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## Family learning at children's centres: Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service

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### Brief description

This example describes how effective partnership working with children's centres can increase provision and successfully attract hard-to-reach learners back to learning and employment.

### Overview – the provider's message

'In 2004 when our inspection judged us as inadequate it caused us to take a long hard look at how we were organising our provision. At the time we had a very limited offer in family learning, didn't meet our targets and we underspent our budget. We decided to reduce subcontracting and deliver the provision ourselves, raise our profile and create strong partnerships to enable us to deliver to the right learners in the right places. Our partnership with children's centres has worked really well and we've worked effectively with them to help to build the participation in adult learning of the parents and carers using the centre.'



*Irene Austin, senior development officer*

### The good practice in detail

#### Background

If a community learning provider is not catering for the 'hard to reach' learners in the local area, it's time to review both strategies and methods. Managers at Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service (HAFLS) were aware of the need to restructure the service and had begun to re-plan their approach to identifying needs and planning provision for family learning before the 2004 inspection confirmed their need to act.

Managers knew there was a need to raise the profile of family learning within the county and as Irene says, 'Children's centres were an obvious partnership for us – they became part of our strategy for development and we have worked with them since their inception.' The effectiveness of the provision since that first inspection was recognised in the latest [inspection report in 2012](#) which says: 'Good strategic links with schools and children's services have increased the number of enrolments steadily and improved the targeting of family learning provision.'

## First steps

The introduction of an early years post into the Hertfordshire team was one of the first important steps. The family learning team then undertook training with the early year's advisor. As Irene says, 'It raised our awareness of what was needed and enabled us to train our teaching staff in the key skills involved in developing children's learning and also to develop strategies to help parents and carers build skills to support their own children's learning.'



Managers were trained to understand the importance of a shared agenda with partners and with children's centres. As well as improving parenting, these partnerships and programmes developed employability skills in young parents.

True to the principles of good partnership, HAFLS brought its skills and experience as well as its funding to the table. HAFLS staff trained children's centre managers and outreach workers in basic skills awareness. Joint funding was provided for a crèche which provided learners with free places.

A 30-hour play and talk course which led to a qualification drew many parents and carers back to learning. Centres like the Creswick Children's Centre now offer English and mathematics qualifications, including opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills as well as interacting with their children. Building on the success of this programme, courses are being offered in 36 children's centres across the county; 18 are programmes with qualifications and the rest are short courses which are designed to attract new learners.

## The impact of the programme

For Val, the manager at Creswick Children's Centre, the partnership with HAFLS is an important part of the centre's success: 'Over 75% of local parents and carers use the centre, and we can have over 100 learners on a busy day. The impact on our families of the intergenerational literacy courses is really strong. Families are recognising the importance of interacting with their children and are learning how to ask effective questions and to let their child have a go.'

The confidence that learners develop in what feels to them a safe environment is evident. Simona, who has been using the centre for some time sums up the views of many when she says how much she enjoys being part of a community: 'I can now help my daughter in school and I'm hoping to get a job working with children. I've learnt to understand and enjoy what that means for my child and I now know what I want to do.' For Manuela, her new-found confidence and skills have led to a job and she wants to continue with her learning. For others, like Lauren, gaining qualifications has been really important: 'I did badly school, but my success here has made me want to do more.' For her it has been 'absolutely brilliant; the hours we spend with our children are really enjoyable.'



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Val knows how important this partnership has been for the development of the centre. 'It's great to see our parents and carers succeeding. We know a lot of them go onto other things.' She and the other centre managers work closely with Irene to celebrate success through regular awards events.

For Irene, the impact on the service has been to increase enrolments and the achievement of qualifications in family learning: 'Our partnership with children's centres has enabled us to pool resources, share skills and reach the learners we really need to reach.'

## Provider background

[Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service](#) (HAFLS) is the department of Hertfordshire County Council which runs the adult education service in the county. Much of the provision is subcontracted. However, the service has a small direct delivery team who along with three subcontractors provide family learning. The majority of Family Learning in children's centres is delivered directly by HAFLS staff.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch.