



Engaging hard-to-reach families in Suffolk: An impact case study

Suffolk County Council was a pilot authority in the Partners in Literacy pilot, run by the National Literacy Trust from 2009 to 2011. Suffolk took part in the pilot from 2010 to 2011. This short case study demonstrates the impact of partnership work and building relationships with families.

As part of a partnership developed within the Partners in Literacy pilot, a family information officer (FIO) attended a home visit with a social worker from the Family Assessment and Support Team. The social worker was involved with the family due to a number of issues, including lack of cleanliness and safety in the home, speech and communication development delay of the two-year-old and the mother's lack of a support network. There were eight children in the family, ranging in age from two to 21.

The two-year-old boy was given a Bookstart pack which he looked at straight away. The mother was given timetables for activities at the local children's centre.

During the visit, the family information officer began to build a rapport with the mother, who showed interest in an activity taking place at the children's centre the same afternoon. She had never been to a children's centre before and the social worker indicated that she may lack the confidence to go on her own. Therefore, the FIO changed her plans for later in the day in order to attend the group with the mother.

On entering the children's centre, the mother remarked, "It's great". The FIO made her a cup of coffee to make her feel welcome and relaxed, and the little boy settled himself playing with toys. The FIO went through relevant paperwork with the mother and helped her to arrange a library card with other centre staff.

The FIO also recommended a library-based activity designed to help toddlers with their communication and speech development. The mother was very keen to attend and her son is now booked onto the course.

Both the mother and her son were not used to being around other parents or children. During the course of their visit, the FIO checked on them regularly and noted that both were managing very well. The mother did mention, however, that she felt embarrassed and a little shocked when she compared her son with the other children. Some of these were younger and were attempting to speak and communicate more than her son. The FIO reassured her that she was doing the right thing now and shouldn't feel embarrassed but proud that she had the courage to go to the centre.

At the end of the session, the FIO reported that the little boy didn't want to leave and the mother felt relaxed. The FIO reminded her that she could borrow books from the children's centre as well as the library, and the mother was very appreciative that she had helped her.



Outcomes

- The mother visited a children's centre for the first time.
- The family is now registered with the children's centre and library.
- Action has been taken towards improving the two-year-old's speech and language through being signed up to appropriate activities and receiving his Bookstart pack.
- Hopefully the mother will have increased confidence to continue to visit the children's centre, attend activities with her son to improve his literacy and build a support network for herself.
- The social worker is happy with the progress.

Lessons learnt

Building relationships with families is vital. The partnership between the Family Assessment and Support Team and the FIO allowed the officer to meet the mother and introduce her to provision that she may not have had the confidence to access on her own.