



Department
for Education

Opportunity Areas Insight Guide Early Years



Opportunity in early years

Opportunity Areas

The long-term objective of the Opportunity Areas programme is to transform the life chances of children and young people in 12 areas of the country with low social mobility. In doing so, it aims to learn more about what works in improving education outcomes in coastal, rural and urban areas. The programme seeks to tackle regional inequality by convening resources, using evidence-based approaches and testing new approaches to unlock the barriers that hold young people back in geographic areas where the educational challenges are greatest.

The programme is being evaluated and reports will be available during the course of 2022. In the meantime, with this series of insight guides, we are sharing the experiences of those working hard to make a difference in the Opportunity Areas for others to learn from.

Further information about the programme can be found on **GOV.UK**

Early years in the Opportunity Areas

Research shows that if children live in disadvantaged areas, they are less likely to be able to access high-quality early years education and good schools and are more likely to fall behind as they move through the education system.

Early years education aims to ensure that young children have high-quality learning experiences which provide the foundation for good future progress through school and life. Gaps between more affluent children and their peers emerge before the age of 5, so efforts to support children's learning in the early years are likely to be particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹

Early education approaches provide opportunities for children to play and explore, learn actively, and create and think critically. Early education providers need to work in partnership with parents to promote children's learning.

¹ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/early-years>





Levelling up disparities is at the heart of the Opportunity Areas programme and a key part of the Government's work to support the most vulnerable as we chart our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and build back better.

One way the Opportunity Area programme has been making a difference is by bringing national and local partners together from businesses, education, civil society and community organisations. The approach in each area has been led by local partnership boards and driven by data, evidence and a shared determination to ensure children have access to the best early years education.

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Who is this guide for?

- Practitioners and system leaders with an interest in early years foundation stage education, recognising the crucial role that both play in addressing challenges.
- Anyone working in a social mobility 'cold spot' who wants to learn from peers who face similar challenges in early years foundation stage education.

Each guide that we publish will be followed by a webinar to connect interested parties with those involved in the featured projects. If you would like to find out more, or you would like to attend a webinar, please get in touch: Opportunity.Areas@education.gov.uk

What this guide covers

This guide is the fourth in a series. It covers a selection of Opportunity Area place-based early years projects that have tackled complex and multi-faceted obstacles to social mobility and regional inequality. Some of the best examples of local solutions to local problems are listed here. They cover a number of themes in early years education, from best practice sharing networks through to early literacy programmes. Our aim is to cover tried and tested projects that vary in cost, showing where match-funding has been secured. We hope that these insights will support work to overcome similar challenges for children elsewhere.

The following case studies are included:

West Somerset: Children were helped to develop their physical literacy skills² and increase their self-esteem and wellbeing through the Healthy Movers physical literacy programme in the early years foundation stage.

Norwich: Children were supported with their early speech, language, listening and communication by training Communication Champions using resources from The Communication Trust.

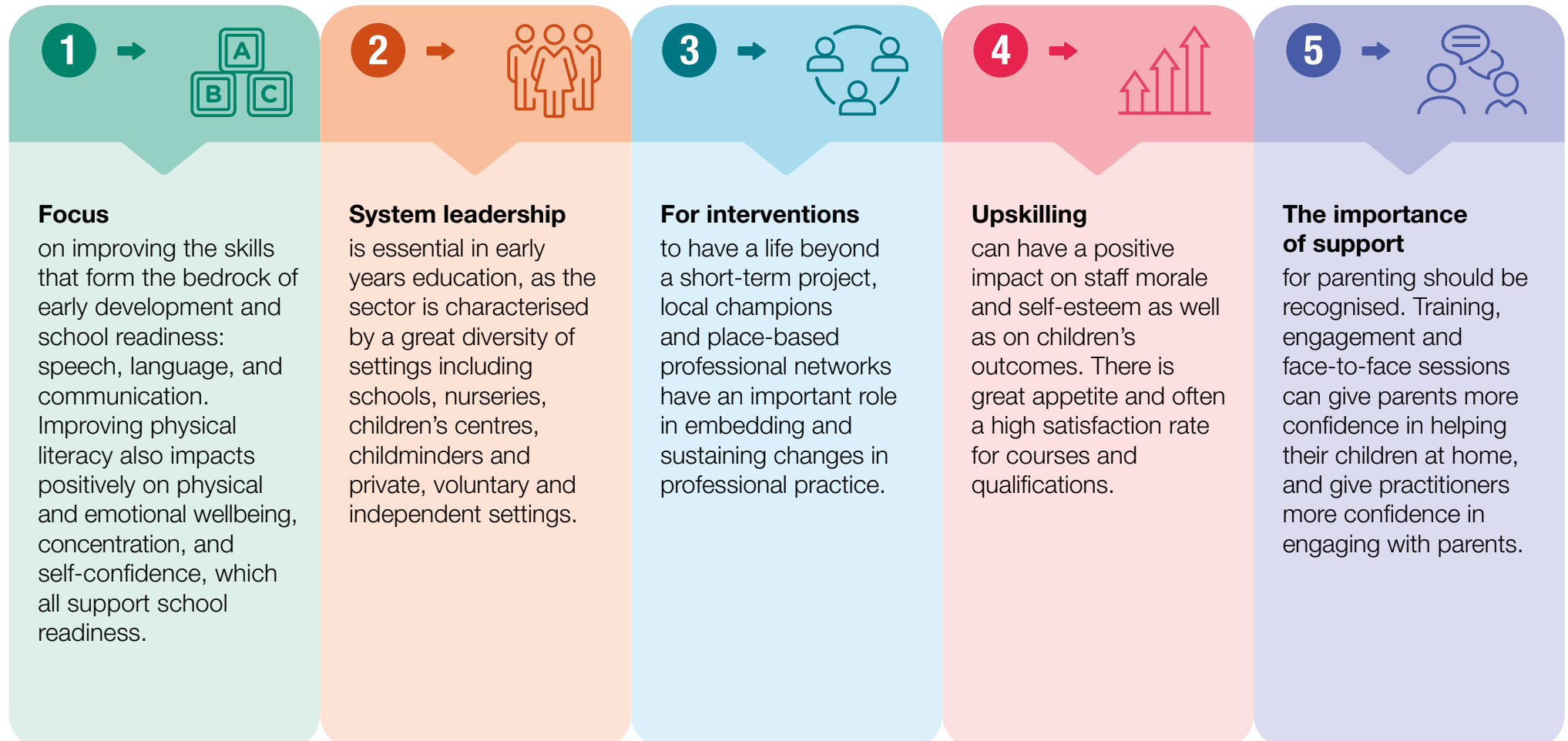
Derby: Schools and early years foundation stage settings in the most disadvantaged wards were provided with a package of speech, language and communication improvement support and training over an 18-month programme.

North Yorkshire Coast: Early years practitioners, particularly those working in private, voluntary, and independent settings, were provided with high-quality professional development opportunities through the Early Years Hub.

Oldham: Through the Making it REAL programme, practitioners were helped to build parents' knowledge and confidence to help their children with reading and writing and create a positive early home learning environment.

² Good level of physical development linked to their language and literacy skills.

Key insights



Observations from a Partnership Board Chair

Each OA has a local partnership board, which is headed by an independent chair and supported by a Department for Education Head of Delivery. This board comprises local stakeholders from schools, further education, businesses and beyond, to ensure a tailored and localised approach to delivering priorities and robust challenge.

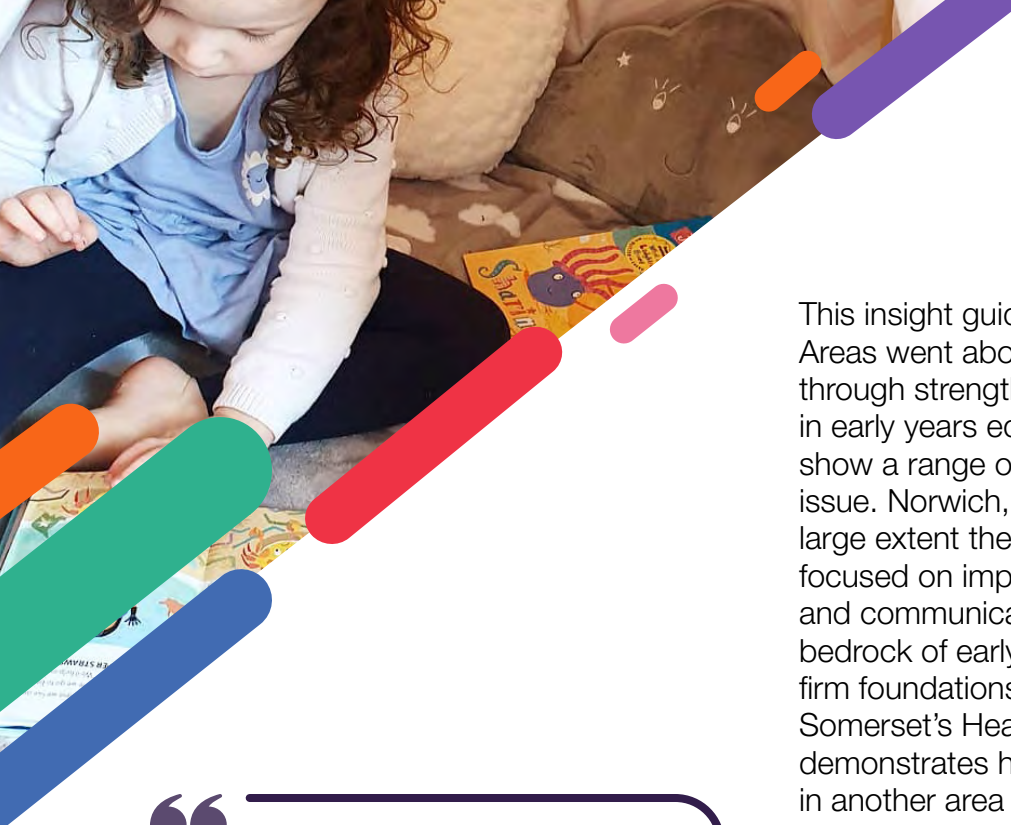


James Kempton
Chair of Oldham Opportunity Area
Partnership Board

As an independent Opportunity Area Chair, I knew that delivering on the Department for Education's aim of achieving social mobility through education was going to require a broader focus than the very important school improvement interventions that we had seen in previous place-based initiatives like Education Action Zones and the London, Greater Manchester and Black Country Challenges. From the outset, the mission of the Opportunity Areas was driven by the department's imperative that "a good early years education is the cornerstone of improving social mobility".³ The research is extensive, and the conclusions are clear: if development gaps that arise between those born into disadvantaged homes and their peers are not tackled early, they prove stubbornly hard to close despite everything the school system can do. The investment made by the Opportunity Areas programme in working towards improvements is testament to the importance of a good early years education.

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667690/Social_Mobility_Action_Plan_-_for_printing.pdf p8





“...local champions and place-based professional networks have an important role in embedding and sustaining changes...”

This insight guide describes how 5 Opportunity Areas went about driving social mobility through strengthening and raising standards in early years education. The case studies show a range of interventions to address the issue. Norwich, Derby and Oldham, and to a large extent the North Yorkshire Coast, have focused on improving speech, language, and communication. These skills are the bedrock of early development and form the firm foundations for school readiness. West Somerset’s Healthy Movers programme demonstrates how to improve outcomes in another area of child development and shows how improving physical literacy impacts on physical and emotional wellbeing, concentration, and self-confidence, and thereby school readiness.

These case studies tell a story of hope: of how well-trained and properly supported early years educators can enable children from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach a good level of development and gain the skills they need.⁴ System leadership is essential in early years education, as in the wider school system, but perhaps even more so in a sector

characterised by the great diversity of settings (school, nursery, children’s centre, childminders and private, voluntary and independent settings). These case studies show that, for interventions to have a life beyond a short-term project that impacts on the target cohort only, local champions and place-based professional networks have an important role in embedding and sustaining changes in professional practice.

These programmes reveal a striking appetite from early years practitioners for training in early years pedagogy. They also show the impact that upskilling can have, not just on children’s outcomes but staff morale and self-esteem. This is apparent not just in the uptake – everything from specific courses to Talk Derby’s level 3 and 4 qualifications and the Masters degrees supported as part of Norwich’s Communications Champions project – but also in the satisfaction statistics and the quotes that show what a difference the investment in training has made to them. Indeed, even in Oldham where the speech, language, and communication project, Making it REAL, had been established since

4 Good level of development refers to a summative assessment judgement which is made for each early years foundation stage child at the end of the Reception year. It is a measure of attainment, not progress. Achieving a good level of development will help a child to make a good start in Year 1

2009, we still found enormous scope to roll out successful practice to a wider group of practitioners who were hungry to learn.

Support for parenting is a repeated theme across the case studies. This reminds us about the importance of upskilling parents, who are, after all, their children's first educators. My absolute top moment in 4 years of chairing the Oldham Opportunity Area Partnership Board was listening to a parent in the Making it REAL programme talk about the joy she felt being able to better help her daughter and learning the importance of celebrating her mark-making, and how the training had revolutionised the drudgery of her visits to the supermarket into exciting reading expeditions to spot logos and labels together. Family engagement, delivered through the Let's Talk at Home tutors, is similarly a key feature of Talk Derby's speech, language, and communication programme. And something similar can be found in the way West Somerset's Healthy Movers programme supported families to continue healthy activities at home through hundreds of resource packs, creating

opportunities for parents to participate in Stay and Play sessions, and supporting practitioners to be more confident in engaging with parents.

These case studies, as I said above, tell a story of hope by demonstrating ways to improve outcomes for children that secure their early development, help them to become school ready, and make progress towards the social mobility goal of escaping the disadvantage they were born into. But we would do well to also reflect that it is now well over 25 years since educators started talking about the 30-million word gap between higher and lower income children.⁵

Given this, it is unsurprising that many areas in the Opportunity Area programme focused on speech, language and communication because of the evident need, and the contribution that a committed workforce that is prepared to take on the challenge of securing the life chances of the country's most disadvantaged children can make.

As place-based interventions, the Opportunity Areas set their priorities based on the analysis of the challenges each area faced, organised to reflect the priorities of that community. That the issue was one facing these very different places suggests that there may be more early years leaders in other areas for whom this insight guide offer could offer help, support, and inspiration.

James Kempton

Chair of Oldham Opportunity Area Partnership Board

⁵ Betty Hart and T R Risley, Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children (1995).





West Somerset case study



West Somerset: Healthy Movers

The West Somerset Opportunity Area has created a fun and engaging programme, called Healthy Movers, by working with practitioners and families. The programme has improved children's physical literacy⁶ and school readiness by providing resources and training for early years practitioners, and supporting families to continue the activities at home. Watch the introductory video here: www.youthsporttrust.org/programmes/healthy-movers

What was the problem?

In 2016, West Somerset was ranked the lowest in the Social Mobility Index, which measures the chances that a child from a disadvantaged background will do well at school and gain employment. The early years indicator within the overall measure was also the lowest among English local authority districts. The first priority for the West Somerset Opportunity Area is to ensure that every child has a great start in life.⁷

The Opportunity Area plan set an ambitious target to significantly improve the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage, which prepares them for Key Stage 1.

West Somerset Opportunity Area commissioned a range of interventions designed to help early years settings to provide good-quality education in the early years foundation stage. The programme included audits of practice, evidence-based speech and language interventions, maths in the early years, effective Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND) practice and physical literacy. Evidence suggests that improving children's physical literacy is fundamental to improving their physical and emotional wellbeing.⁸ This is crucial to ensure every child meets a good standard of development before they enter Key Stage 1.

6 Good level of physical development linked to their language and literacy skills.

7 www.westsomersetopportunityarea.co.uk/priority-1/

8 The Best Start in Life – A manifesto for physical activity in the early years (2016).





Youth Sport Trust was commissioned to deliver the Healthy Movers programme. Healthy Movers aims to develop physical literacy in early years children and improve their school readiness. A child's level of school readiness can impact on future attainment, health and life chances.⁹

The Youth Sport Trust research team conducted an evaluation of the Healthy Movers programme. As part of the evaluation, a baseline assessment of a sample of participating children was completed. The data analysis showed that the average baseline of physical literacy and key early learning goals was below what would be expected for their age.

Healthy Movers was delivered in



early years settings across West Somerset

Implementation activities and successes

Healthy Movers was delivered in 15 early years settings across West Somerset. The programme ran from October 2018 to March 2020.

The early years settings received a one-day training session and bespoke monthly support visits from the Healthy Movers staff to help the practitioners with the programme. They were also provided with resource cards, equipment, a wall chart to showcase their Healthy Movers work, and a physical literacy assessment tool to help measure the progress of the children taking part. Together, these enabled practitioners to deliver Healthy Movers activities to children.

The settings also engaged parents by inviting them to attend Stay and Play sessions, which offered an opportunity to participate in Healthy Movers activities with their children. Each child then received a Healthy Movers home backpack that included resource cards and equipment, to continue being Healthy Movers at home as a family.

9 www.publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2015/08/10/ensuring-all-children-have-the-best-start-in-life/

This diagram summarises the key programme activities.

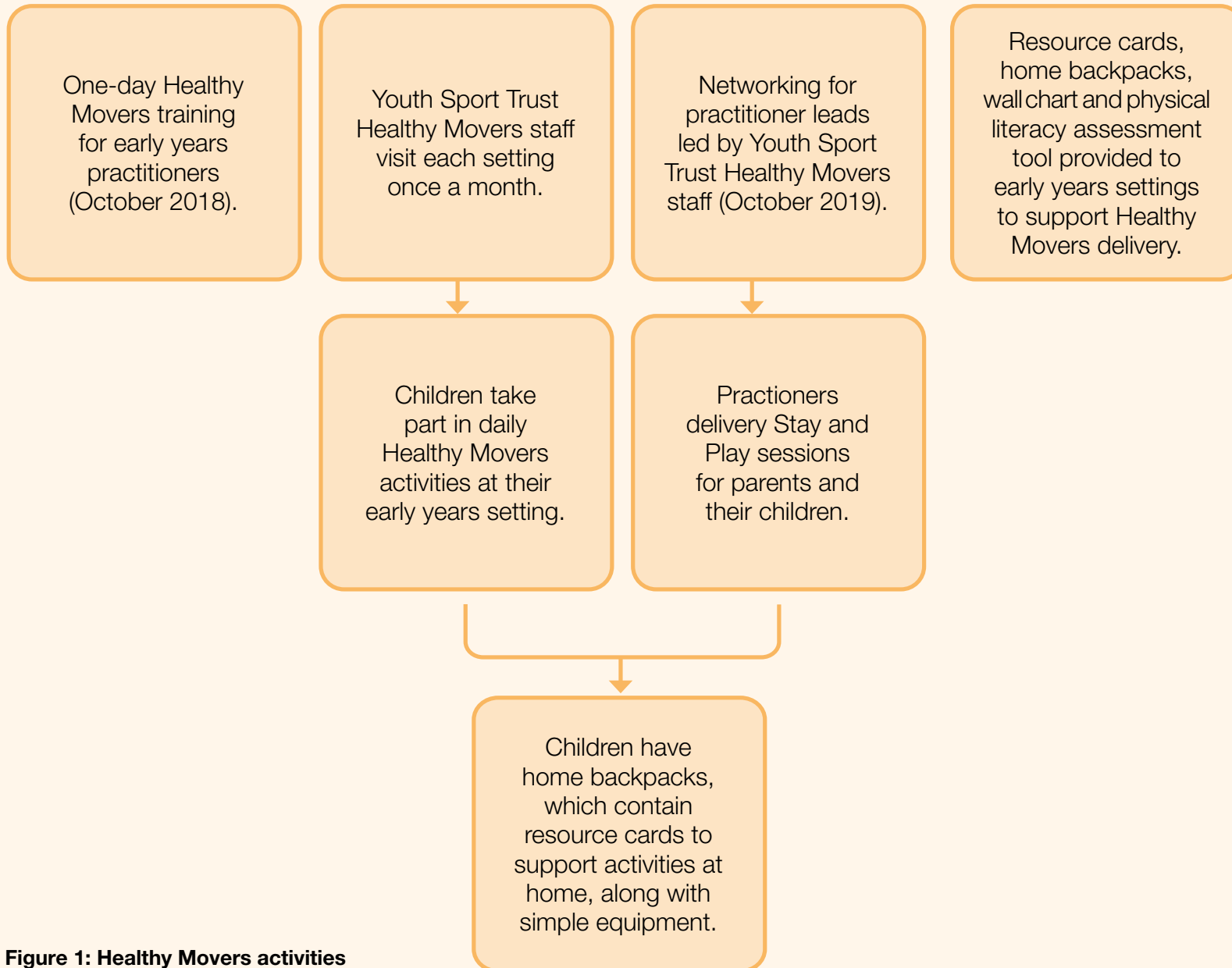


Figure 1: Healthy Movers activities

56



practitioners delivered
Healthy Movers activities

620



home packs were sent to
settings to give to families



Figure 2: Healthy Movers resources

As part of the project, there were 210 visits to settings by Youth Sport Trust Healthy Movers staff, 45 Stay and Play sessions and one practitioner networking session.

In total, the project reached:

- 597 children via Healthy Movers activities.
- 15 early years settings, with 12 settings maintaining engagement for the entire project.

- 230 parents who attended Healthy Movers Stay and Play sessions.

This was facilitated by:

- 56 practitioners who delivered Healthy Movers activities.
- 620 home packs which were sent to settings to give to families.

Output measures

The research included the following data sources. Sample sizes for each are reported in brackets.

- Practitioner feedback: pre survey (n=15), training feedback survey (n=15), interim survey (n=13), final practitioner survey (n=16) and practitioner interviews (n=2).
- Parental feedback surveys (n=39) and parent interviews (n=3).
- Children's data.¹⁰
 - Early years foundation stage data for a cohort of children involved in Healthy Movers at the beginning, interim and final stages of the project.
 - Physical literacy assessment data for a cohort of children involved in Healthy Movers at the beginning, interim and final stages of the project (collected using a bespoke assessment tool that was developed for the project).
 - Observations of Healthy Movers sessions in 5 settings.

In addition, 5 case studies have been completed and can be found at

www.youthsporttrust.org/programmes/healthy-movers

Three settings were involved in follow-up telephone calls in spring 2021 to explore how they had embedded and sustained the project in their setting. These case studies can be found at: www.youthsporttrust.org/news-insight/research-papers/sustaining-and-embedding-healthy-movers-in-west-somerset-early-years-settings

Key findings from practitioners:

- 100% stated that Healthy Movers had helped them to make improvements in how they deliver physical activity.
- 94% reported that Healthy Movers helped them to feel more confident, competent and motivated in delivering physical development and physical activity for children aged 2 to 4.
- 94% felt that Healthy Movers helped them to feel more confident to engage parents in physical activity with their children.

¹⁰ Where possible, children's data was matched at the 3 time points. However, where this was not possible and the sample size of matched data was too small, all submitted data was analysed.

91%



of parents reported their child
likes being active more

Key findings from parents:

- 95% felt Healthy Movers had given them ideas to help their child be active.
- 91% felt more confident in helping their child to be active.
- 85% had increased their knowledge about why it is good to be active.

A cohort of children involved in Healthy Movers had their physical literacy assessed at the beginning of the project (December 2018), in the interim (December 2018 to January 2019), and at the final stage (January and March 2020). The physical literacy assessment tool differed slightly for the younger children (typically aged 22 to 36 months) and the older children (typically aged 30 to 50 months). Parents and practitioners were also asked to report any observed changes in children's physical activity. For more information about the evaluation approach and physical literacy assessment tool, please see the full report at: www.youthsporttrust.org/media/hjmfhz2c/healthy-movers-west-somerset-executive-summary.pdf

- 100% of children in the younger cohort demonstrated improved motivation, and 98% demonstrated improved stability and object control.
- 100% of practitioners felt that Healthy Movers had a positive impact on children's physical literacy.
- 91% of parents reported their child likes being active more.
- 88% of parents reported their child has better movement skills.

Overall, Healthy Movers increased children's enjoyment of being physically active.

“Healthy Movers is the best of all the initiatives because it's active, children enjoy it and it is developing the child's skills through play.”

Practitioner

Healthy Movers has also led to benefits for children's wider development and school readiness. The settings provided early learning goals data for a cohort of children involved in Healthy Movers at the start, interim stage and final stage of the project.

The research focused on 5 key goals: managing relationships, movement and handling, listening and attention, understanding, and speaking.

- 100% of practitioners felt that Healthy Movers had a positive impact on children's ability to follow instructions, and with their relationships with staff and other children in the setting.
- 68% of parents felt that Healthy Movers had a positive impact on their child's speaking skills.

“The children are more confident at having a go.”

Practitioner

“My child's speech has massively improved.”

Parent

The practitioner survey also highlighted positive changes in children's ability to follow instructions, manage relationships and their attitudes to learning, all of which are vital for school readiness. The effect of Healthy Movers on children's school readiness was a key theme that emerged from the case study visits and qualitative data. Practitioners noted changes in children's attention and concentration, as well as improvements in their confidence, communication and language. In addition, they felt that children's physical development as a result of Healthy Movers helped the children to prepare for more formal PE lessons at school.

The target was to have at least 70% of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage. The 2019 data demonstrates that this target has been exceeded, with 73% of children achieving a good level of development. Although we cannot claim that Healthy Movers alone caused this improvement, the findings suggest that the programme has contributed towards more children achieving a good level of development.

Practitioners noted changes in children's attention and concentration, as well as improvements in their confidence, communication and language.



95%



felt Healthy Movers had given them
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Henry's story

“When Henry joined the setting, he didn’t have much confidence to talk to adults he didn’t know. He had long hair that covered his eyes and he mostly sat and watched. Healthy Movers has been a key activity he has begun to engage with, and having the whole group join in with the activities has helped him feel less self-conscious and see that they are all learning together. Over time, the practitioners have seen his confidence, speech and language develop, and they now feel confident that he is ready for school in September, something they were previously concerned would not be the case.”

Note: Pseudonyms have been used for this story

Project costs

	Drop-in
Youth Sport Trust staff – Development Manager, Project Officer, Head of Wellbeing	£24,275
Healthy Movers training – including, venue hire, networking sessions, Level 3 training course, licences and mentoring sessions	£25,440
Healthy Movers resources – toolkit, development tree, home backpacks	£12,074
Early years Healthy Movers and Stay and Play support sessions and training	£80,802
Youth Sport Trust communication team and social media support	£2,159
Youth Sport Trust research and insight	£12,491
Total	£157,241

This works out at £263 per child. However, the actual impact is much larger as, after the initial programme costs, many settings are continuing to deliver to children, families and practitioners.



Sustainability

The Youth Sport Trust research team has conducted additional research exploring how settings have embedded and sustained the Healthy Movers programme. The full report can be found at www.youthsporttrust.org/news-insight/research-papers/sustaining-and-embedding-healthy-movers-in-west-somerset-early-years-settings

Practitioners felt that they have been able to maintain Healthy Movers in their settings due to the following factors:

- Regular sessions and embedding the programme into daily practice has helped practitioners to know and understand the resources and activities. They are more confident to deliver the programme effectively. This has developed through a constant cycle of reflection and improvement.

- Children's awareness – regular sessions have also meant that the children are aware of the expectations of Healthy Movers. They know the types of activities they will be doing and are confident to join in.
- Parents' awareness has increased, especially for those settings that used it as part of the home learning activities during COVID-19 restrictions. Linking the setting activities to the home activities has helped to sustain the parents' interest and encouraged them to try the activities at home.
- Refresher training has helped the settings to maintain momentum.

As a result of the flexibility and simplicity of Healthy Movers, and the benefits observed to their children, settings felt they would continue with Healthy Movers in the future.

Key ingredients for success

Practitioners' top tips for embedding and sustaining Healthy Movers:

- Have fun!
- Keep it simple.
- Build it into your regular routine.
- Involve parents as much as possible.
- Provide opportunities for staff to learn and develop from each other.
- Have a Healthy Movers Champion to oversee the programme in the setting.
- Empower all staff to deliver and take responsibility for Healthy Movers.
- Build in routine assessments.

In addition, the following aspects of Healthy Movers were identified from the research activities as being particularly effective elements of the programme.

- **Flexibility:** The non-prescriptive nature of Healthy Movers enabled settings to embed the programme into their curriculum in an effective way to help meet their own needs.
- **Continual and personalised support from Youth Sport Trust Healthy Movers staff:** The relationship they built with practitioners enabled them to ensure the support was bespoke for each setting. Regular face-to-face contact helped the momentum of the programme to continue.
- **Opportunities to share practice:** The regular contact with Youth Sport Trust staff who were supporting the settings enabled good practice and learning to be shared. In particular, the networking session where practitioners were brought together was found to be especially useful.





Norwich case study



Norwich: Communication Champions project

Improving early speech, language and communication development is one of the 4 priorities of the Norwich Opportunity Area. As part of the Communication Champions project, early years practitioners from schools and other settings received expert training to develop a consistent and universal approach to supporting children's speech, language and communication needs. Practitioners noted increases in their knowledge and confidence when identifying and supporting children with their speech, language and communication needs post-training. They meet regularly as a local network to share best practice and further develop their expertise with guidance from the Communication Hubs.

What was the problem?

- Local partners, such as schools and voluntary sector organisations, told us that pupils too often have poor communication, social and emotional skills at school entry.¹¹
- In 2016, the proportion of Norwich children achieving a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage was 66% and just 54% for disadvantaged pupils – well below the national average of 69%. The average point score for disadvantaged pupils was among the lowest in the country.
- National research suggested that strengthening early speech, language and communication skills would be an essential foundation for further academic progress and social mobility (see footnote 6).
- Schools suggested that, while they could refer children to the speech and language therapy service, they often found that the service did not necessarily meet the whole challenge and there remained a need for improving speech and language support within the classroom.
- Pre-training questionnaires ascertained that local early years practitioners lacked the knowledge and confidence needed to identify and support children with speech, language and communication needs.¹²

11 These conclusions are built on a significant body of national research and evidence including The Communication Trust – Talking about a generation (2017), available at www.ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/professionals/tct-resources/more-resources/talking-about-a-generation/ and the Early Intervention Foundation – Language as a wellbeing indicator (2017), available at www.eif.org.uk/report/language-as-a-child-wellbeing-indicator

12 Data taken from the baseline surveys of 83 Norwich-based early years practitioners, ahead of the first round of Communication Champions Training, suggested that: - 40% of practitioners rated themselves as having 'a little confidence' or 'not sure' when asked how confident they were in their ability to identify a child with speech, language and communication needs, and 55% of practitioners rated themselves at 6/10 or less when asked how they would rate their knowledge of strategies that can be used to support children with speech, language and communication needs.



Implementation activities and successes

The Norwich Opportunity Area established a multi-organisation working group to focus on building professional excellence across Norwich in developing children's early speech, language and communication skills among teachers, early years practitioners and other professionals. This universal approach was designed to sit cohesively alongside the Norfolk speech and language therapy service's goals and complement the wider, long-term aims of the local authority to support all children to achieve their full potential and have their needs met at the earliest possible opportunity.

In September 2018, the Norwich Opportunity Area commissioned The Communication Trust to develop a new programme of continuing professional development called Communication Champions training. This training comprised of 2 modules – core and leadership – and it aimed to upskill local practitioners with the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to efficiently identify and support children with speech, language and communication needs. Our target was to train 100 Communication Champions across Norwich by the end of the project's third year. We hoped that another 600 practitioners would then receive cascaded training. So far, we have exceeded our target to train 100 Communication Champions in Norwich (we have trained 117 to date) and we have achieved 90% of our cascade target (539 have received cascade training or online training to date).



- 282 practitioners have been trained to become Communication Champions for their own school or setting.
 - Across Norwich, 24 of 26 primary schools and 13 of 31 settings now have a Communication Champion.
 - On average, 68.6% of delegates who completed the core training went on to complete the leadership training, with an average attendance rate of 94.5%.
- 320 practitioners have accessed the online Communication Champions training.
 - This launched in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for access to free on-demand training that could be accessed from home during the national lockdowns.
 - Of these 320 practitioners, 118 have completed the core training, and 70 have completed the leadership training to date.



staff have been trained

to become Communication Champions for their own school or setting (includes those who have been trained up via the online training as well as those who were trained F2F)



“I found that the training was really comprehensive, everything was well covered. Good to look at the data and see how it affects children in the long term.”

Communication Champion

Number of trained Communication Champions

Training type	Core only	Core and leadership	Total
Completed Communication Champions Training: Norwich (face to face and virtual)	45	72	117
Completed Communication Champions Training: Breckland ¹³ (virtual)	5	42	47
Completed Communication Champions Training: Online	48	70	118
Communication Champions Training that's been started online	166	36	202
Cascaded Communication Champions Training			219
		Total	703

13 Norwich Opportunity Area is sharing learning with Breckland.

“The training underlined for me just how crucial good speech, language and communication skills are to all areas of a child’s life. It consolidated and extended my existing knowledge, enabling me to identify realistic priorities for development in my own school and gave me the skills and confidence to train others and implement change.”

SENCO, Communication Champions and Communication Hub Leader at Mile Cross Primary School, Norwich

A key feature of the project was the development of a sustainable network of expert practitioners, including establishing Communication Hub schools and settings as centres of excellence to provide long-term support to the Communication Champions and maintain collaboration and sharing of best practice.

For the first 2 years after the Communication Champions training launched, the Norwich Opportunity Area offered a funding incentive (honorary scheme) to all Communication Champions that had been trained to leadership level in Norwich. The purpose of this honorary scheme was to:

- Encourage Communication Champions to embed their learning and share this learning with colleagues to make long-term positive changes within their school or setting.
- Give recognition to the importance and value of improving speech, language and communication best practice and the time needed to do this.
- Boost engagement with the project after the training, e.g. through attendance at the newly established Communication Champions Network meetings.

Enable termly reports from the Communication Champions that detail progress towards embedding their sustainable whole-setting speech, language and communication plan and any early evidence of impact.





I have grown in confidence, and I am now on a path of continuous learning.

Forty-two Communication Champions signed up to the honorarium scheme and worked through a range of tasks to improve the speech and language practice in their setting. Tasks included creating and delivering training for colleagues, developing whole-school action plans, embedding best practice, and conducting speech, language and communication needs assessments of children. Their reports enabled the project to capture extensive qualitative data about the development of speech, language and communication practices and the wider cascade of the Communication Champions training. This project came to an end in July 2020. However, it will be trialled again through the Norwich Opportunity Area's sharing learning activities.

"...the local appetite for further continuing professional development in speech and language was growing..."

Communication Champion

"Changed my thinking – gave me proactive view of what to do for children with speech, language and communication needs."

Communication Champion

Meanwhile, it was evident that the local appetite for further continuing professional development in speech and language was growing. To help develop expertise, the Norwich Opportunity Area began to offer local practitioners the opportunity to undertake some accredited Level 2 and 3 qualifications via the national speech and language training provider, Elklan. Accredited training added extra value to the project by giving staff the level of understanding needed to inform a more targeted approach. This offer was very popular, and in late 2019, with some practitioners still keen to advance their learning even further, the Norwich Opportunity Area invested further funding into 7 Educational Practice and Research Masters degrees at The University of East Anglia. This meant that the project could develop some Communication Champions to be at the forefront of new research. These students were chosen via an application process and each committed to completing their Masters dissertation on an area of speech and language development.

The results of this research will be shared next year with the Communication Champions Network via the Communication Hubs. The students are already well-linked to the hubs and will continue to share new learning with the Communication Champions Network.

Output measures

Before and after each tutor-led Communication Champions training module, delegates were asked to complete a baseline and end point questionnaire, as well as The I CAN self-assessment Speech, Language and Communication Framework. Analysis of these questionnaires showed a strong positive shift in practitioners' knowledge and confidence of identifying and supporting speech and language needs. The average knowledge score increased from a baseline score of 6.6/10 to 8.4/10 post-training, and the overall average score increased from 6.5/10 to 8.6/10. This trend was supported by the data gathered from the framework responses, which demonstrated a strong increase in practitioners' expertise in every section of the framework.

For the 118 practitioners that completed the core module of the online Communication Champions training, their confidence to identify a child with speech, language and communication needs rose from 57% to 98%. In addition, 91% of delegates said they had learnt new skills and 99% suggested that they would recommend this training to a colleague.

Communication Champions noted the following improvements to practice in their termly reports:

- Improved speech, language and communication assessments, usually through the introduction of the WellComm Toolkit that screens children for speech and language abilities, and the WellComm Wizard.
- Improved communication with parents and carers around children's speech, language and communication development (through better use of online journaling, digital resources, display boards and visuals).
- More opportunities created for parents and carers to attend speech, language and communication-focused events and activities (before COVID-19) such as early years Stay and Plays and Communication Cafés.
- Improved communication environments.
- Better use of visual timetabling and supportive resources (such as sensory items and visual timetables) to aid children's communication and understanding.

- More tailored and thought-out intervention and support planning for all children and particularly those with speech, language and communication needs.
- Increased use of diverse evidence-based interventions.
- Greater use of speech, language and communication auditing and more peer reviewing.
- More sharing of best practice and helpful resources, both between staff in school and across the area via the Communication Hub Network meetings.
- Improved links with local Early Childhood and Family Service bases, parent and toddler groups, libraries and other local schools and nurseries.
- Greater numbers of staff undertaking further speech, language and communication training opportunities.
- More conversations about children's speech, language and communication needs during regular slots at staff meetings.

- Better support for children with English as an additional language .

The figures for those who achieved at least the expected level of development in speech, language and communication early learning goals rose by 1.3 percentage points between 2017 and 2019, from 81.2% to 82.5. This reduced the gap with the national figure, which has remained static at 85.4%. Data also suggests a small rise in the percentage of all pupils achieving a good level of development in Norwich between 2017 and 2019 (up 2.3 percentage points from 64.2% to 66.5%), outstripping the national picture (up 1.1 percentage points from 70.7% to 71.8%). The most recent data from 2019 shows signs of significant progress for free school meals pupils in Norwich, who improved by 2.6 percentage points (from 54% to 56.6%) and now outperform the national average (up 0.5 percentage points from 56% to 56.5%).¹⁴

14 DfE data, broken down by local authority: www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-early-years-foundation-stage-profile

Project costs

Face-to-face Communication Champions training

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Creation and face-to-face delivery of 3 core and 3 leadership sessions in Norwich	Training delivered from the summer term of 2018 to summer term 2019	83 early years practitioners have undertaken the training, and beneficiaries are potentially unlimited	£32,895

Online Communication Champions training

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Creation of package and 2 follow-up sessions	Training delivered from the summer term of 2020 to present	320 to date but ultimately unlimited	£3,100

Virtual Communication Champions training

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Reconfiguring training to a virtual format and virtual delivery of 1 core and 1 leadership session	Autumn term 2020 to spring term 2021	34 early years practitioners	£5,640

WellComm early years toolkits

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Purchase of early years WellComm toolkit and WellComm Wizard licence renewals for 2019/20 and 2020/21	Toolkit unlimited, licences have a one-year duration	30 schools and settings, unlimited children	£17,395

Accredited Level 2 and Level 3 Eiklan training

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Delivery of Level 2 and 3 speech training	Autumn term 2019, to autumn term 2021	51	£20,712

Educational Practice and Research Masters at the University of East Anglia

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Delivery of part-time Educational Practice and Research MA	January 2020 to present	7 practitioners	£47,452

Communication Hubs

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Start-up costs	2019/20, 2020/21 2021/22	5 Communication Hubs with unlimited beneficiaries each	£50,000 (£10,000 for each hub's individual action plans, including activities such as continuing professional development)

Honorariums

Activity	Duration	Beneficiaries	Cost
Funding capacity for Communication Champions to work through responsibilities listed in the Memorandum of Understanding	2018/19, 2019/20	42 Communication Champions	£222,190
			Total £399,384



Sustainability

In February 2019, following the first round of Communication Champions training, the Norwich Opportunity Area had a large group of passionate and knowledgeable early years practitioners who had no fixed way of networking or sharing their learning and best practice. The Opportunity Area started running half-termly network meetings, which grew in attendance as more cohorts of Communication Champions were trained. To encourage sustainability, in the summer term of 2019, the Opportunity Area chose a selection of schools and settings, via an application process, to become Norwich's new Communication Hubs. These 4 hubs would act as 'centres of excellence' around children's speech, language and communication needs and take over the running of the network from September 2019.

The plan was for each hub to develop their own areas of expertise and lead in the sharing of knowledge and best practice for early years professionals in the Norwich Opportunity Area and beyond. The Communication Hubs would also monitor local training needs and use some of their funding to support future workforce development.

"I have found the Communication Hub Network meetings extremely helpful and engaging. Having done 2 thorough courses on speech, language and communication needs, the Communication Hubs have been brilliant at taking our learned information and making it really practical in terms of our professional practice. I have benefited from these groups and have enjoyed the varied topics."

Communication Champion

This model is aligned with the local authority's longer-term vision and approach.

To date, the Opportunity Area has established 5 Communication Hubs in Norwich:

- 3 focused on early years speech, language and communication development.
- One focused on speech, language and communication development of 0 to 2-year-olds.
- One focused on supporting community groups to help parents understand early years speech, language and communication development.

In September 2021, the Opportunity Area launches its sixth Communication Hub in Breckland as part of sharing learning. Together, these hubs will help to ensure the continuation and growth of the network, which has begun to spread beyond Norwich, and they will continue to advocate for the importance of effective speech, language and communication support. This model is aligned with the local authority's longer-term vision and approach.

Key ingredients for success

- Strong local leaders with the passion to drive system-wide change, share best practice and work collaboratively with schools, settings and early years professionals to improve communication and language outcomes for all children.
- Strong project management support and a project lead that is based in the existing Early Years Department at the local authority.
- Alignment with the local authority's longer-term goals and approach.
- A high-quality, relevant, engaging and evidence-based training programme that deploys a variety of delivery methods to suit all learners and circumstances.
- Dedicated and passionate early years practitioners who recognise the value that effective speech and language support can have on a child's lifelong development.



Derby case study



Derby: Talk Derby

Talk Derby aimed to increase the social mobility of children in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Derby by strengthening their development of speech, language and communication skills in early years.

The £715,631 project, which ran from spring 2019 to summer 2021, provided speech, language and communication training and support to schools, nurseries, childminders, children's centres and other early years settings. Trained staff also worked with parents and families to encourage interactions that would build their child's understanding, communication skills, confidence in self-expression, and vocabulary before they start school.

What was the problem?

Language is crucial for social mobility – good language at age 5 is the most important early skill in helping children escape poverty. As reported in the Department for Education report **Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential**, far too many gaps arise early and then prove stubbornly hard to close.¹⁵

Children who are behind in language development at age 5 are 6 times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11, and 11 times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths.¹⁶ Children who arrive at school in a strong position will find it easier to learn, while those already behind will face a growing challenge.

At the time of commissioning, educational outcomes in Derby were below national average, with just under 68% of pupils achieving a good level of development in 2017, 2 percentage points below national average. Additionally, just 70% of Derby's 11-year-olds attained the expected levels in reading in 2017 and 56% of 16-year-olds achieved a standard pass in English and maths, with these results likely having foundations in poor language development.

The gap between the percentage of children in the early years who achieve a good level of development in Derby and the national average was narrowing, but every year around 700 more 5-year-olds entered Key Stage 1 not having achieved the expected levels of development in speech, language and communication.

15 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-action-plan-summary>

16 Save the Children (2016) Early language development and children's primary school attainment in English and maths: new research findings, www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/early_language_development_briefing_paper.pdf



Implementation activities and successes

The project was split into 4 strands:

Strand 1, co-ordination

Awarded to Hemsalls, this strand was to manage and co-ordinate the project. Hemsalls were responsible for:

- Promoting the project and engaging early years settings.
- Developing all communication materials, including the creation and maintenance of the Talk Derby website, talkderby.org.uk.
- Conducting audits using **The Balanced System**.
- Allocating the training attendance allowance (a funding pot available for schools and settings to claim once they had completed a training course).

Strand 2, family engagement

Awarded to Elklan, this strand aimed to:

- Increase the quality and quantity of effective engagement between families and schools and settings to support children's speech, language and communication development.
- Increase parents' knowledge and confidence of what to expect and when in regard to speech, language and communication, and how to support their children's development in these areas.
- Provide parents with access to information and resources to encourage and support their roles as effective primary communicative partners for their children.

To achieve this, by the end of the project, Elklan aimed to:

- Train 80 practitioner tutors as licensed **Let's Talk at Home tutors**, with 80 self-nominated parent tutors trained and experienced as co-deliverers.
- Engage 800 parents from 80 schools and early years settings and deliver 2 **Let's Talk at Home** courses to each setting, with the second co-delivered by a parent tutor.



Strand 3, training

Awarded to Elklan, this strand aimed to:

- Increase early years practitioners' skills, knowledge, and understanding of speech, language and communication.
- Ensure that teachers and leaders are highly knowledgeable about communication-friendly approaches.
- Increase the competence and capability of schools and settings to respond effectively to identified speech, language and communication needs.

To achieve this, by the end of the project, Elklan aimed to deliver a proven package of practitioner training to staff across 30 schools, 50 settings, and 60 childminders, including:

- Level 3 training: **speech and language support for children aged 0 to 3** or **support for children aged 3 to 5**, targeting 140 practitioners.
- **Level 4 training:** communication-friendly settings for leaders and teachers.
- **Training in using the screening tool** identified by Strand 1 providers for the early years workforce.
- **Training** in identifying speech, language, and communication difficulties, for the wider workforce, including health visitors, family visitors and children's centre staff.



Strand 4, evaluation

Awarded to the University of Wolverhampton, the aim of Strand 4 was to monitor the programme and its impact.

The project aimed to engage every school and early years setting within the 8 most disadvantaged wards in Derby. However, in November 2019, Hemsalls submitted a recommendation to the Derby Opportunity Area Partnership Board to make the programme available to all settings across Derby. This proposal recommended that settings self-nominate for training but would be prioritised based on level of disadvantage. The recommendation was made owing to a slowing of uptake within the 8 wards due to workforce pressures and the introduction of other initiatives focused on supporting the development of communication and language in the early years. This recommendation was agreed by the board.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 had a huge impact on the ability to deliver Talk Derby. The additional pressures on the early years workforce meant some settings no longer had the capacity to engage in training. Setting closures and restrictions resulted in Elklan having to move courses online where possible. Restrictions were particularly disruptive to the parent training elements. This was because reaching parents was more challenging and the training required parents, their children, and a practitioner to attend face-to-face sessions.

As a result, the Partnership Board agreed to extend the project until August 2021. It also agreed to review and revise the original targets to reflect the change in circumstances, for example, by removing parent training targets and increasing the targets for courses which could be run virtually. These revisions can be seen in the following table on page 40.

Output measures

Strand	Activity	Original target	Progress at August 2020	Revised target	Progress at August 2021
2	Early years settings equipped to deliver sustainable family engagement programmes	80	52	80	57
	Early years practitioners trained as parent tutors to deliver to families	80	106	132	120
	Parents trained as co-tutors to deliver with early years practitioners	80	0	0	0
	Deliver the family engagement programme to families	80 families	65 parents	Up to 400 parents	281

Strand	Activity	Original target	Progress at August 2020	Revised target	Progress at August 2021
3	Speech and language support (Level 3) practitioner training	140	100	140	100
	Leaders and managers from 80 settings complete Level 4 training and lead their settings to achieve communication-friendly setting status	80	18	50	39
	Training in screening and evidence-based intervention for early years practitioners	160	48	120	101
	Training for the wider workforce	100	48	75	86

Early years outcomes have improved, with 70.7% of Derby's pupils achieving a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage in 2019. This is an increase of 2.8 percentage points since 2017, and compares favourably to a national average increase of 2.5 percentage points to 71.8% over the same period. The proportion of Derby's free school meals children achieving a good level of development at the end of early years foundation stage in 2019 was 60%, exceeding the national average of 56.5%. However, we cannot directly attribute these improvements to Talk Derby, as they were seen prior to the start of the project. Although we hope that Talk Derby has helped to secure improvements, due to the lack of data for 2019/20 and 2020/21, we do not have conclusive evidence to support this.

Evidence from the practitioner and parent surveys and qualitative research with practitioners (41 practitioner responses to online questionnaire surveys, 223 practitioner and 35 parent responses to pre- and post-training questionnaire surveys, and

10 practitioner interviews) indicate that involvement in Talk Derby had a positive impact on practice in settings and at home. However, the relatively small sample sizes, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, mean that these conclusions can only be tentative.

Practitioners reported that their confidence in helping young children to understand what they say increased considerably, as did their confidence in interacting with children to support their communication. Parents' confidence also increased, particularly their confidence in helping their child or children meet communication milestones.

More than 8 in 10 practitioners (n=33, 86.8%) who answered the online questionnaire said they had changed how they supported young children's speech, language, and communication since Talk Derby began. All practitioners who had been involved in both the Elklan training and the balanced system stated that they had changed their speech, language, and communication practice as a result.

“The difference from where we started to where we are now is immeasurable. It's exceeded our expectations, I think, from where we started [...] The support has just been brilliant.”

Children's centre practitioner



Project costs

Strand 1: Lead co-ordinating organisation for Talk Derby

Set-up costs	£35,000
Programme management and overhead costs	£86,000
Programme delivery: staffing costs	£119,725
Programme delivery: non-staffing costs	£28,900
Training attendance allowance	£35,000
Total cost:	£304,625

Strand 2: Family engagement provider

Set-up costs	£5,250
Programme management and overheads costs	£31,770
Programme delivery: staffing costs	£75,075
Programme delivery: non-staffing costs	£61,375
Total cost:	£173,470

Strand 3: Speech, language, and communication training provider

Set-up costs	£14,500
Programme management and overheads costs	£42,826
Programme delivery: staffing costs	£62,700
Programme delivery: non-staffing costs	£88,642
Total cost:	£208,668

Strand 4: Talk Derby evaluation

Set-up costs	£3,783
Programme management and overheads costs	£9,943
Programme delivery: staffing costs	£13,215
Programme delivery: non-staffing costs	£1,900
Total cost:	£28,841





Sustainability

Talk Derby consisted of high-quality continuing professional development training and support for in-school improvements. The project aimed to support, deliver, and maintain long-term, system-led improvements. Additionally, practitioners trained as communication-friendly settings tutors will be licensed to continue training until summer 2022.

Following the project, Derby City Council have created a five-year Speech, Language and Communication Integrated Strategic Model for children aged 0 to 5. The strategy aligns with the scope set out in the Department for Education's Early Outcomes Fund and will build on the work of Talk Derby to continue to develop the speech, language and communication offer. This revised strategy will help sustain long-term improvements and will continue to make use of the Talk Derby brand and logo.

Key ingredients for success

- Be ambitious but realistic with targets, and check capacity for the intervention as well as alignment to other offers. The original aim to engage all 140 settings within the 8 most disadvantaged wards was ambitious for a 15-month project, with the target to train 60 childminders proving particularly challenging given the demands on their time.
- Clear communications are imperative – it took time and a number of communication channels for the Talk Derby offer to be understood and for settings to make informed choices about which training opportunities were right for them. This challenge was made more difficult when targeting only 8 wards, as a number of communication channels would only promote offers available to all settings. Once the offer was expanded, it proved more effective to use existing communication routes such as childminder Facebook groups and links through children's centres. Building more time within the project plan to land and promote the offer before running training courses would have been beneficial.

“ Clear communications are imperative – it took time and a number of communication channels for the Talk Derby offer to be understood... ”



North Yorkshire Coast case study



North Yorkshire Coast: Professional development for early years practitioners

The North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area worked with partners to deliver continuous, high-quality professional development for early years practitioners. Alongside our early years projects, we have seen a rise of 5.9 percentage points in good level of development for all pupils between 2016 and 2019, bringing the area closer to the national average and the delivery plan target. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving a good level of development remains low, although we have seen an increase of 4.2 percentage points over the life of the programme.

What was the problem?

Too few children on the North Yorkshire Coast, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, were achieving a good level of development across the early learning goals. In 2016, approximately 400 children failed to reach this level. Without intervention, this gap grows wider at every following stage of education; it more than doubles to 9.5 months by the end of primary school, and then more than doubles again, to 19.3 months, by the end of secondary school.¹⁷

“Early education is a critical and enduring foundation for children’s success through the rest of their schooling.”

North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area Delivery Plan¹⁸

The Effective Education of Pre-School Education study has shown that quality pre-schooling continues to have a positive effect

on literacy and numeracy after a child has been in school for 5 years – underpinning its importance as a foundation for life.¹⁹

Stakeholders in the area were concerned that, in the core skill areas of both literacy and numeracy, disadvantaged children perform particularly poorly compared to similar children nationally.

It was also identified that the range and volume of training opportunities for the early years workforce was not at a level that staff would like, particularly for those working in private, voluntary and independent settings, which make up two-thirds of all early years provision in the borough.

The Opportunity Area programme team worked with Scarborough Teaching School Alliance, settings, and private, voluntary and independent nurseries to deliver a bespoke package of continuous, high-quality professional development.

17 https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual_Reports/EEF_Attainment_Gap_Report_2018.pdf

18 www.northyorkshirecoastoa.com/our-priorities/early-years/

19 The Research Schools Network is a collaboration between the Education Endowment Foundation and the Institute for Effective Education to fund a network of schools which will support the use of evidence to improve teaching practice. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/support-for-schools/research-schools-network>

Implementation activities and successes

Having a clear understanding of the specific issues faced by young children in the area, we wanted our intervention to be:

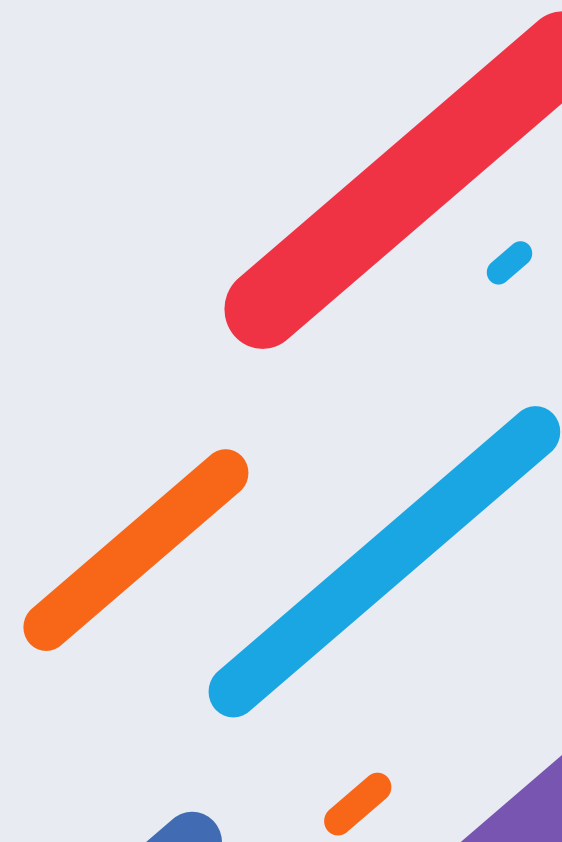
- Evidence-based and addressing the issues specific to our area, ensuring that the needs of the local children and providers were at the centre of everything we did.
- Targeted at specific settings that serve the most disadvantaged communities, using the number of free school places and local knowledge to identify these.
- Tracked during delivery, ensuring efficacy so that adjustments could be made in a timely manner.

The focus of the intervention was to upskill the local early years workforce through:

- Offering targeted training in detecting and supporting young children with speech, language and communication disorders and then providing these children with evidence-based interventions. This involved the use of the Early Talk Boost screening tool.²⁰
- Funding assessments for settings which were based on a well-evidenced research framework (Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing). This led to action plans for improvement in each setting, which were implemented with peer-to-peer support and additional continuing professional development focusing on effective adult-child interactions.
- In the fourth year of the Opportunity Area, we moved to an Early Years Hub model, funding Scarborough Teaching School and Childhaven Nursery School to co-ordinate the training and development offer as a centre of excellence. This package of support focused on:

- Early phonological awareness.
- Early speech and language.
- Understanding of the development of early number sense.
- Ensuring accurate and consistent judgments relating to early years attainment, specifically writing.
- Improving identification of and provision for children with SEND.

20 www.ican.org.uk/training-licensing/i-can-programmes/early-talk-boost



To date, the hub has worked with 24 private, voluntary and independent settings that serve high numbers of disadvantaged children. The hub moved quickly to develop and offer online continuing professional development sessions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These were focused on early speech and language development, phonics, maths and SEND. The hub has accredited 7 new Specialist Leaders in Education to work with settings, co-ordinating local networks and developing the capacity and capability of other practitioners to lead their own settings in improving their practices.

The focus for the fifth year of the programme is to embed system change, to ensure that these improvements continue. We will continue to fund the Early Years Hub, and their focus will be to strengthen links with the North Yorkshire Coast Research School, Yorkshire Endeavour English hub, and local authority improvement advisors to boost the early years continuing professional development offer. It will also establish an active, locally driven early years network for the area. The Specialist Leaders in Education will work closely with a network of private, voluntary and independent settings to support their improvement journey.

“We have accessed some great things that we normally wouldn’t have been able to. Online is the best way for us.”

Early years practitioner

“[The training has] helped with developing child-initiated play and open-ended learning. It has also helped us to focus on the speech and language skill strategies.”

Early years practitioner





Output measures

The programme put in place a strategy to support improved speech, language and communication. This aims to tackle a legacy of unmet speech and language needs, and to prevent children from starting primary school with communication skills below the expected level.

- 50 practitioners have been trained to deliver Early Talk Boost in their setting. Nationally, children in receipt of the intervention are likely to make around 6 months progress over 9 weeks.²¹
- 40 practitioners undertook a Level 3 qualification in early years speech, language and communication. They have become 'champions' in their setting, responsible for supporting colleagues to improve speech and communication skills. From a cohort of 86 children receiving the intervention, average pre- and post-assessment scores increased across all areas:

49%

Attention and listening
scores increased by 49%.



33%

Language (understanding)
scores increased by 33%.



46%

Language (speaking)
scores increased by 46%.



45%

Communication
scores increased by 45%.



²¹ Early Talk Boost was piloted between September 2014 and September 2015 to evaluate its impact on children's early language development. The evaluation framework was designed with the support of Professor Tim Pring at City University London to be as close as possible to a randomised controlled trial, considered to be the gold standard of research methods. <https://ican.org.uk/media/2949/early-talk-boost-evaluation2015.pdf>

- 18 settings were trained in Launchpad for Literacy, a skills-based approach to support diagnostic work in children’s speech, language and communication.²²

The second strand aims to improve early years pedagogy – the theory and practice of teaching:

- 25 settings had a developmental assessment to improve the quality of adults’ interactions with children.
- 30 practitioners have enrolled in an early phonics hub. This is a comprehensive training programme, led by an early years specialist in the Scarborough Teaching Alliance. The hub aims to improve practitioners’ understanding of early phonics and the fundamental skills that children need in order to be ‘literacy ready’.
- 6 local Specialist Leaders in Education have undergone training and support.



settings had a developmental assessment to improve the quality of adults’ interactions with children

22 www.launchpadforliteracy.co.uk



Project costs

The North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area has spent £262,595 between November 2017 and September 2020. The spend is broken down as follows:

Year	Activity	Spend
1 to 3	SSTEW and continuing professional development	£47,499
	Speech and language pathways	£119,712
Total		£167,211
4	Hub lead position	£29,734
	Leadership and management release	£22,750
	Training and deployment for Specialist Leaders in Education	£18,000
	Half-termly networks	£5,400
	External continuing professional development providers	£15,000
	Administrative costs including marketing, organisation and resources	£2,500
	Room hire and refreshments	£2,500
Total		£95,384

By the end of the 2021 to 2022 academic year, an additional spend of £112,810 is forecasted. This is to target 30 settings, including those that have not previously engaged with the hub. The spend covers in-house and external continuing professional development, the hub lead role, training and continuing professional development for Specialist Leaders of Education, half-termly networks, and administration costs.

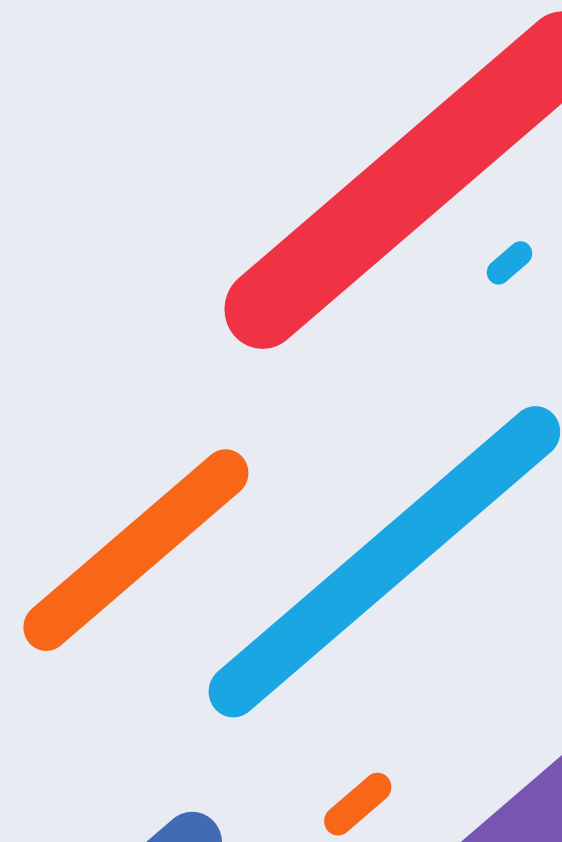
The addition of this fifth year of Opportunity Area funding brings our total spend to £375,405.

Sustainability

Adopting a hub model allows for continuity in the longer term, working alongside the new Teaching School Hub in the area to make use of their continuing professional development offer for early years. We will also consider the transition to a subscription model with private, voluntary and independent settings. By designating more early years Specialist Leaders in Education for the area, we hope to encourage the sharing of good practice through 'clusters' of settings, and that these networks will be self-sustaining.

Key ingredients for success

- Implementation was based on local knowledge of private, voluntary and independent settings. It built on existing relationships in the area and was led by an outstanding nursery school that had the reputation and knowledge to offer support and challenge with credibility based on their own practice.
- Delivery adapted to the changing circumstances with the COVID-19 pandemic and the different needs of private, voluntary and independent settings. Delivery took place through a combination of face-to-face support and by telephone. This made continuing professional development more accessible.
- There was a funded co-ordinator who was key to leading the offer. This promoted wider engagement, and provided opportunities to troubleshoot when issues arose.





Oldham case study



Oldham: Making it REAL

Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) helps early years practitioners to build parents' knowledge and confidence with reading and writing and create a strong early home learning environment, engage in their child's learning and to support their child's readiness for school by age 5. It has been part of Oldham's early years strategy since 2009, when Oldham participated in a National Lottery-funded partnership project with the University of Sheffield and National Children's Bureau.

Making it REAL was developed by professors Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Hannon at the University of Sheffield and has been developed and delivered by the National Children's Bureau. The National Children's Bureau is a charity that has worked for over 50 years in improving the lives of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable. The programme won the early years category at the Children and Young People Now Awards 2012, and in May 2013 Professor Cathy Nutbrown was the winner of an **ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize**

in recognition of the programme's achievements in research with an outstanding impact on society.

What was the problem?

In the 2015-16 academic year, only 60.5% of children in Oldham achieved a good level of development at age 5, compared to 69.3% of children nationally.

In the same year, 71.9% of children in Oldham achieved at least the expected level across all learning goals in communication and language – one of the key early learning goals within the good level of development – against an England average of 81.6%.

The Opportunity Area Partnership Board agreed to scale up the previous work that had already been delivered in Oldham with the National Children's Bureau and the Sutton Trust.²³ In the Oldham Opportunity Area plan, this came under Priority 1: 'Ensure all children are school-ready by the age of 5'.

23 <https://www.suttontrust.com/>



Implementation activities and successes

In 2018, the Opportunity Area funded the delivery of Making it REAL in 31 schools and settings, targeting 8 of the most deprived wards in Oldham. Delivery started in February 2018 and is ongoing. Practitioners are trained to use a framework that supports parents to provide opportunities for early literacy, recognising when children demonstrate early literacy, interacting with their children, and acting as a model for literacy (the ORIM framework).

Making it REAL had previously been delivered with nursery-age children. The Opportunity Area project extended the programme into the Reception year. Participating children and families were offered more home visits and events across the early years foundation stage in their school.

In addition to this targeted and intensive programme, a Sharing REAL with parents course was delivered to build parental confidence. The programme was also delivered for younger children aged 1 to 2 through children's centres.

Target local authority wards were identified where there were:

- Low levels of attainment in the early years foundation stage good level of development.
- Significant gaps in attainment between boys and girls.
- High levels of deprivation and entitlement to early years pupil premium.
- High levels of English as an additional language.

“I have liked being part of the REAL project, even other family members have got involved including elder sister who enjoys doing the activities with [the practitioner]. I am more able to help my daughter now because of the REAL project and visits because it has shown me what to do to help my child and I now understand.”

Parent

Operational support was commissioned through one of Oldham's teaching schools that had a proven record of delivering Making it REAL. This 'on the ground' support from a setting that had delivered Making it REAL successfully for many years was crucial in maintaining engagement from schools, as learning could be shared, and emerging challenges addressed quickly.

Early engagement with identified schools was a priority for the delivery team in order to gain buy in to the project. Two headteachers who had previously delivered Making it REAL in their own schools were asked to share their experiences with the participating schools to outline the benefits of the programme and the impact that it had on families and children's outcomes. They also shared how Making it REAL had become integral to their transition process.

Regular network meetings were held by the local authority delivery team in conjunction with the National Children's Bureau and this provided an opportunity for practitioners to share successes and effective practice such as hosting events in holidays, or using before or after school home visits once children were in full-time education.

The Making it REAL programme expanded to include children aged 0 to 2 via children's centres, with match funding from the local authority in order to make this a sustainable programme and to secure its future.

By the fourth year of the programme, the wards and settings that had delivered the programme were sustainable – the workforce had received the training and were given the autonomy and flexibility to make the programme work for them based on their school and community needs – and new areas were selected to further spread the programme.

The impact of COVID-19 meant that the standard model had to be adapted. Home visits were started but these changed to 'close to home' visits with books and activities dropped off for families, virtual learning sessions, calls made to parents from individual schools, and outdoor group events.

While recognising the significant practical challenges associated with home learning, many teachers noted the increased readiness for learning and improved capacity to deal with home learning for those families who had participated in Making it REAL, which could lead to a positive impact on progress and attainment for those children in the longer term.

"...can really clearly see that children who have been involved in REAL are performing really well. The REAL children and parents were better placed to respond well to doorstep drops with resources that were used during lockdown."

Teacher

"...clearly seen that children who engaged well during lockdown have found coming back to school much easier. A good number of these children were REAL children."

Teacher

"Thrilled that the project is continuing next year."

Head teacher



325



children have been reached directly by the programme

Output measures

Over 100 practitioners in 39 schools and settings have been trained and have completed the programme, reaching 325 children directly. The programme has also reached 197 siblings, and an additional 742 families have attended at least one of the 226 literacy events. The programme works directly with families while also building workforce capacity, delivering benefits to children now and into the future.

Of the children taking part in Making it REAL, 66.1% achieved a good level of development in 2019 (exceeding the 65% target). This has contributed to the significant increase in Oldham overall: in 2019, 68.1% of children in Oldham achieved a good level of development, an improvement to the position in 2018 when 64.1% of children achieved this. In 2018, Oldham ranked 151 out of 152 local authorities in the percentage of all pupils achieving a good level of development, but in 2019 Oldham's ranking was 129. Oldham has more than halved the gap to the national average which is now 3.7 percentage points.

In 2018/19, 77.5% of pupils achieved at least the expected level across all learning goals in the communication and language learning area. This was a 5.6 percentage point increase from 2015/16 against an England increase of 0.6 percentage points over the same period.

As part of the Making it REAL project, early years practitioners have provided intensive support to children by working directly with their parents (through 1,875 home visits and literacy events), with indirect benefits also spreading to other pupils in the class through the full-class group events and the books. 98% of respondents to the family survey reported doing more to support their children's learning at home as a result of taking part in Making it REAL, and the early findings suggest there is correlation between parental confidence and children achieving a good level of development.

“Before I didn’t really share books or go to the library. Didn’t used to take him to the supermarket. But now I do, thinking he will learn a lot more. I share books more, I talk more to encourage him to speak.”

Parent



Project costs

£900,090 has been committed to Making it REAL in Oldham across the 4 years of the programme. £556,439 of funding was paid in year 2, £184,397 in year 3 and £159,254 in year 4.

This funding was used for workforce training, school grants, workforce investment and resources – such as books, learning packs used during the COVID-19 lockdown, videos and educational and literacy resources. Funding was also allocated to backfill staff delivering home visits, which was the key resource to the success of the programme.

Training	£438,551
Local support and project management	£42,360
Resources for schools (backfilling, books, etc.)	£274,022
Delivery	£124,657
Evaluation	£20,500



Sustainability

Making it REAL will continue to be delivered as a key project within the Early Years Strategy in Oldham. The flexibility of the programme enables it to be sustainable and to evolve, depending on funding available and individual needs of schools and settings.

Practitioners and parents are trained as trainers to enable the project to continue beyond the Opportunity Area funding.

Surveys of practitioner views and, separately, a survey of headteacher views of the Making it REAL project were conducted. All practitioners reported at least some impact from Making it REAL, with 93.3% reporting either a 'fair' or 'a great deal' of impact in improving their knowledge and practice in both supporting early literacy and working with parents to support early literacy.

Key ingredients for success

- Early engagement with schools and stakeholders.
- Clear messaging around the aims of the project, the impact on pupils in Oldham, and the aims of the Opportunity Area.
- Giving schools and settings autonomy to identify their own need and solutions.
- Amending the standard delivery model when unforeseen circumstances arose, to accommodate innovative delivery methods.



Further information



The Hungry Little Minds campaign

website features tips and practical activities that parents can do at home with children to support their early learning.

www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk

The Department for Education has published an early years online resource which contains guidance and practical support for childminders, nursery leaders and pre-school practitioners.

www.help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/

Opportunity Areas

Opportunity Areas selection methodology

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650036/Opportunity_areas_selection_methodology.pdf

Delivery plans for the 12 Opportunity Areas

www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas

An independent process evaluation of the set-up phase of the programme and a summary document featuring case studies of progress in each area

www.gov.uk/government/publications/opportunity-area-programme-research-and-analysis

Transparency data: Education statistics by local authority district and pupil disadvantage

www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-statistics-by-la-district-and-pupil-disadvantage

West Somerset

westsomersetopportunityarea.co.uk

Norwich

norwichopportunityarea.co.uk

Derby

derbyopportunityarea.co.uk

North Yorkshire Coast

northyorkshirecoastoa.com

Oldham

oldhamopportunityarea.co.uk

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Pages 7, 9–10, 19, 42: Oldham Early Years Team

Pages 21–22, 25, 27, 33, 35–39, 45–46, 49–51, 54–55, 59, 62: DfE Early Years Framework video series





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