail of literacy support, by mapping provision and finding accessible ways of sharing with partners across the community.

Training continues to be an issue, with a need for local areas to consider how they can support more front line staff and volunteers to identify literacy needs and how to appropriately offer information and support.

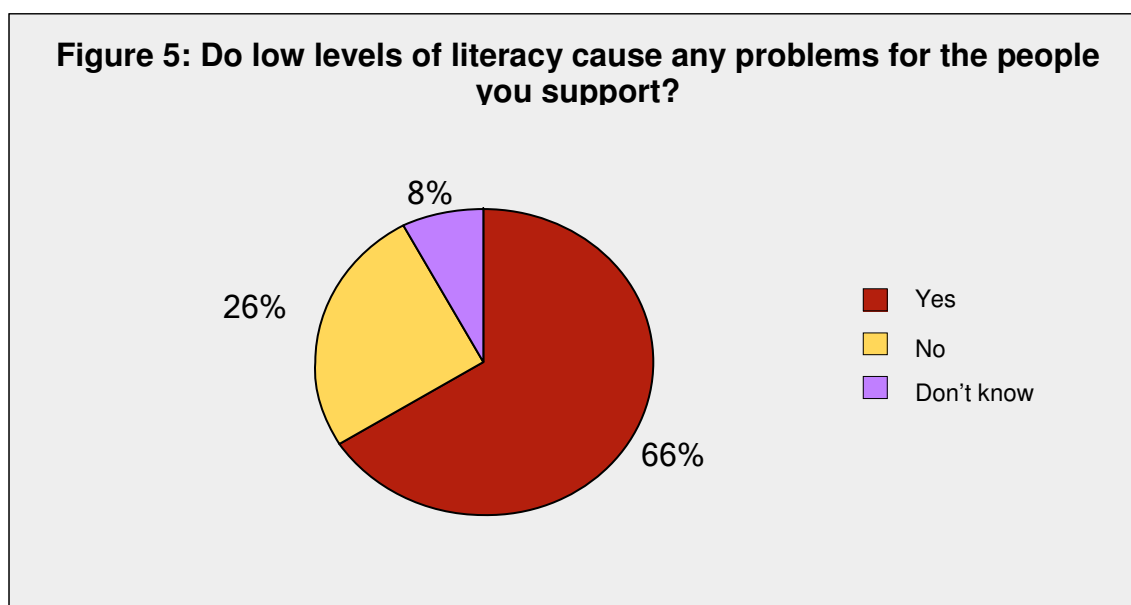
Literacy levels and local support

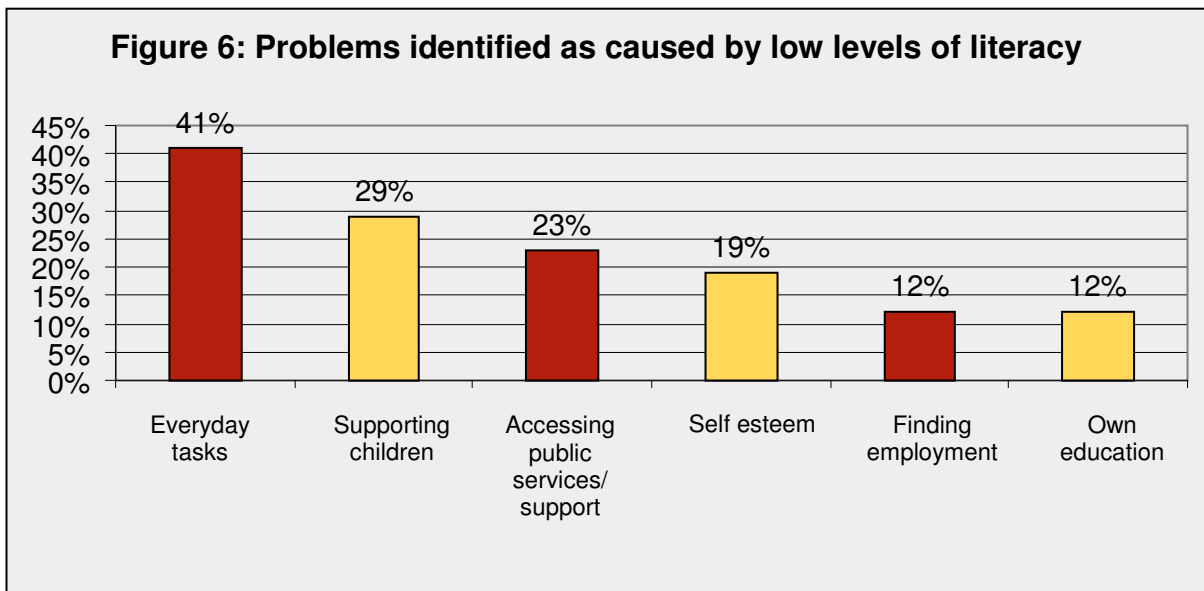
The survey results highlight that many people working locally often encounter people with literacy needs. 83% of respondents said they frequently or occasionally met parents with difficulties in reading, writing or communication (Figure 4). This figure is up from the 75% reported in the 2009 survey.



66% of respondents felt that low levels of literacy caused problems for the people they supported (Figure 5). A wide range of problems were reported, the most common of which can be seen in Figure 6. They included:

- i. Everyday tasks, including dealing with correspondence and bills, completing forms and time keeping.
- ii. Supporting their children's development and helping them with school work.
- iii. Accessing public services, support and information, including benefits and legal aid.
- iv. Their general confidence and self-esteem.
- v. Finding employment and gaining qualifications.



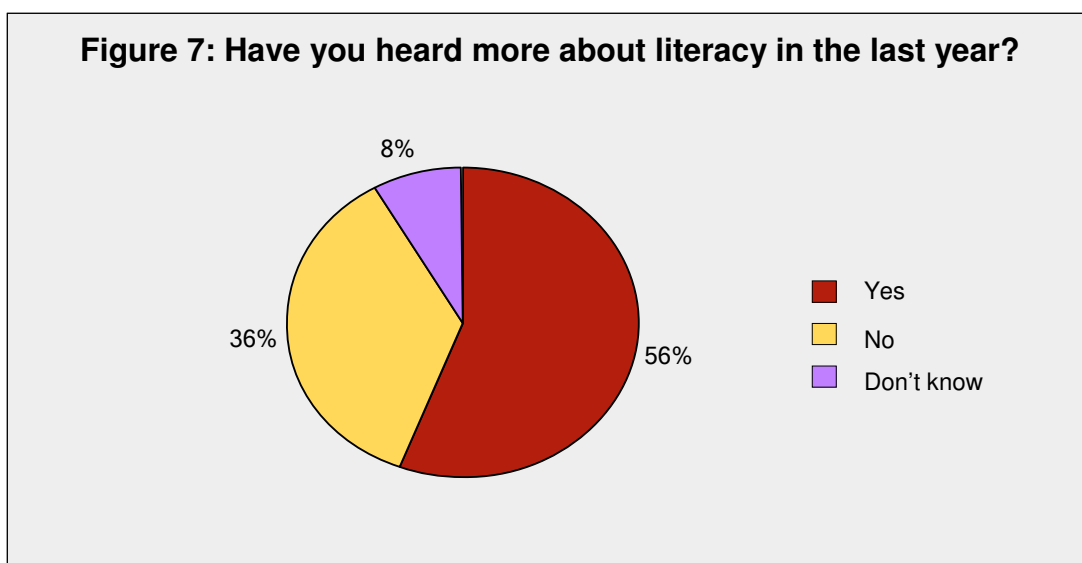


“I have observed that the person can become anxious about attending meetings, and has shared with me that they feel worried if they have to complete paperwork.”

“They have difficulties getting public services and are not confident in searching for assistance themselves.”

“They are not able to read their post and therefore for example go into debt as they are not understanding that their rent payment day may change, that they have gone overdrawn at the bank, that their housing benefit may need renewing etc. They also may miss medical appointments, school appointments etc. It also adds to lack of self worth and impinges on their ability to act as positive role models for their children. They sometimes have low expectations of themselves and their children.”

The survey asked respondents if they had heard more about literacy in the last year. Of the 452 respondents who answered this question, 56% reported a greater awareness of literacy, as shown in Figure 7.



Analysis: Large numbers of partners locally continue to encounter families with literacy issues and to see low literacy as a barrier to those families accessing services and supporting their children's learning.

It is possible that the increase in awareness of literacy could be responsible for more respondents recognising literacy issues, particularly as much of Partners in Literacy's work has focused on engaging more partners in supporting literacy, raising awareness and providing more opportunities for families to accept support.

Extending reach to families via new partners

The survey asked respondents to identify local partners and organisations that they felt were successful at engaging "hard to reach" families.

The overwhelming response was that children's centres are the most effective, with 27% of respondents identifying them, followed by schools with 10%.

A big variety of job titles, organisations and teams were identified by the 380 responders, resulting in very low percentages for each. They also included Family Support Teams, Health Visitors and Access and Inclusion Officers as well as local projects, initiatives and particular individuals. 19% of respondents claimed they did not know.

Analysis: The wide range of successful partners identified could indicate a high level of awareness of local services and the support they offer. However, apart from children's centres and schools, whether these organisations are consistently successful across different localities is not clear from the results. The list of partners also points to the scale of partners who could be involved in extending support to "hard to reach" families.

Responses demonstrate a continued need for training and communication across local authorities to increase awareness of literacy support available.

What next?

Building on the findings of this survey and of the Partners in Literacy pilot more generally, the National Literacy Trust will continue to share good practice between local authorities in order for them to address low literacy. There continues to be a need for a longer term commitment to auditing provision and training. The final evaluation of the Partners in Literacy project will assess if the issues raised within this survey have been effectively dealt with over the two years of the pilot. It will also draw together key lessons to support more authorities to develop a strategic approach to literacy.

Appendix A: The survey

Appendix A offers a blank example of the survey that was sent out by seven Partners in Literacy local authority partners and an example introductory email.

Example email to go out with survey

Note: highlighted sections should be changed to reflect local details.

In <X department/service area of council> we are looking at how different partners work together to support families to promote literacy within their homes. This work is being developed in partnership with a charity called the National Literacy Trust via an approach called Partners in Literacy.

Sharing your knowledge and expertise through this survey can help us to ensure that no one in <insert name of area e.g. Kent> lacks the literacy skills they need to get on in life. We really appreciate your help.

This survey should take no longer than 10 minutes. If you have any questions about this survey or about local work to support families with their literacy then please email <insert Coordinator's email address>.

Partners in Literacy Survey to Local Partners – 2010

PAGE 1- Literacy Survey – Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. It should take you no more than 10 minutes to do.

The aim of this survey is to understand how <insert name of area> can help create more opportunities for people to improve their literacy skills by working in partnership. We are sending this survey out to as many people as possible to understand how you work with local families and to get your views.

If you have any queries regarding this survey then please get in touch with <insert Coordinator name> who is the Partners in Literacy Coordinator for <insert area> at <insert Coordinator's email address>

PAGE 2- Definitions

Before you start this survey we wanted to take a minute to define a few key terms.

By "literacy" we mean the communication skills that everyone needs to do well in life. Therefore, we take literacy to include speaking, listening, reading and writing. Because of this literacy skills are something that everyone needs from when they are born and start developing the earliest communication skills.

By "families" we mean all family groups and all types of parents and carers from children being brought up in foster families to children cared for by siblings and grandparents. Family is defined in its broadest sense.

PAGE 3

1) What type of services and/or support do you offer to families in <area>?

Please give an answer which covers the majority of your time for example - parenting support, advice on finding work, library services, leisure services.

2) The services, or support, I offer families are mostly:

- Universal i.e. available to all families or individuals
- Targeted i.e. available to particular families or individuals

3) If you answered that your services/support are mostly targeted, please can you give details here of who your services are mostly targeted to?

For example, it may be that your services/support are generally for:

A particular audience such as teen parents or unemployed people
A specific location

PAGE 4 - Age of Children

If you offer support or services to local families, please can you say what the average age of children is in those families.

1) The general age of children in the families I support is: (You can tick more than one box)

- Pre-natal
- Pre-school (birth to four)
- 5-11 years
- 11-16 years
- Other

PAGE 5 - Working with partners

We know that for most of us there are some families who we find "hard to reach". However, some local partners and organisations find it easier to work with and engage these families.

1) Do you know a person or organisation which is particularly effective at building relationships with "hard to reach" families? Who are they?

PAGE 6 - Poor Literacy

1 in 6 people in United Kingdom have poor literacy skills. We would like to change that and make sure that everyone has access to support to improve their literacy skills.

1) Do you ever meet people with literacy difficulties?

Please tick just one of the list below.

- Yes, frequently
- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, but rarely
- No, never
- Don't know

PAGE 7 – Supporting people with literacy needs

1) If you meet people with poor literacy skills what do you do?

NB: if this has never happened to you, please answer this question with what you would do in that situation.

You can tick more than one answer below.

- I wouldn't know what to do
- I would give them information about local support services or activities
- I would offer them advice or support to help them to improve their literacy skills
- I would have a conversation with them about what support they would find useful
- Other

2) If you ticked other please give details here.

3) Signposting to local support.

If you said that you would tell them about local support or services, please can you tell us which support or services you would signpost them to.

PAGE 8 – Difficulties with offering support

1) Are there any problems with identifying literacy difficulties, signposting to support or supporting people with literacy difficulties?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

2) If you answered yes to the question above, what support (if any) would you like to be able to better support people with poor literacy?

PAGE 9 – The impact of poor literacy

1) Do low levels of literacy cause any problems for you or the people you support?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

2) If you answered yes, can you tell us how?

PAGE 10 – To Finish...

1) Have you heard of any of these initiatives?

You can tick more than one. If you haven't heard of any of these then please leave this question blank.

- Family Reading Matters
- Partners in Literacy

2) Have you heard more about literacy in the last year?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

3) If you answered yes, please can you explain your answer.

4) Please use this space to tell us anything else that you have not had a chance to say in this survey.

5) Please can you tell us a bit about you.

What is your job title?

6) Last question!

You can choose to keep your answers anonymous but if you feel able please use this space to give us your name and contact details.

Alternatively you can just say which service/directorate/organisation you work for.

This information helps us to understand who responded to this survey and to get in touch with you if you would like us to.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We really appreciate your help.

Appendix B: Who the survey was sent to and how

The 2010 survey was sent to Partners in Literacy Coordinators (lead officers) in the following local authorities via a web survey link. These Coordinators then passed the survey on to their network of partners, encouraging each to forward on again. As such, the potential respondents should have been made up from those involved in the Partners in Literacy approach, and those who had never heard of it before.

Local authority	No. respondents
Sheffield	251
Wiltshire	72
Suffolk	71
Kent	68
Coventry	54
Knowsley	35
Gateshead	1

Respondents were asked a variety of questions to understand how they work with and support local families. The majority of respondents answered that they worked with children aged from birth to four (64%), or 5 to 11 years (63%). 59% of respondents provided a universal service, 41% targeted their support. They mainly provided family or parenting support and family learning, delivered adult education or library services.