

Reaching Out, Supporting Families

Capturing the Learning

The National Lottery Community Fund invested £25 million in 36 projects working to support families for a period of five to seven years.



Each project committed to working towards **three** outcomes:

1.
More children and their families will have greater skills, knowledge and understanding to overcome adversity

2.
More children and their families will come together to learn

3.
More children and their families will be part of the community that they live in

What were the key changes observed by projects over five years?



The most reported changes for parents and children fall into three categories:

- 1. INCREASED CONFIDENCE**
- 2. ENHANCED WELLBEING**
- 3. REDUCED ISOLATION**

1. Increased confidence:

What does increased confidence look like for families?

Increased confidence in parenting / caring role

Better understanding of children's needs.
Strategies to address those needs.

Higher levels of self-esteem
For parents and children.



Increased social confidence
Ability to seek support and engage in education.

2. Enhanced wellbeing:

What does enhanced wellbeing look like for families?

Better health
Both physical and mental.

Improved relationships
Between family members.
Better communication and more trust.



Increased ability to cope
Feeling more resilient.
Reduced stress/anxiety.

3. Reduced isolation:

What does reduced isolation look like for families?

Increased knowledge of other supports.

Building relationships
Making friends, development of peer support etc.



Shared experiences
Support through sharing knowledge and experience in a safe place.

What did we learn about implementing a five year family support programme?



The **Active Implementation Formula** describes the essential components of good implementation. It emphasises that an effective intervention (a programme or service), effective implementation methods and an enabling context are equally important to see significant outcomes.



The WHAT: designing services to support families

ETHOS AND VALUES: central to family support service design.

Community development, whole-family approaches, trauma-informed approaches, supportive empowerment, reducing isolation and advocacy are strongly embedded in the Programme.

“The family and inter-generational ethos of (the project) was noted as a key ingredient in its impact, giving families time to come together to learn in a supportive and welcoming environment... (Evaluator)”

ACCESSIBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY: one service design does not fit all.

One-off, fun or anonymous activities let parents build relationships with projects. They raise awareness of available supports and connect with parents who might not have sought out support. Projects increased engagement with a range of flexible, low-commitment offerings.

Others achieved the same end through a service design that was bespoke, person-centred and relationship based.



The HOW: Effective Implementation methods

INVESTING IN ENGAGEMENT: There could be no successful achievement of project goals without good quality engagement with families, making engagement a key enabler of successful project implementation and co-production.

Engagement, and continuous improvement through **CO-DESIGN WITH PARTICIPANTS**, create services that meet the needs and utilise the assets of the parents and communities - to the benefit of both.

“The parents... have a voice that is heard in terms of developing opportunities that meet the needs of themselves and other local families. (Project)”



The CONTEXT: Creating an enabling context for the work

TRUST AND SAFETY: Cultivating trust and carefully pacing the work is a repeated theme.

“The investment in establishing trusting positive relationships and the provision of activities which enable... relationship building – trust, support, kindness, patience, community – has enabled the project to engage effectively with vulnerable people, whose previous relationship with agencies has been tenuous and / or frustrating.” (Evaluator)

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP: Partnership working does not just happen, but needs to be cultivated, invested in and led, even after it has been formally negotiated and agreed. A shared vision, a well managed partnership, mutual benefits and tenacity are some of the noted enablers of successful partnerships.

What did we learn about effective family support practice?



1. The core components of effective family support

WHOLE-FAMILY APPROACH

"Whole family systems may need to alter to achieve positive change."

Achievement of outcomes was seen to be linked to focusing on the whole family rather than the individual referred.

'Whole family' approach

Activities together strengthen family relationships

Engagement

Evidence-informed practice



"We all got to be together and do something as a family, where I got to be with my dad, my nieces and he got to be with all his grandchildren... For once we felt people seen us and listened to us for who we really are, not what we should or shouldn't be" (Carer).



ACTIVITIES TOGETHER STRENGTHEN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES. Activities that provided quality family time along with access to peer support were highly valued by parents, children, schools, and partners, and were associated with improved relationships, increased family time, and opportunities to learn together.

ENGAGEMENT. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to engaging with children, families and communities. Projects have developed engagement activities that work, from light-touch activities – Zumba, family fun days, baby cafés, which build confidence in participants and trust in the service – to home visits, therapeutic and relationship based approaches and residential.



EVIDENCE INFORMED PRACTICE. Reaching Out, Supporting Families projects used evidence in their service design. Some use evidence-based programmes with fidelity and evidence informed measuring tools to demonstrate effectiveness. Projects have also developed an evidence base of what works for their families.

2. Understanding the impact of adversity

A BROAD RANGE OF FAMILIES CAN FIND THEMSELVES IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES.

Sometimes, otherwise resilient families hit a bump in the road and need support.

Projects found that often, families are not struggling to deal with one specific issue that is easily addressed, but a multitude of pressures, making it difficult for them to know where to begin making changes or finding solutions. Projects found benefits in using a **trauma-informed approach** to working with families. They recognised the need for individualised, tailored approaches to help families make changes.

Early intervention strategies, services and supports were highlighted as important for helping to interrupt and prevent ongoing patterns of adversity that detrimentally impact people's lives.



3. The role of peer support

Benefits of peer support have been found for a range of groups, including breast feeding women, rural participants, parents facing family challenges, and adults experiencing stigma and isolation.

In creating a safe space for peer support, projects noted the need for confidentiality, flexibility, and the availability of one-to-one contact alongside group support.

Peer support was seen to contribute to a sense of wellbeing and improved mental health.

