

# Family learning in West Dunbartonshire

A local authority case study

# Background

This project was set up in partnership between West Dunbartonshire Council and Education Scotland to identify current practice in family learning within this local authority. The main aims of the project were:



1

To identify current practice in family learning across West Dunbartonshire in a variety of settings.



2

To look at partnership approaches and how GIRFEC is being embedded into practice across all sectors.

# Methodology

From November 4th 2013 to November 8th 2013, 11 schools and centres were visited by a team from Education Scotland.

The project team met with families, school/centre staff, local authority staff, and partners such as health professionals and voluntary organisations. The discussions were firmly focused around whole family engagement and learning opportunities, partnership working and the 'Getting It Right for Every Child' agenda.

In June 2011, West Dunbartonshire developed a parenting strategy with the aim to improve the coordination, integration and delivery of evidence-based parenting programmes. The strategy sets out how West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership works to enable

parents to raise healthy and achieving children and young people (i.e. those aged 18 years or younger) through the provision of a comprehensive suite of parenting interventions whilst increasing their skills as parents/carers and lifelong learners in their own right.

Throughout our visits we were able to see how the coordination of programmes reduced duplication and supported referral routes and progression for families across the authority. The project team wanted to explore this further and determine what impact this was having on children and their families. In order to do this we focused on three main case studies, Auchnacraig Early Education & Childcare Centre, Y Sort-It and Bonhill Primary School.



# Context of West Dunbartonshire

West Dunbartonshire has an estimated population of 90,920 people (2009 mid-year estimate), with a drop of 20 people since the last mid-year estimate of 2007. This is the 28th consecutive year that the population of West Dunbartonshire has decreased, and it is projected that this trend will continue.

Of the 90,920 population, 19,926 are children and young people aged between 0-18 years: this equates to 21.5% of the overall population. This is 2.5% less than the proportion in 2007 and reflects the trend of an aging population in the West Dunbartonshire area, as with Scotland generally. This breakdown is crucial in understanding the nature of the challenge of providing parents with support when they need it and determining how best to address it.

In 2009/10, some 11,100 families were in receipt of child and working tax credits, i.e. 20% of the population. Four thousand eight hundred and sixty (24.6%) of all children in West Dunbartonshire live

in households where no-one is in paid employment, with an additional 1,950 living in households where the family are working but are in receipt of working tax credits. This indicates that 42% of all children in West Dunbartonshire could be described as being poor.

Whilst the number of children and young people referred to the Reporter is reducing, there is a proportionate rise in children and young people being supported by Children's Services on a voluntary basis; and where interventions are being effective, there is then a negation of the need for compulsory measures of supervision. Around 60% of support to families from the CHCP's Children and Families Social Work team is now provided on a voluntary basis. Thus, engaging positively with children and families, developing comprehensive assessment and review procedures, means that services are increasingly delivered without the need for compulsory measures.

## West Dunbartonshire Council Context for family learning

Family learning is reflected in the West Dunbartonshire Parenting Strategy (2011). Whole family approaches to engagement and learning are apparent throughout this document. Community Learning and Development (CL&D) defines family learning through their family learning guidelines (2012) “Supporting children and families” document.

Parenting support in West Dunbartonshire sets out to reflect the varied needs of families for help in raising their children, from short-term universal support to more intensive services. To be successful in this requires appropriate and proportionate support for parents and children when they need it from across professional disciplines, services and organisations that are both evidence based and outcome-focused.

West Dunbartonshire is committed to delivering a staged model of parenting intervention that reflects the age and needs of the child, young person and parent/carer. At the core of their local approach is an emphasis on supporting and reinforcing attachment and resilience; and emphasising opportunities for

nurturing throughout a child and young person’s development. This model aims to improve integration, coordination and delivery of parenting programmes and to offer a consistent level of support and interventions across West Dunbartonshire.

West Dunbartonshire’s Parenting Strategy document sets out their model for providing parenting support. This includes:

- Providing public information and contact for all parents of pre-school and school age children.
- Providing universal support for all new parents in West Dunbartonshire, crucially through the Health Visiting Service.
- Ensuring that resources are targeted to benefit those parents identified as requiring more support.

Intensive programmes of support for families in greater need are provided through the multi-agency partnership approach.



## Family learning work in West Dunbartonshire is based on the following definitions:

Family learning is defined in the Family Learning Guidelines (2012) “Supporting children and families” document as:

*“...aiming to encourage family members to learn together. They are learning as or within a family. They should include opportunities for intergenerational learning and wherever possible, lead both adults and children to pursue further learning.”*

**Family learning in West Dunbartonshire focuses on four key areas:**

### 1. **Widen participation**

Stimulate the demand for learning while recognising the diversity of communities, their needs and aspirations, widen participation in learning, particularly amongst hard to reach groups.

### 2. **Quality**

Develop a broad range of innovative

and quality learning opportunities and to secure a well trained workforce to deliver provision through a wide range of accessible community venues.

### 3. **Partnership and sustainability**

Develop and agree a strategic approach to family learning and with appropriate partners to develop the infrastructure that will ensure continuity of services for families and communities.

### 4. **Progression**

The focus is on family learning programmes that lead both adults and children to pursue further learning. CL&D aim to ensure that learners are offered a wide variety of progression routes that facilitate their progress and achievement.

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## Impact on children and young people

Individual children and young people, through involvement in family learning,

can achieve a greater sense of wellbeing and improve attitudes to learning.

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## Impact for adults

Adults may improve their own skills, for example in literacy and/or numeracy, and interest in and commitment to learning. Parents/carers can gain greater knowledge and more confidence to tackle family situations through increasing their understanding of children's development.

They may improve the capacity to communicate with their children. Participating in family learning can also enable parents to go on to access information and support to help them in their parenting role.

## Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) in West Dunbartonshire

West Dunbartonshire is committed to the Getting it Right for Every Child agenda. As set out in the West Dunbartonshire guidelines for education staff, Entitlement to Personal Support 2012, staff have a duty to identify the support needs of all children and young people, including care and welfare needs. All staff must work together to put support in place to meet those needs.

Universal support includes support from family, the community and generally available services. This support includes the chance for children and young people to regularly talk about their learning to a key adult.

All children and young people are entitled to personal support to allow them to:

- review their learning and plan for next steps
- gain access to appropriate learning activities
- plan for personal achievement
- cope with change and the choices they have to make.

Young people themselves should be at the centre of this planning, so they are actively involved in their learning and development.

West Dunbartonshire Council are aware that sometimes targeted support may be needed for some children and their families from specialist services. These can be services based in education or from other agencies, e.g. health or social work. Services work together for the benefit of the child and their parent and/or carer.

In West Dunbartonshire the GIRFEC Practice Model provides the basis for assessing the additional needs of children and young people. This framework can be used to:

- gather information and decide if universal support can be improved
- gather information and assess the need for targeted support
- review targeted support
- consider referral for additional resources

All staff have the responsibility to ask themselves the following five key questions about all children and young people as set out by the council.

- What is getting in the way of this child or young person's wellbeing?
- Do I have all the information I need to help them?
- What can I do now to help them?
- What can my agency do to help them?
- What additional help may be needed from other agencies?



# Common Themes

It was clear that West Dunbartonshire Council is committed to the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) agenda and that they want it embedded into the practice of every staff member. This has resulted in individual schools and centres creating their own training manuals for every member of staff who come into contact with children, young people and their families. Follow-up sessions after training make sure that GIRFEC is at the forefront of staff members' minds and practice.

Within a number of the establishments that we visited there was a strong focus on working in partnership. This was either as a referral system or working collaboratively on specific programmes. Parents and/or carers from a number of centres advised that Health Visitors and CL&D staff had referred them to services within the local authority. This resulted in families accessing more dedicated and targeted provision for those who needed it such as Triple P Parenting, Save the Children UK's Families and Schools Together FAST project or Incredible Years

Programmes or universal provision such as Bookbug and Play@Home.

Progressive routes for families can be seen working effectively in a number of areas. West College Scotland work in partnership with schools, CL&D and early years centres to deliver classes in areas such as SVQ Children's Care Learning and Development which has resulted in some parents and/or carers moving onto full-time college and university courses as well as employment. One key feature of these classes is crèche provision being available to break down barriers to accessing this provision. Feedback from parents was overwhelmingly positive and classes are on the whole extremely well attended.

Throughout the authority, staff had a good understanding about the needs of their community. Families are consulted about what programmes were needed in their local area and how they could work together in some cases to constitute their own groups and take ownership of local community development.

## Impact of involvement with family learning

The impact of a family learning approach is threefold. It shows that it can have an impact on both the child and the significant parent/carer as well as staff and services.

Parenting groups delivered throughout the authority give parents the skills to manage challenging behaviour. One parent advised that she is now able to communicate effectively with her child and avoid confrontation after attending the Incredible Years programme.

Parents reported that family learning has had an impact on the relationship that they and their child have with learning. Some

parents have used it as a progressive tool for accessing courses within the local College or local community classes like literacy and numeracy or felt ready to apply for employment or training courses.

Parents have developed health and wellbeing skills through programmes like the FAST and Fit Families classes which are impacting on their choices in relation to health and wellbeing.

Family learning can be a vehicle for partnership working which facilitates easier sign posting to services if a family requires specific support.



# Case Study 1

## Auchnacraig Early Education & Childcare Centre

Auchnacraig Early Education & Childcare Centre provides early years provision for children aged three to five years. They have a current capacity for 80 children in the morning and 60 in the afternoon. There is a designated community wing within the building that is accessed by partner agencies to deliver various classes not only for families that have children attending the centre but also those from the local community. Auchnacraig is situated in an area of multiple deprivation and has a community with complex needs. To reflect this the centre takes a tiered approach to engaging with parents, recognising that there are many ways for a parent/carer to become involved in both their child's learning and their own.

The range of family learning and parenting activities is reflective of the needs of the community and has a wide remit. These include:

### **Incredible Years**

This is a 16 week programme for parents/carers who need support in both managing and understanding the various behaviours that their children may display. The group's aims are to work with the parents to develop the most effective approaches to parenting which can help to reduce stress and anxiety for both the child and the parent/carer. These groups are well attended and can be accessed

by those living in the local community as well as those from the centre and referrals from partner agencies. As a needs-led programme, parents/carers can re enter groups at different times if they feel further support is needed as their child enters new stages in their development or their own personal circumstances change.

### **Impact**

Parents/carers reported that they were now equipped to deal with challenging behaviours at home in a calm and controlled way. This also had an impact on how their child communicated with them and their siblings.

All of the parents reported that it became a peer support group, which broke down barriers of feeling isolated within the community. They felt that the issues that they were facing at home were shared issues that they worked together on without feeling judged.

Parents felt strongly that it was best not to call it a 'Parenting Programme' as this would have adversely affected their take up of the programme.

The mix of expertise amongst the facilitators of the groups was felt to be beneficial – these included Social Work, Health and Education.

Upon leaving the programme parents/carers felt that the ongoing support that was given to parents/carers in texts/calls from facilitators when the group had completed the programme was extremely beneficial and reinforced the skills that they had learned.

### **The Caterpillar Project**

The Caterpillar Project is a nine week partnership programme for the whole family based on the children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. Parents/carers and children read the story and participate in a programme of activities related to the story. The activities encompass Curriculum for Excellence outcomes in health and wellbeing, sciences and expressive arts. The programme involves a variety of services and professionals such as Community Learning and Development, a chef from a local company Raising Standards, Centre staff, Library Services and staff from a local Community Arts organisation CAOS, who work together at different stages of the programme. It highlights a needs-led approach involving relevant sectors ensuring an appropriate multi-agency intervention strategy for the benefit of the whole family.

### **Impact**

After taking part in storytelling activities, parents/carers are more equipped to read to their child and understand the benefits of doing this.

Working with staff from the local Community Arts organisations CAOS increased the families' skills in creative arts and also supported them to work together as a family and as a group. This

also resulted in a wall frieze within the center showing the stages of development from the caterpillar to the butterfly.

Working with the chef from Raising Standards and using the book, the families are more aware of health and wellbeing issues and the impact on their choices of what to eat.

Using a multi-agency approach in this way supports different sectors coming together and identifying resources, both physical and human, which are then utilised effectively ensuring the best outcomes for families.

Families build relationships with a range of staff both formally and informally which breaks down barriers for future access to progressive programmes for both the whole family and individual members.

### **SVQ Children's Care Learning and Development**

The class is a progressive route for the majority of parents/carers that have accessed programmes within the centre and the local community such as the FAST project and Incredible Years. It is organised through Community Learning and Development and delivered by West College Scotland. Attendees of this class were described as the group who have an active interest in their children's learning and are at the stage of improving outcomes for themselves. It is delivered in the community in a secure environment for those not at the stage of accessing more formal learning. Crèche facilities are also offered to break down barriers to accessing learning. The course helps parents/carers to support their children's

learning through understanding the process of child development and the expectation placed on children achieving developmental milestones. This has an impact on the whole family dynamic.

### Impact

Parents/carers reported that this had an impact on how their children perceived them. They felt that they were a good role model in achieving a qualification and that learning was something that you did throughout your life.

Parents/carers reported that they were now able to help with their children's

homework and had a better understanding of their children's behaviour and how to manage this.

Some parents/carers reported that this helped them to think about a career change, volunteering or working towards employment. One parent/carer came back to talk to us as she had completed the course and was now in full-time employment.

The group also used the sessions as a peer support group which reduced isolation for some parents/carers and also encouraged peer learning.



# Case Study 2

## Bonhill Primary School

Bonhill Primary School is a non-denominational, co-educational school serving a catchment area which extends from Dalmonach in the north to Strathleven in the south. It is at the heart of the community and has a vision to provide a happy, caring and stimulating environment in which children will recognise and achieve their fullest potential, where they will make a worthwhile contribution to the local and wider community and are valued as individuals. The school strives to promote and extend partnerships with parents/carers, other establishments, external agencies and the wider school community.

### Families and Schools Together (FAST)

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is an evidence-based early-intervention programme that brings parents/carers, children, teachers and the wider community together, to make sure children get the support they need to fulfil their potential at school and in life. This programme is delivered in areas of deprivation and where high numbers of children receive free school meals. Up to 40 families attend eight weekly sessions where children and parents/carers take part in structured activities together.

### Impact

The programme supports children to improve their skills in reading, writing and maths – as well as encouraging good behaviour and a positive attitude to school

and learning.

Supports parents/carers to get more involved in their child's education, so they can support learning and development at home. Parents/carers said that they now cook with their child more and it has encouraged them to eat healthier food at meal times.

Parents/carers also reported that the project encouraged stronger bonds between parents/carers and their child, their child's school, other families and the wider community. This reduced social isolation for new and existing families within the community.

### Fastworks

With the success of the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme, Fastworks became a progressive route for families. Ninety percent of the first FAST cohort of families joined the Fastworks group.

The group is now self-generated and self-sustaining and works together to improve the life chances of families and the wider community. They have become a constituted group and access funding as well as engaging local businesses and services. The school kitchen became an integral part of the success, using this as an educational environment to help develop families' skills.

**Impact**

Families have become more involved in their community and the needs of families within this area. They work together on projects and have gained skills in management, bookkeeping and fundraising.

Families have reported that they are engaging with the school, local services, private companies and the third sector. This has reduced the issue of duplication

and brought all services together for the benefit of the community.

New families are encouraged to join, reducing social isolation and increasing social cohesion.

Staff and parents/carers are working together on social and economic issues and developing new ideas for programmes such as cooking on a budget.



# Case Study 3

## Y Sort-It

Y Sort-It is an innovative Third Sector youth project that provides information and support to young people between the ages of 12 and 25 in West Dunbartonshire. The project is directed by a Youth Management Board of young people which reflects the needs of young people in the area.

The service provides drop-in facilities, young parents groups, and an internet suite with free internet access, chill-out areas and meeting rooms. They work in partnership with a variety of agencies such as Health, local businesses, Social Work, Housing and the local authority. This enables them to provide a comprehensive service to those young people with complex needs.

### Young Mums 2B

Young Mums 2B is a partnership group that provides support, information and advice to pregnant and new young mothers and fathers. The group is supported by midwives and staff from Y Sort-it who organise a whole range of activities including health checks, advice, baby care, hospital tours and issues affecting the young person such as housing etc. This is a referral group both by services and self-referral.

### Impact

For some of the parents the peer support aspect of the group was what made it a

success. They coped better with their babies and the stresses around being a young parent.

The group supports young mums and dads to attend appointments and for onward referrals. Their good links with housing was also important as some had issues with anti-social behaviour and would have to relocate at short notice.

Parents reported that support from the midwife helped them to understand the changes that they were going through and develop skills in supporting their child when he/she arrived.

Staff support the young people to gain access to learning opportunities in the community and also further education and training opportunities. One parent advised that this helped with her literacy skills and she was now better equipped to read to her child.

Staff links with other organisations are strong so referrals are managed delicately and smoothly which supports transitions for the young people.

### Baby Steps

This group is a progressive route from the Young Mums 2B, when the young mothers have had their baby, and ensures continued after care support, advice and

guidance for new young parents. The aim is to encourage young mothers to interact with their babies/children through play, as well as developing their parenting skills. Group activities include a programme of sessions to develop their play skills but also an opportunity to develop personal skills and explore their future choices. A crèche is provided at relevant sessions, so the young mothers can participate. This is to support them in becoming confident young mothers and learners. Sessions include advice and guidance to help improve life circumstances, especially around issues such as employability, housing and money advice.

### **Impact**

Young parents have developed their parenting skills, which enable them to become confident young parents with the

skills and knowledge to support their child.

This project helps to support young parents to improve how they access advice and support, both during and after the stages of pregnancy, helping to better their life circumstances and enhance each child's start in life.

Young parents now engage in positive activities that support them to develop their personal qualities, skills, confidence, and self-worth and become more involved in their local community.

This project has supported young parents to improve their educational attainment and gain better access to training/employment/further education. By building the capacity of the parent this in turn helps to support the child in their learning journey.



# Conclusion

## Outcomes and benefits of family learning as identified by West Dunbartonshire

### Impact on children and young people

Individual children and young people, through involvement in family learning, can achieve a greater sense of wellbeing and improve attitudes to learning.

### Impact on adults

Adults may improve their own skills, for example in literacy and/or numeracy, and interest in and commitment to learning. Parents can gain greater knowledge and more confidence to tackle family situations through increasing their understanding of children's development. They may improve the capacity to communicate with their children. Participating in family learning can also enable parents to go on to access information and support to help them in their parenting role. Many parents report improved confidence in accessing other services across West Dunbartonshire resulting in them feeling less isolated in their community and more confident as parents.

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# Evidence

## Evidence for this report came from the following sources:

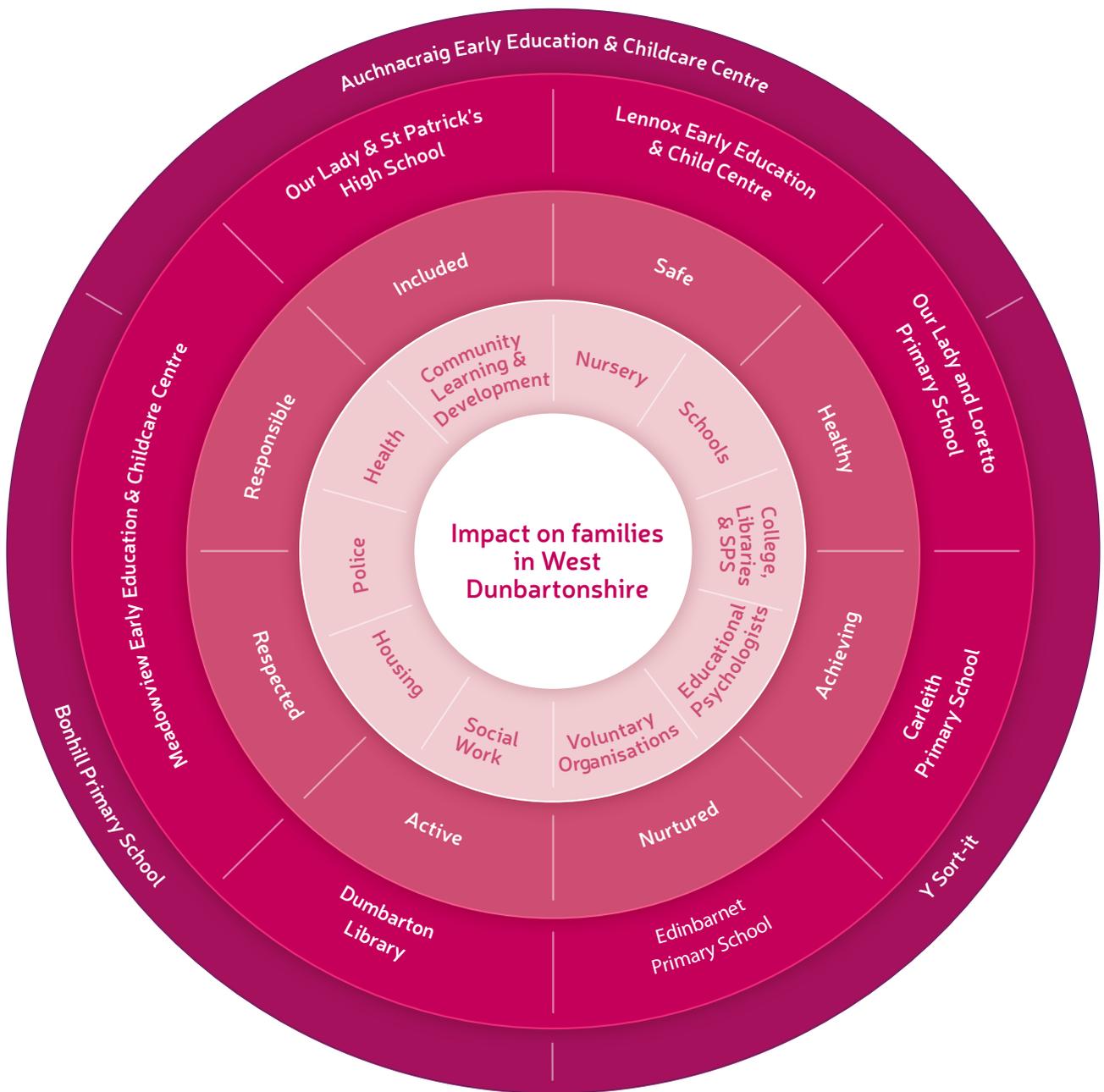
- Discussions with families as a whole and separately.

Meetings with a range of local authority, health and voluntary personnel through visits to

- Dumbarton Library
  - Edinbarnet Primary School
  - Auchnacraig EECC
  - Meadowview EECC
  - Carleith Primary School
  - Bonhill Primary School
  - Lennox EECC
  - Y Sort-it
  - Our Lady & St Patrick's High School
  - Our Lady of Loretto Primary School
  - Documentation from the local authority and partners
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# Appendix 1

## Project representation using the GIRFEC Wheel



# Appendix 2 - Glossary

**Community Planning Partnership**

Community Planning is a process which helps public agencies to work together with the community to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to people's lives.

**Triple P Parenting**

Positive Parenting Program is an evidence-based parenting programme which supports parents with practical strategies to help them confidently manage their children's behaviour.

**Families and Schools Together  
FAST project**

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is an evidence early-intervention programme that brings parents, children, teachers and the wider community together, to make

sure children get the support they need to fulfil their potential at school and in life.

**Bookbug**

Bookbug is a national programme encouraging all parents and carers to enjoy books with their children from as early an age as possible. They give the gift of free books to children periodically from birth to five years, and provide guidance materials for parents and carers.

**Play@Home**

The play@home programme provides all families in Scotland with three books covering three stages from birth to five. The books offer ideas for simple and adaptable play activities, using recycled or home-made materials.

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