

Dundee Partnership - Testing Early Intervention Project

Learn with Fred

Evaluation Report



April 2014

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Learn with Fred

Executive Summary

Background

Education Scotland provided funding to support testing targeted early intervention family literacies learning programmes in Dundee during the period 2012 – 2014.

The project had at its core the importance of the home and parent as the child's first and primary educator; and that parents play a significant role in giving their child the best start in life. It was built on the evidence that the intergenerational transfer of learning is a key factor in a child acquiring literacies.

Key to the project was a commitment to the principles that underpin Community Learning and Development practice, as highlighted in the CLD strategic guidance; providing families with additional support to address barriers and improve life chances.

Lessons learned from year 1 (2012 – 2013) of the delivery and evidence gathered from similar projects across the UK indicated that the benefits from participation in family literacies programmes was enhanced when participants undertook more than 12 hours of learning.

The Adult Learning section of Dundee City Council were keen to explore different delivery models which would allow them to understand the best approach to this important work. Therefore it was decided to approach all the participants from year 1 who had undertaken more than 8 hours of learning and ask them if they would commit to participating in a family literacies learning course which would run on one half day per week for 6 months.

The project was called "Learn with Fred" and was targeted at families/carers with children 3 and under, it ran during the period September 2013 – March 2014. Fred was a teddy bear who played a major part in the delivery of the course. The tutors used Fred throughout the course as a key player in the delivery of learning points with the children. He provided both parents and children with a physical reminder of the activities undertaken in the group.

Each participating child was given a bear and time was spent in the first few weeks building each child's bond with their bear and each family unit was asked to feed-back what their bear had been doing since they had last met.

The project aimed to affirm and reinforce the crucial role of parents/carers as the primary educator of their child and develop the parents capacity in this role through:

- Promoting parents/carers awareness of opportunities for learning in everyday activities and adult – child interactions
- Building parents/carers capacity to develop the home learning environment to support their child's early literacies skills
- Providing parents/carers with information and skills to support and develop their child's early literacies skills

"I don't worry about a messy house so much, before I used to Hoover 3 times a day and now I realise that it doesn't matter. Its much more important to spend time with him during the day and tidy up later.

Groups were established in:

- Kirkton
- St Marys

The programme was made up of blocks of learning, involving:

- Importance of music, rhythm and rhyme
- Language and Communication
- Sharing books and stories
- Importance of play

17 parents/carers agreed to take part in the project:

- 1 was male and 16 were female
- 16 were parents and 1 was a kinship carer

19 children were involved of which 9 were boys and 10 were girls. All were under 3 years of age when the project began.

What was achieved?

The number of participants who completed the course was 9 - they were all female. 12 children were involved throughout. The reasons given for withdrawing from the course varied from:

- Couldn't cope in a large group
- Changing work patterns
- Relationship breakdown
- House moves
- Inability to sustain structured commitment

All of the participants who left did so within the first few weeks of the course.

All participants completed a baseline survey at the beginning of the project and 9 undertook it again at the end of the project to establish if their views and understanding had changed as a result of their participation. The results shown in this section relate only to the 9 participants who completed the course.

Confidence in supporting children to learn

Participants were asked to rate their level of confidence in supporting their child to learn; at the beginning of the course 44% (4) rated themselves as slightly confident and at the end all rated themselves either confident 33%(3) or very confident 66%(6).

"I've seen such a change in her in just a few weeks. She's listening and joining in much more"

Use of music and singing nursery rhymes

Before the course started only 55% (5) of the parents understood that music and singing nursery rhymes would help their child to read and spell. By the end of the course this has risen to 100%.

A change had also occurred in their activities where 44% (4) participants indicated that they sang songs and nursery rhymes more than once a day at home when they started and 77% (7) said this when the course ended.

Language and Communication

22% (2) participants indicated at the beginning of the course that they had never drawn their child's attention to the names of things and sounds of letters. On completion 100% (9) were doing this either several times a week or once/more than once a day.

100% (9) of the participants were having conversations with their children more than once a day and 77% were talking about/teaching colours and shapes more than once a day.

Sharing books and stories

44% (4) participants said that they shared books with their child several times a week at the beginning of the course, by the end 88% (8) were sharing books either once or more than once a day with their child/ren.

77% (7) of adults and 66% (6) of children were members of the library at the beginning of the course, by the end of the course 100% of both children and adults were members.

Play

While all adults indicated that they played with their child before coming on the course the feeling towards the end was that this was now a much more constructive activity and they had developed a number of different ideas as to the best activities to use.

Parents were given several ideas, which could be made from everyday materials that could be accessed at home.

Factors contributing to the success of the Project

- Fred as a learning tool was a great success – he was used in sessions as much as possible – some children wouldn't do the actions themselves but would make Fred do them
- Individual engagement with participants before attending the course was beneficial
- Prior knowledge by the participants of the staff leading the group was useful
 - A commitment to the principles that underpin Community Learning and Development practice,
 - Having staff with an adult learning background
 - Ability to provide adults only time was important

"Amy goes to the books now instead of toys and she reads the book to Fred. She even holds it like you do in the group"

Learn with Fred

Main Report

Introduction

Education Scotland had provided funding to support early intervention family literacies learning programmes in Dundee during the period 2012 – 2014.

The project had at its core the importance of the home and parent as the child's first and primary educator; and that parents play a significant role in giving their child the best start in life. It was recognised that the intergenerational transfer of learning is a key factor in a child acquiring literacies.

Key to the project was a commitment to the principles that underpin Community Learning and Development practice, as highlighted in the CLD strategic guidance, and thus also aimed to provide families with additional support to address barriers and improve life chances.

Lessons learned from year 1 (2012 – 2013) of the delivery and evidence gathered from similar projects across the UK indicated that the benefits from participation in family literacies programmes was enhanced when participants undertook more than 12 hours of learning.

The Adult Learning section were keen to explore different delivery models which would allow them to understand the best approach to this important work. Therefore it was decided to approach all the participants from year 1 who had undertaken more than 8 hours of learning and ask them if they would commit to participating in a family literacies learning course which would run on one half day per week for 6 months.

The project was called “Learn with Fred” and ran during the period September 2013 – March 2014.

Two Community Learning and Development workers staffed the “Learn with Fred” project – one with a literacies background and the other in arts. These two staff were supplemented during the first part of each course meeting by crèche staff. The crèche staff were employed to allow the parents/carers to have some time when they could participate in a discussion topic.

Aims and Objectives

The programme was developed to enable the parents/carers to develop an understanding of how children develop and learn.

The project aimed to affirm and reinforce the crucial role of parents/carers as the primary educator of their child through:

- Promoting parents/carers awareness of opportunities for learning in everyday activities and adult – child interactions

“I don't worry about a messy house so much, before I used to Hoover 3 times a day and now I realise that it doesn't matter. Its much more important to spend time with him during the day and tidy up later.

- Building parents/carers capacity to develop the home learning environment to support their child's early literacies skills
- Providing parents/carers with information and skills to support and develop their child's early literacies skills

Who took Part?

A list of parents/carers was developed from those participants who had been involved during 2012/13 and who had completed at least 8 hours of learning. Each adult was contacted and a discussion took place about the course and the commitment that was expected – each was given time to consider their response. 17 adults agreed to attend an awareness raising session. This group involved:

- 1 male
- 16 female
- 16 were parents and 1 was a kinship carer

19 children were involved of which 9 were boys and 10 were girls. All were under 3 years of age when the project began.

It was decided to run two groups, one in St Mary's and the other in Kirkton.

9 participants, all female, and 12 children completed the course.

Operation

All the parents/carers who had agreed to participate were invited to an awareness raising event in either Kirkton or St Marys to allow them to meet the other participants.

At this meeting the parents/carers and children were also introduced to Fred the bear and each child was given a bear of their own to name and take home. It was made clear that the bear had to come along each week with the children. Fred was to play a major part in the delivery of the course. The tutors used Fred throughout the course as a key player in the delivery of learning points with the children. He provided both parents and children with a physical reminder of the activities undertaken in the group.

Time was spent in the first few weeks building each child's bond with their bear and each family unit was asked to feed-back what their bear had been doing since they had last met.

The course programme was then made up of 4 blocks of learning, involving:

- Importance of music, rhythm and rhyme
- Language and Communication
- Sharing books and stories
- Importance of play

"I would never have gone through town singing songs before but now I don't care what anyone else thinks because I know it's important"

Within each individual block, the sessions consisted of parents only time during which the children were looked after in the crèche, and time where parents and children took part in joint activities.

Course Content

The sessions focussing on parents/carers only involved the following - each is listed under its block title:

Songs, Rhymes and Music

- awareness of the importance of positive parent/child interaction
- importance of hearing the beat and rhyme in early literacies development
- music linked to movement, beat and emotions

Language and Communications

- brain development in early years – the importance of communication with children from birth; parents to gain confidence reading a book and discussing it with their children
- appreciation that language is fundamental to all learning
- discussion with a speech and language therapist
- development of language, vocabulary and listening skills
- language and sequencing skills

Sharing Books and stories

- the importance of sharing books and activities
- reading tips
- why reading to your child is important
- raising awareness of importance of fine motor skills for early literacies through art and craft activities – highlight importance of repetition in story telling

Play

- play is how children learn; stages of play and importance of messy play

Each session included discussion of issues concerning parents/carers around each of the topics. The speech and language therapist was invited as a result of these types of discussions.

Practical sessions which were undertaken by parents/carers and children and supporting the course content included making:

- Old MacDonald Nursery Rhyme book
- homemade drums and guitars
- paper cup shakers to use in story rhyme session and at home
- play-mats
- feely bags
- sequencing books
- story sacks
- wolf sock puppet
- paper bag puppets
- play-dough
- gloop
- post-boxes

"Before I relied a lot on the TV but now I let him get involved in 'helping' with the housework and talk to him much more"

The following hand-outs were provided to each parent/carer:

- Rhymers make Readers
- Music and Songs
- What do children learn from rhymes and songs
- How children learn
- Listening
- Communication every day
- First words
- Why reading is important for your child
- Reading tips
- Scottish Book trust Kids Booklist and link to web-site

The parent only sessions allowed them to explore the ideas behind each session and to feel confident about the activities they would undertake with their children. The practical activities were used to offer parents/carers imaginative, interesting and cheap ways to engage their children in the processes involved in learning.

When stories were introduced, parents and children made puppets and props to support the telling of the story. This was done to promote more skills than just reading in terms of use of intonation, actions and rhyme and the importance of repetition.

In the Sharing books section – the parents were encouraged to write their own story based around their visit to Camperdown Park.

A library box was also introduced in this section and parents were able to borrow books each week and their use of them was recorded within the group on a Readometer.

Parents were encouraged to use the activities developed in each session at home; they were asked to keep a personal diary in which they could record successes and challenges. Many of the participants used these to record changes in the way they played with and involved their child in everyday activities.

Outcomes

The number of participants who completed the course was 9 - they were all female. 12 children were involved throughout. The reasons given for dropping out of the course varied from:

- 2 families didn't like being in a large group
- One mum stopped coming because she had split up from her partner, had taken on extra hours at work and moved from the area.
- One parent attended first week then phoned each week with different reasons for not being able to attend – daughter ill; decorator in; daughter ill again – history of sporadic attendance at other courses
- Another had a history of sporadic attendance but also had relationship problems and had moved back to live with her Mum.

"I take a
book with
me now
and read
to him
when we
go on the
bus"

All of the participants who left did so within the first few weeks of the course.

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Parents were given several ideas which could be made from everyday materials that could be accessed at home.

"We did a family play with the story sacks and we all had a part to play - even Dad!"

Evaluation

Learn with Fred was a pilot project which came from the work undertaken with Hotspot Funding provided by Education Scotland – from the feedback and analysis of the questionnaires there is no doubt that the parents/carers have gained considerably from their participation.

Not only has the confidence of the parent/carers increased but the children have been seen to develop in terms of their:

- ability to participate in collective activities – story time
- language skills – talking clearly
- personal confidence to be involved in activities without their parents – attend the crèche

A grandmother, who had recently become a kinship carer, saw a considerable change in her grand-daughters language, concentration and interaction.

While there was a 47% (8) drop out from the group there were legitimate reasons for many of these. It would have been unusual if there had been 100% attendance –the pattern of withdrawal at the start is often seen in groups of this target background ,highlighting the need for stronger pre course guidance.

Lessons from the Project

- Fred as a learning tool was a great success – he was used in sessions as much as possible – some children wouldn't do the actions themselves but would make Fred do them
- Individual engagement with participants before attending the course was beneficial
- Prior knowledge by the participants of the staff leading the group was useful
- Team leadership approach of adult learning worker and arts worker was beneficial
- Ability to provide adults only time was important
- Limit size of initial engagement session – smaller groups for these sessions and be prepared to do it twice if need be – gives parents a chance to actually meet and talk to each other
- Focus more on activity for parents to meet and talk to each other rather than all activities focusing on the children
- Provision of both a morning and afternoon slot would be advantageous to allow people to change times if their work patterns change
 - the need for strong pre course guidance.

"I give him pots and pans and a spoon to play with - he will sit and play with them for ages. I would never have thought of this before."

Appendix 1

Why use Fred?

Why use Fred?



Fred is a visual reminder at home to try out learning.

Fred is a physical link between the group and home.

Fred creates a positive attachment to the group

Fred is a learning tool.

Fred is a vessel for channeling ideas and emotions.

Fred is a buffer for trying things out in the group.

Fred creates a sense of belonging to the group.

Fred unifies the group and makes everyone the same



Appendix 2

Participants Diary and

Fred's Adoption Certificate

Initial Resources for 'Learn With Fred'

The image shows two diary pages. The one on the left is a blank template with sections for 'Date', 'What new information did you find out from last week's session?', 'What have you done together with your child this week?', 'How did you find it?', 'How did your child find it?', and 'Any other things you want to tell us about or find out about?'. The one on the right is a completed page with a blue and white striped background, a photo of a woman and a child in a decorative frame, and the text 'DIARY', 'Gran, Amy and Sweep Bear'.

Diary with family photo

Adoption Certificate
Joshua Nicoll
Has officially adopted
Callum
and promises to look after his bear, by giving lots of bear cuddles and having lots of fun.



learning for yourself



Fred Bear tagged with children's initials.

Appendix 3

Learn with Fred in Pictures

Learn with Fred

Rhymers make Readers



MAKING OLD MACDONALD NURSERY RHYME BOOKS

I SANG WITH THE BOOK AT HOME. LACEY KNOWS ALL THE NAMES OF THE ANIMALS NOW

SCARLETT HAS STARTED SINGING OLD MACDONALD AND TWINKLE TWINKLE AT HOME NOW. IT'S GREAT SHE NEVER WENT ABOUT SINGING ANY SONGS BEFORE

NURSERY RHYMES BREAK THE WORDS INTO BEATS AND SLOWS EVERYTHING DOWN SO THE KIDS CAN HEAR THE SOUNDS. I FOUND THAT INTERESTING

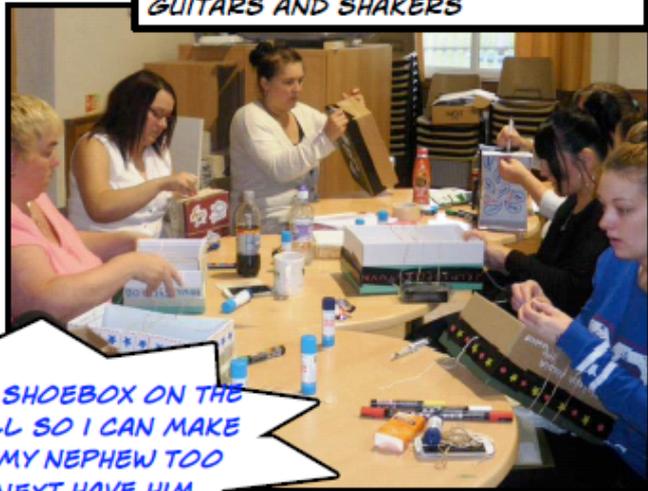


Hearing the beat in words help children read and spell



WRITING SAMINALIGAM WITH MY LEFT HAND REALLY MADE ME THINK ABOUT BREAKING UP THE WORD TO SPELL IT AND TRYING TO WRITE IT WAS SO HARD

MAKING HOMEMADE DRUMS, GUITARS AND SHAKERS



ABBY HAS BEEN SINGING OLD MACDONALD AND BEATING OUT HER NAME ON HER DRUM

I'VE KEPT A SHOEBOX ON THE WINDOWSILL SO I CAN MAKE ONE FOR MY NEPHEW TOO WHEN I NEXT HAVE HIM



SINGING THE HELLO SONG



EVEN WEE ONES NEED THIS COS THEY CAN HEAR IT EVEN IF THEY CAN'T SING ALONG YET

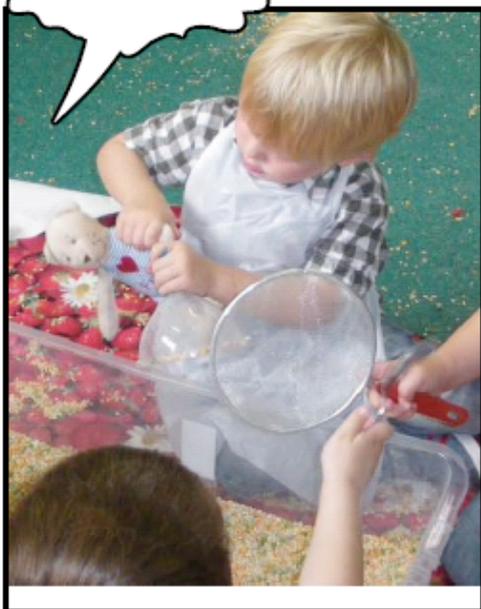
Using Fred as a Learning Tool

SHE TUCKED HIM IN A WEE BED IN THE LIVINGROOM AND SANG THE HELLO SONG AND PLAYED THE DRUM TO HIM



AMY GOES TO THE BOOKS NOW INSTEAD OF THE TOYS AND SHE READS THE BOOK TO FRED. SHE EVEN HOLDS IT LIKE YOU DO IN THE GROUP

ABBY SINGS TEDDY BEAR TEDDY BEAR TO HIM AT BEDTIME



SHE'S STARTED TAKING FRED TO BED INSTEAD OF HER MONKEY

Being able to **listen**, pay attention, **play** and understand are the basic building blocks of communication

I'VE SEEN SUCH A CHANGE IN HER IN JUST A FEW WEEKS - SHE'S LISTENING AND JOINING IN MUCH MORE



SHE MANAGED TO WAIT FOR HER TURN AND THEN WAIT AGAIN UNTIL IT WAS TIME TO POST IT

I MADE PLAYMATS AT HOME TO USE WITH HIS CARS

LISTENING AND TAKING TURNS



TALKING ABOUT PLAYMATS TOGETHER



Encouraging Parent-Child Interaction and Communication

ONE OF THE MUMS READING TO THE REST OF THE GROUP



IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO HAVE CUDDLES AND FEEL SAFE FOR DEVELOPING THE BRAIN AND WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN IS SCARY

I REALLY LIKE WHAT WE'RE DOING IN THE GROUP AND IT'S MADE ME WANT TO FIND OUT ABOUT GETTING QUALIFICATIONS TO DO THIS KIND OF WORK

WE'VE BEEN READING IT EVERYNIGHT WITH THE MATS

GIRLS LOVED TALKING ABOUT THE ANIMALS ON THE BROOM AND I DOWNLOADED THE APP - IT HAD LOADS OF GOOD STUFF ON IT



ROOM ON THE BROOM



Encouraging Parent-Child Interaction and Communication



MAKING 'FEELY BAGS'

WE'VE PLAYED WITH THEM ALL THE TIME. THEIR OLDER BROTHER HAS LOVED IT TOO!

THIS HAS BEEN ONE OF THE BEST IDEAS - WE'VE USED IT IN SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS - POSTING THINGS WITH THE SAME COLOUR, COUNTING - IT'S SO EASY



TAKING POST BOXES HOME

SHE LIKES TAKING EVERYTHING OUT AND PUTTING THEM IN AGAIN SO WE TALK ABOUT HER FAVOURITE ONES

Learn with Fred

Visit from Speech and Language Therapist

IT'S REASSURING TO HEAR I'M DOING THE RIGHT THINGS AS THERE'S NO ONE AT HOME TO TELL ME I'M DOING A GOOD JOB

I LIKED THE 'COUNT TO 5' TIP. I USED TO ASK QUESTION AFTER QUESTION BUT NOW I TRY TO JUST ASK ONE QUESTION AT A TIME



WE'RE TELLING HIM TO TAKE HIS DUMMY OUT WHEN HE'S SPEAKING. WE CAN HEAR HIM MORE AND HE CAN MAKE THE RIGHT SOUNDS

GOT LOTS OF HELP WITH STUTTERING. I FEEL SO MUCH BETTER. WE CALL IT 'BUMPY' WORDS NOW AND HE ISN'T SO BAD

Making Storysacks



Using puppets to tell a story



**SHE HAS LOVED
TELLING THE THREE
LITTLE PIGS STORY
TO ANYONE WHO
WILL LISTEN!! SHE
CALLS IT THE HUFF
PUFF STORY - IT'S
AMAZING HOW
IMPORTANT
REPETITION IS**

**WE ALL TOOK
PARTS AND
TOLD THE
STORY AT
HOME AND
THEIR DAD
WAS THE BIG
BAD WOLF -
IT WAS
GREAT!**



Parents' Comments

I WOULD NEVER HAVE
GONE THROUGH TOWN
SINGING SONGS WITH HER
BEFORE BUT NOW I DON'T
CARE WHAT ANYONE
THINKS BECAUSE I KNOW
IT'S IMPORTANT

I TAKE A BOOK WITH ME
NOW WHEN WE'RE GOING
ON THE BUS AND WE
READ IT ON THE BUS
TOGETHER

I FOUND THE WHOLE BIT
ABOUT BRAIN
DEVELOPMENT
AMAZING; AND HOW
MUCH THEY GET OUT OF
JUST SINGING
NURSERY RHYMES.
I'M MUCH MORE PATIENT

BEFORE I RELIED A LOT
ON THE TV BUT NOW I
LET HIM 'HELP' WITH THE
HOUSEWORK AND TALK
TO HIM MUCH MORE