



Leading learning and skills



Opening the door

**Case studies from 2008/09 Family
Learning Impact Funding programmes**

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Case study 1 – Isle of Wight – Bargain Summer

Provider: Isle of Wight

Region: South East

FLIF programme: Family Financial Capability

Course title: Bargain Summer

Number of hours: 72

Target audience: Families in social housing

Case study focus: Tailoring provision of Financial Capability course to the needs of families at risk

Key messages:

1. Use of learner champion key to successful recruitment;
2. Involving learners in planning course
3. Trips and activities key to engaging whole family
4. Learners progressing to numeracy and literacy courses

“The stress has gone out of what I can do with my children in the holidays”

The Isle of Wight’s Community and Family Learning officer, Kerry Baker, had tried three times to recruit a family financial capability programme. However, few of the families targeted through voluntary sector partners showed any interest. Kerry felt that families were afraid of joining such a course, thinking that other learners would find out about their problems.

Kerry, who was also to be the tutor on the course, decided to talk through the situation with a learner, J. Herself a single parent who had attended various family learning courses on the island, J had now taken up a position as a volunteer on the Youth Offending Panel and was shortly to start Catch 22¹ training.

Kerry explained to J about the Family Learning Impact Funding target groups and the outline of the family financial capability course she had in mind – identifying family budgets and good value family activities over the summer holidays. “Oh, you mean a bargain summer - that sounds great,” replied J.

¹ <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/>

and she undertook to find families within the target group who would do the course.

J. recruited eleven learners with children of different ages from 2 years to 15 years. All the adults were living in social housing and were new learners: seven were lone parents, three were survivors of domestic violence, one had alcohol problems, eight had mental health issues and one had entry level 2 skills in reading and writing.

J. became the learner champion for the course. She attended sessions herself and helped to build the other learners' confidence and understanding of the background and rationale of the course. The learners were very interested to hear about Family Learning Impact Funding and over the weeks confided their personal circumstances to the tutor.

From the outset, the learners were directly involved in planning the course, in terms of session content, times and venues. Main sessions took place at the Family Learning Centre and a community venue identified by the learners, on weekdays and at weekends. The group used ICT to research bargain or free activities locally, and sessions included trips to the beach and countryside for planned picnics and activities, for example a fossil hunt and beach games. Different activities were planned to cater for the different age ranges of the children involved on the course. The beach trip attracted the whole family and the eleven learners came with most of their children bringing the total to 40.

All activities took on a budgeting angle. At the beginning of the course, each family was allocated £35 for activities through the holidays such as small entry fees, transport and food for trips. The project supplied a few materials such as an outdoor detective kit, including magnifying glass and identification books.

Families were encouraged to put together an activities kit including paper and pens and to develop particular activities, for example kite making. Healthy eating and exercise were covered in the comparison of prices for own-bought picnic and restaurant meals and petrol/public transport costs compared with walking.

The learners were given a disposable camera to take photographs of activities at home as evidence of learning. They had money from the project to process the photos and annotated them as a further record. Following a letter to the children from Kerry saying how happy she was that they had joined the course, the children were given several stamped addressed postcards to write, illustrate and send back to Kerry during the holidays saying what they had done. This also gave them some literacy practice over the long break. The families planned to make scrapbooks of their activities, using free items like brochures, web printouts and their own illustrations.

Because the subject of pocket money for the children was raised by the parents, the children too were set a budgeting task. The parents agreed to try

and fix pocket money at about £5 a week per child (varying in age) through the holidays. The children in turn would then have to prioritize and limit spending accordingly.

The course showed very clearly that financial capability requires literacy and numeracy skills. For example, at the start of the course, none of the learners could read a bus timetable which precluded them from making use of public transport as a money saver. All the families joined the library while on the course after they analysed the cost of buying the children comics through the holidays. The children have also signed up to the Reading Agency's summer reading challenge.

Learners set up a buddy system whereby two families go shopping together. One learner gets on with shopping while the other learner takes the children round the shop doing activities. Then they change roles. Kerry comments that two learners have reported that the buddy system is working well for them. They get less stressed and think more about what they are buying.

The families are continuing to use the skills gained on the course. A group has checked out cheap train travel offers and is planning an October half-term visit to the London museums, taking advantage of a cheap train offer. The learners are asking for another course on budgeting for Christmas. Kerry reports that learners are now texting her when they discover a bargain and she texts the rest of the group.

Learning champion, J. has been crucial in giving the learners information on further learning as she can speak from personal experience. Six learners are interested in doing a numeracy course and one learner a literacy course as she could not understand the financial language.

Kerry commented that it was an exciting and challenging course. "Family financial capability is not a natural first choice of course for new learners with lots of other issues in their lives. But this group was fantastic and J. was vital. It's not an easy group to teach and you as the tutor have to very versatile and think on your feet – this is not teaching for the inexperienced tutor."

As one learner reported after the course:

"I'm so excited – I can't wait for the children to be off school"

Case study 2 – Nottingham – Family SEAL

Provider: Nottingham

Region: East Midlands

FLIF programme: Wider Family Learning

Course title: Family SEAL

Number of hours: 20

Target audience: Mothers, fathers and carers of children who are persistently absent from school and children who have behaviour difficulties

Case study focus: Improving parent-child relationships through engaging families at risk in Family SEAL

Key messages:

1. Families may resent being 'targeted'. Skills and experience of the tutor are fundamental to resolving these issues;
2. Improving parents' engagement with school;
3. Increased bonding and supportive networking between parents;
4. Increased confidence of parents and improved parenting skills.

Having successfully piloted the four week Family SEAL² course earlier in the year in other city venues, this school was the first to host the full eight week course covering all of the SEAL themes and domains. They were very keen to have the course and remained proactive in the recruitment of parents of children who were persistently absent from school.

Initially there was some scepticism and hostility amongst the parents, which they voiced openly and vociferously during the first few sessions. They felt that they had been targeted by the school to attend the course because their children were seen as 'difficult' and they themselves were seen as difficult/ambivalent parents. After several weeks and some delicate and diplomatic discussions between staff, tutor and parents, the atmosphere calmed quite significantly and there appeared to be a volte-face by all the parents – they recognised that the course was interesting,

² Family Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning:

http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/66383?uc=force_uj

informal, beneficial and fun and felt that they were lucky to be a part of the first eight week course to run in the city, and to be 'chosen' by the school to attend.

Prior to the course, some of the parents did not feel that they had a good relationship with the school and several parents said they felt uncomfortable being in the school and working alongside the staff. Again, these concerns and fears appeared to be dispelled and a co-operative and friendly relationship between school and parents was established which, it is believed, will now continue.

For some members of the group, it was the first time they had come into the school, attended a course or become acquainted with other parents living locally. One particular parent, who has a background of depression/mental health difficulties, poor literacy skills and low self esteem, grew hugely in self-confidence and her enthusiasm to learn and better herself and her children's outcomes was immensely rewarding. Initially, she was reluctant to attend, but is now able to speak in front of the group, offer advice and support and make friends and is keen to keep on learning.

The group formed a strong network as they came together each week and gradually opened up to one another, sharing experiences and supporting one another. During the course, the confidence and self-belief of some learners grew visibly, friendships were made and kind gestures shown. The group is now enthusiastic and motivated and is planning to continue to meet every week, with the assistance of the Parent Support Worker.

All the learners reported positive changes, some significant, in their home and family life. In the final session the parents were able to accurately recall all the themes of SEAL and gave anecdotal evidence of how they had successfully practised the skills and suggestions at home with their children. All of the parents reported how much their children enjoyed these 'special afternoons' and also learning with and spending time with their parents at home:

"I think this has made me a better mum...I listen much more than I used to. I am calmer and more patient...and I am now more aware of his feelings and ways to listen to him and help him. It has given me lots more ideas to try at home."

"I feel so much more confident in dealing with [my son] now. At first I said he was awful...a monster who was out of control. I now know that I can sort things out and not let things go as I used to...like sleeping - I really didn't think he would ever sleep and I thought the videos and advice was a load of rubbish...but it worked!! I couldn't believe it, I now see how important it is for him to get a good night's sleep and why he maybe behaved the way he did....he was tired and I gave in all the time. Now I can sort it out - I have done it. My relationship with him is now brilliant because really he is brilliant."

"I never really came out of the house before. I have really enjoyed spending the time with my children. I have learnt loads that is going to help me with my

kids. I now think I am a good parent and I feel so much more confident. It has opened my eyes to my children....I understand their feelings better and I am now able to listen to them more. I can now talk to people and in front of other people. I would like to say that I think I am a happier person since I have done this course."

"I try to treat my children as individuals now. I know we share more time together – we have now proper family time. I have been really happy to attend each week and mix with the group. My kids have loved me joining them in their school."

Case Study 3 – Nottingham – Guns & Gangs

Provider: Nottingham

Region: East Midlands

FLIF programme: Wider Family Learning

Course title: Law and Order

Number of hours: 20

Target audience: Young unemployed African Caribbean fathers/carers

Case study focus: Engaging young fathers who had been involved in criminal activities in exploring how to prevent their children getting involved

Key messages:

1. Working with community group helped to enhance the tutor base and engage this group of learners;
2. Importance of establishing boundaries and building up trust;
3. Group discussions were key, with tutor taking a facilitator role;
4. A safe environment was vital to enabling honest and open discussion.

Nottingham City Council imported the Law & Order course from the Isle of Wight, as part of an Action Research project transferring practice between local authorities. They were delivering the programme predominantly to white working class mums and, with the FLIF funding, wanted to extend the reach to different ethnic groups, in particular looking at issues around guns, gangs and knives. They identified that, in order to reach this client group, they needed a different tutor base to the one that their usual partner, a local FE college, was able to offer. In the words of one of the partners, 'What will a middle-aged, middle-class white woman be able to teach me about guns, gangs and knives?' They therefore began working with a new partner, Take-One, a community group that offered E2E³ and PCDL⁴ courses and was very successful in reaching Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

Take-One offers courses above a barber shop, popular with African Caribbean men. For this programme, they targeted young, predominantly African Caribbean dads aged between 19 and 25. All the participants had been in trouble with the law at some point, and were known to organisations such as Youth Offending Teams, the Probation Service and Connexions.

³ Entry to Employment

⁴ Personal and Community Development Learning

Most were unemployed and those who were working were in low-skilled, low-paid work. Many had drug problems (mostly cannabis) and several were involved with local gangs.

The course ran as an adult-only course in the first instance. Eight learners started and completed the course which gave them the opportunity to explore their experiences of the criminal justice system and look at how they could prevent their children getting involved in gangs and criminal activity. Speakers were invited from the Youth Offending Team, magistrates, Community Support Officers and Nottingham Homes (a local housing association). Although the original intention was to invite police officers from the drug squad, it was agreed that this might be too confrontational and that the Community Support Officers who already had a relationship with the community, would be more appropriate.

The course was tailored to suit the needs and backgrounds of the learners. The learners wanted to explore their experiences and look at what they could do for their children. Tutors, therefore, took a facilitating role rather than a course delivery role, and the course was modified to emphasise group discussions. This was the most powerful aspect of the course - the learners valued being able to express their opinions and challenge each other in a safe environment. They learned to articulate their perspectives and to feel less threatened by different opinions. They also valued the opportunity to talk with representatives from criminal justice services, in a safe environment, 'on their own turf', where power relationships were more equal than the situations in which they would normally encounter these services. The line between what could and could not be discussed without consequences, was made very clear, so learners were sure about the boundaries and felt safe. Guest speakers were always brought in part way through a session, so that there was always the opportunity to remind learners of these boundaries.

Immediate progression from the course included 2 learners moving on to Skills for Life Numeracy courses and two becoming further involved with Take-One's activities such as music recording, photography, DJ-ing etc. Nottingham Family Learning Service hopes to develop aspects of the programme to include the children in future, and hopes that the other activities and resources that Take-One offer will help to engage the children and overcome some of the challenges of working with a mixed age group. They intend to further develop the partnerships that have been integral to this and the other law and order courses. They feel that this programme has 'taken the partnership to another level.'

Case study 4 – Staffordshire – School Information for Parents

Provider: Staffordshire

Region: West Midlands

FLIF programme / Course title: School Information for Parents

Number of hours: 16

Target audience: Low income and unemployed families with English as an Additional Language and no formal qualifications

Case study focus: Helping parents with skills for life needs to become more involved with the school system and to address their skills for life needs.

Key messages:

1. Using different partners to help with delivery added value to the programme and helped to engage and retain learners;
2. The head teacher's pro-active involvement was key to recruiting learners;
3. Parents felt better able to support their children's learning and were more involved with the school;
4. 15 of the 17 learners progressed to skills for life courses;

This School Information for Parents programme was originally funded for 12 hours, but was extended to 16 hours in order to include a celebration event where parents came in to school to have lunch with their children.

Parents were targeted for the programme who were considered 'hard to reach.' The school head teacher identified that these families consistently did not attend any school events. The parents had little or no engagement with the school and were typically described as parents who 'leave the children at the school gates.' The aim of the programme was to get these parents more involved with the school system and to look at their own personal progression in order for them to help their children. The programme gave the parents a voice and provided opportunities for them to take responsibility for their own learning.

The learners met a number of the 'families at risk' categories. They all had English as an additional language and had no formal qualifications within the UK. The families were all on low income and, in some cases, no parent within the household worked. Some of the other baskets of need were also identified but due to the sensitive nature of these, the school preferred them not to be disclosed.

17 mothers attended the programme, which was over and above the expected number. They were all from different ethnic backgrounds and had not pursued employment or furthered their education since arriving in the UK. Although it was slightly disappointing that the programme did not attract any male learners, it was felt that due to the cultural and religious backgrounds, this would have proved difficult.

The focus of the programme was to raise awareness of the school's policies and procedures. The parents were shown how their children learn in school, looking at the importance of the literacy hour and other aspects of the school curriculum. They were made familiar with the key people within the school that had involvement in their child's learning. The programme was developed and delivered in a fun practical way which involved working with children's centres, libraries, local colleges (for Information, Advice and Guidance) and the Primary Care Trust. Using different partners added value to programme delivery as they provided the expertise within their own areas, and helped to keep the programme interesting and to engage and retain the target learners.

The course was successful as a result of the strong leadership within the particular school. The head teacher took personal responsibility for targeting the learners most suitable for the transition programme. She spoke to the parents informally and individually at the school gate, which personally engaged every learner that enrolled.

The learners fed back that they were more aware of their children's education which in turn, would help them support their children with their learning. For example, sharing books and bedtime stories raised awareness of the benefits of reading together, and parents fed back that in some cases the relationship between themselves and their children had improved. They were made aware of the key people within the school and now felt more comfortable in approaching various people. 15 of the 17 learners are pursuing further Skills for Life learning and some of the parents have opted to do volunteer work within the school.

An evaluative DVD is in production which will be uploaded to the council's website and will be used to promote family learning within Staffordshire.

Case study 5 – Trafford – Early Years Foundation Stage

Provider: Trafford

Region: North West

FLIF programme: Early Years Foundation Stage

Course title: Keep up with your children in the Early Years

Target audience: Families in touch with social care professionals

Case study focus: Engaging families at risk to support their children's learning

Key messages:

1. Small group size helped learners with low confidence feel comfortable and share ideas;
2. Involvement of nursery teaching assistant helped to bring the course to life;
3. Opportunity for one-to-one sessions;
4. Learners progressed to further learning.

"I'm getting dad involved and teaching him... everyone was arguing but now it's a good relationship. Thinking more about what I want to do in the future."

This course was attended by a small group of five families who were considered to be 'at risk'. Two of the parents had left school at 14 because of pregnancy, none were employed and all had children with disabilities including visual impairment and possible ADHD. All families on the course were receiving or had received Family Support from a social care professional.

The size of the group meant that the parents received much individual attention. They said that they felt more comfortable talking and sharing thoughts and ideas in a small group. One learner said that she would never normally talk in a group but that she had felt confident enough to do it.

The course encouraged parents to seek ways to support their child's learning, to consider in what ways they are a good teacher of their children and also to reflect on their own skills and how they could enhance them.

The session on phonics was particularly powerful as the parents realised that they had been saying the letters incorrectly. One parent reported: “Now I know what he means when he’s talking about ‘Maisy and the mountain’ and I say ‘mmm not m-ugh’... he tells me I’m doing it right”. Each child was given a placemat that included letters for them to practice and their name. As there were some speech issues with the children, elements in the course that related to speech and language, such as the Language Pyramid which looks at how children acquire language, were also very pertinent.

An integral part of the course included input each week from the teaching assistant. This worked incredibly well as each week she brought in resources from the nursery and explained how they were used. This gave parents an insight into how the children were being taught, the importance and value of play and what the children were actually learning. The teaching assistant was very approachable and clearly had the respect of the parents. She also made time to give one-to-one attention at the end of each session.

As part of the course, the parents got ‘hooked’ on creating a storysack and really enjoyed the craft activity. The teaching assistant has arranged for them to come in for another session to work on the sack now that the course has completed. She is also arranging some ‘arts and crafts with your child’ for over the summer. Both the teaching assistant and Family Support worker are very keen to nurture this group and also to welcome new parents when they join in September.

One mother, whose son wanted her to draw for him but felt that she could not draw, was encouraged by the tutor to trace ‘Rory the Racing Car’ onto her storysack. She then spent four weeks carefully painting it with fabric paints. Her son was incredibly proud when he saw it.

Learners said that they had a much better understanding of how to help their children do well in school, they listened more to their children, they did more activities together, could understand and cope better with school. Some enrolled on further education courses.

“I want to better my life by going to college.”

Case study 6 – Hackney – Family Financial Capability

Provider: Hackney

Region: London

FLIF programme: Family Financial Capability

Course title: Cracking the Credit Crunch

Number of hours: 60

Target audience: Families living in areas of deprivation

Case study focus: Enabling families at risk to take more control of day-to-day finances and to achieve qualifications

Key messages:

1. Family Liaison worker was key to recruiting and retaining learners;
2. Tutor acted as 'facilitator' and encouraged discussion;
3. Linking personal finance with national financial policy and infrastructure achieved high level of debate;
4. 8 of the 11 learners achieved a qualification, many progressed to further learning.

The "Cracking the Credit Crunch" course was a 60 hour programme that was delivered over 15 weeks. The aim was to give families living in areas of deprivation an opportunity to take more control of their personal day-to-day finances but also to understand how wider financial learning linked to their own personal objectives. It was hoped that the course would help de-mystify a lot of financial language. The group of 11 were a mixture of young women, mostly aged under 30 who had few if any formal qualifications. They included 2 Indian women, 2 white, 2 Caribbean and a number of mixed race learners.

Most of the group did not work outside the home and were living in areas of multiple deprivation. They had not been involved in any learning for some time and had left school with little confidence in their abilities due to a lack of qualifications and other achievements.

The group gelled quickly, helped by the provision of lunch which gave them the opportunity to bond outside the learning environment. They were very supportive of one another and a couple emerged as 'leaders' in terms of initiating discussion and encouraging others to get involved. The tutor acted more as a facilitator and encouraged wide-ranging discussion. He also

delivered in a very flexible way bringing in key external factors; for example, when the Budget was announced, the group spent some time exploring what that meant for them. They also had a trip to the Bank of England to find out more about the infrastructure behind financial institutions. According to the tutor the level of discussion was impressively high “it could almost have been a degree level course some of the time when you reflected on the level of debate.”

Learners visibly grew in confidence and one moved on from the course into paid employment. Others expressed a wish to undertake further learning. Although many were daunted by the idea of putting together an extensive portfolio for their assessments, the sense of achievement when they completed this task greatly increased their self-belief and encouraged them to go on to further learning.

Recruitment of learners was carried out through a family liaison worker in the community. This was key to the success of the project as she was able to attract learners who would probably not have had the confidence to put themselves forward without her support and encouragement. The liaison worker also visited the group during most sessions and this helped in terms of retention.

Eight of the eleven learners achieved a qualification as a result of the programme.

Case study 7 – Oldham – Early Years Foundation Stage

Provider: Oldham

Region: North West

FLIF programme / Course title: Early Years Foundation Stage

Target audience: Families living in areas of deprivation

Case study focus: Working with children's centres to help parents learn about their children's learning

Key messages:

1. Holding classes in children's centres raised parents' awareness of other opportunities available there;
2. Working closely with creche managers enabled data collection on children using the creche;
3. For many learners, the concepts at the heart of the EYFS structure were new to them;
4. Parents learned how playing with their children promotes learning.

"I didn't realise that playing with play dough helped my child to write."

The courses were mainly delivered in children's centres in the heart of the deprived areas of urban Oldham. Some of these centres were in white working class estates, where it had been traditionally very hard to engage with learners who were disaffected. Other centres were in areas of high percentage ethnic minority families, mainly Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities.

Holding classes in children's centres proved very successful. Whilst coming to class, learners became aware of other groups using the centre, or gathered information on other services. One learner joined the midwife classes and was also seeking help with breast-feeding. The quality of resources and physical environment of the centres was high. Learners appreciated the venues and this helped greatly in delivering a quality service. The use of interactive whiteboards meant learners could experience 'new technology' and be more familiar with how their children were learning in schools.

The Family Learning team also worked closely with the services' own crèche managers and as a result developed systems to collect data on children using the crèche. These children also benefited from their parents attending a family

learning programme as they received quality play and interaction during their time in crèche.

During each joint session, the teacher observed the children interacting with their parents and noted any developmental progress. She also catalogued any progress during nursery sessions, which she believed to be as a direct response to involvement in family learning.

One parent, who had limited English skills, attended sessions with her child. The child was fluent in English but did not choose to talk either in class or in nursery. After attending a few family learning joint sessions, this child, with gentle encouragement and close contact with her mother, started to talk. The child subsequently stated that she had “decided to start talking to her teachers now.”

Learning about the Early Years Foundation Stage structure and how it contributed to their child’s learning was an eye-opener for many of the learners. Many did not know or understand basic foundation concepts such as ‘self esteem’ or ‘unique’. Most were not familiar with the curriculum and did not understand how the emphasis on play related to learning. Many were amazed at the breadth of learning that occurred during the joint session activity.

“I’m amazed at my child, she is talking more. I ask her questions about books now not just read them to her.”

Case study 8 – Bolton – Early Years Foundation Stage

Provider: Bolton

Region: North West

FLIF programme / Course title: Introductory and Short Early Years Foundation Stage

Number of hours: 12 and 30 hours

Target audience: Families living in an area of deprivation and diverse ethnicity

Case study focus: Engaging families at risk to enhance their skills, increase their ability to support their children's learning and learn about learning

Key messages:

1. Embedding the social and emotional aspects of learning, skills for life and the EYFS within the Every Child Matters framework;
2. Parents learned the value of play in their child's development;
3. Joint planning and development between the family learning service and the school ensured the programme was relevant for the school and the families;
4. FLIF funding enabled a useful trip to be incorporated in the programme, which families would not have been able to afford otherwise;
5. Following the course, parents set up their own group to raise money and provide activities.

See also: Case studies 9 & 11

" [My daughter] looked forward to the day mum was going to be in nursery with her. The chance to read books as a group and take part in games."

Bolton's Family Learning Service invested time working with the local Every Child Matters Partnerships and individual Nursery Heads. They jointly identified settings with a diversity of need, and individual families within these settings that the nurseries felt would benefit from joining a family learning course. They agreed to offer a programme that embedded Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning and Development, Skills for Life and the Early Years Foundation Stage within the Every Child Matters Framework. The nurseries also identified early numeracy as an emerging need for some of their parents and children. The principle of the 'Unique Child' became the central focus of the courses and adult learning literacy activities were developed using

reflective play observation records, little learning passports and an end of course Family Circle Time memory book.

This particular Early Years Foundation Stage course was held in a children's centre nursery school in a deprived area of Bolton, where the intake is approximately 90% families of Indian origin. The nursery was keen for the Family Learning Service to work with the parents, as they wanted to engage them more actively in the school and with their children.

12 women attended the course. 10 of the learners were of Indian heritage, 1 Pakistani and 1 white parent. The white parent, in particular, had low esteem and the Indian parents gave her a lot of support. When one of the mothers could not attend because she was giving birth, her husband joined the course in order not to disappoint the mother and child. He fitted in well and continued until his wife came back. He joined the group on a trip to a farm.

The course helped the learners to build relationships and share experiences as well as gaining new skills. Many of the mothers did not previously 'play' with their children as they did not see the value of it as a learning experience. The course was arranged so that the parents had the time to play and experience activities before their children joined them. This helped the families to enjoy the activities together without the parents wanting to do the activity for the children and make it 'perfect'.

Playing with, listening and speaking to their children was a real learning curve for the parents. Some had previously thought that quiet and passive behaviour - being 'seen and not heard' - equalled good behaviour. They learned to value the importance of play and early learning on the development of the children and improved their 'readiness for school' with a range of skills for themselves and the children.

Joint planning and development of the course between the Family Learning Service and the school, ensured that it was relevant for the school as well as the parents. The school provided a good physical space to work in and additional childcare. Family Learning Impact Funding enabled the provider to invest in quality resources and learning materials. It also made possible a trip away from school to a farm where the families were able to use the skills learned on the course in a real life situation. Without the Family Learning Impact Funding to cover transport and entrance fees, the trip would have been financially out of the reach for most of the families. The more informal and creative atmosphere generated by the trip was highly valued by the families, and the Service is planning to introduce trips and social events earlier in the course in future.

At the end of the course the mothers set up their own group in order to raise money to enhance the outdoor play area. To raise funds, they plan to hold activities that parents will value, for example 'pamper days'. The parents also requested family learning courses for their older children and this is being looked at with the three schools involved. One of the things that parents

found the most difficult to do was to give praise. By the end of the course, they were finding it easier to say positive things.

“Parents have come to every session and enjoyed meeting each other each week. They have built up a support network which extended to their support of other areas of the school.” (Nursery school head)

Case study 9 – Bolton – Vulnerable learners on Early Years Foundation Stage courses

Provider: Bolton

Region: North West

FIF Programme / Course title: Introductory and Short Early Years Foundation Stage

Number of hours: 12 hours and 30 hours

Target audience: Across areas of deprivation and diverse ethnicity. Including targeting of vulnerable families in need of additional support and with safeguarding concerns.

Case study focus: The impact of the EYFS programme on three very vulnerable learners.

Key messages:

1. The confidence gained through the programme enabled one learner to start to tackle the domestic violence she was experiencing;
2. The support and relationships developed by the group were important in enhancing learner confidence;
3. One mother said that she got to know and understand her child better.

See also: Case studies 8 & 11

The profile of learners on these courses included 2 children who were 'looked after' children. Their grandparents had guardianship as both of the birth mothers were drug users, one was an offender and the other had mental health problems. The two families were supported by the nurseries as part of the 'families in need of additional support or at risk' targeting.

There were many examples of successes to share across the courses. The learning journeys and the enjoyment and achievement for some of the mothers and fathers was remarkable:

Learner 1

"This mum who for the first few weeks couldn't even face opening the door to the classroom, and managed to escape before we could get to the door, is our alliteration and rhyming queen. Both her and her daughter struggled to face new situations and you could see them both physically shaking when they came into the group. Mum is now talking about feeling confident enough to return to further learning and her little girl ran into the class last week and gave me a big hug." (Family Learning tutor)

Learner 2

This mother was approached to attend the course after negotiating a parenting support agreement with the nursery. Following concerns and then disclosure about domestic violence, she was offered additional family support. After spending some individual coffee and chat time with the family learning tutor she reluctantly enrolled onto the course. Initially, she said that she could only stay for 5 minutes, but progressed to staying for 3 hours, with good attendance.

The most significant observation made was the change in her relationship with her daughter during family circle time. At the start of the course she would ignore her daughter, and constantly read the text on her mobile phone. However, she started playing more with her and became more relaxed and attentive. There was a real sense of community within the group, and the other mothers and fathers encouraged and supported her to attend the course.

She continued to grow in confidence in the group and started to disclose some serious concerns about domestic violence. She found the courage to speak out about the abuse that she was experiencing and her little girl was witnessing. The family learning course impacted on her confidence and in her finding a voice to co-operate with other family support agencies following a child action meeting. The head teacher of the nursery school considered the family learning course to be a lifeline for this mum at such a critical time in her life.

Learner 3

“A mother who told us that since the course she has realised that she has not really been talking to her children about their learning or school life. She shared that she now knows more about her little boys learning in nursery than her other two older children at school. On our outing to a local farm she was absolutely taken back by how confident and loving her son was with the animals and the other children. You could witness a very real turning point for this mother both with her son and her confidence and social skills with the rest of the group. It was really sad to hear her say at the end of the course that she did not feel that she deserved her certificate because she did not ‘get it’ until the end of the course. We assured her that she absolutely did. She is now keen to progress to a school based literacy course.” (Family Learning tutor)

Case study 10 – Manchester – Mother with sons involved in gangs

Provider: Manchester

Region: North West

FLIF Programme: Wider Family Learning

Course titles: Confident parent, confident child; Parent survival; Communication with children

Target audience: Parents of 8-11 year old boys on the periphery of gangs

Case study focus: Lone mother whose family is involved in gangs

Key messages:

1. The family learning team had to learn about a new area, and the knowledge and expertise of the partner organisation were invaluable for this;
2. The learner's confidence was built up gradually through attending several family learning courses;
3. The learner progressed from low levels of confidence and Entry Level 3 literacy to putting together a paper for the Prime Minister and becoming a role model for her sons and for other parents.

“This is the first time that I’ve had all my boys together.”

‘8 til late’ is a mentoring scheme run by the Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy team (MMAGS), working with 8-11 year old boys who are on the periphery of gangs in Manchester. The project works with approximately 25 boys at any one time and each child has a mentor who works with them. The mentors are males aged 18 –25 who can act as role models for the boys. Manchester Wider Family Learning team were asked to work with the parents as the 8 til late team recognised that many of the parents had poor communication and parenting skills. The Wider Family Learning team worked with 6 parents and 7 children. The knowledge that the 8 til late project had about the learners was invaluable to the team, as they had to learn about the guns and gang culture so that they could communicate effectively with the learners and also *‘know the limits of our knowledge and specialism and the referral agencies’*.

This particular mother was a single parent of mixed heritage with 5 sons aged from 5 to 17. There were two dads involved on the periphery of the family.

She came from a gang family in Manchester. Two of her brothers were killed by guns, and two were currently in prison. Her eldest son was also in prison and she was worried for her other sons who were now involved in gangs. She had broken contact with her family except her mother, in order to try to distance her sons from the influences of the gang culture.

Her eldest son was in prison because she took him to the police station herself and handed him in. This was the only way she could see of keeping him safe from being a target himself. Her actions caused a huge rift in the family and between mother and son. The mother was distraught at what she had done, but believed it was for the best.

Supported by the 8 til late project workers, she first attended a coffee morning with her friend and then joined the Wider Family Learning courses 'Confident Parent, Confident Child'. She attended the course for the six weeks and did not miss any sessions. Her literacy skills were assessed at Entry 3, mainly because she had left school at the age of 14. She completed the course and was pleased at her own progress and the ideas she had gained to improve her relationship with her children.

Following this course, she progressed to a 16 week Parent Survival course delivered by the Children and Parent services team and the family learning team kept in contact with her during this time. She then joined the longer Wider Family Learning 12 week course 'Communication with Children' and the children attended for 2 sessions with their mentors.

As a result of these courses, the mother gained confidence and improved her relationship with her children sufficiently to take the giant step to visit her son in prison and talk to him confidently. It took a few visits, but she reported that a positive relationship was developing.

An extension of the course was run for two Saturdays and that culminated in a residential course with the full 8 til late team at Center Parcs in the North West. This was the first time that the family had been away together and, despite some initial worries, they had a very productive weekend.

For this learner and her family, spending quality time together and being able to put the skills learned on the course into practice was invaluable. Walking through the forest together was the first time the boys had walked in the open air and felt safe:

"The boys are walking about with their hoods down because they are not afraid of being shot."

Since the course, the learner has passed her Level 1 Literacy and Numeracy; enrolled for a Level 1 First Steps in Working with People and Mentoring course and joined a voluntary organisation supporting families in a similar position. She was putting together a paper for the Prime Minister, as she wanted to raise awareness of guns and gang families and the issues they

face. She has also taken up the mantle of role model for other mothers who want their children to escape the guns and knives culture: she has a regular Wednesday afternoon spot on a community radio station, where she answers questions from listeners and gives advice to parents in a similar position to herself.

All this she attributes to the opportunities that were opened up to her by joining the family learning course. She appreciates the fact that the course content was really relevant to her and other parents in the group. She has gained skills and confidence and knows that the example she is showing by joining classes and learning has rubbed off on her sons and is trying all she can to keep them safe.

Case study 11 – Bolton – Mother with learning difficulties on EYFS course

Provider: Bolton

Region: North West

FLIF Programme/ Course title : Introductory and Short Early Years Foundation Stage courses

Number of hours: 12 hours and 30 hours

Target audience: Families in areas of high deprivation. Priority targeting of vulnerable families in need of additional support and with safeguarding concerns

Case study focus: White female with moderate learning difficulties in suspected abusive relationship

Key messages:

1. The personal, social and emotional aspects of the EYFS course helped the learner to articulate her behaviour and that of her family and to see how it affected her child;
2. Working with different agencies as part of the course helped the learner to build up trust in statutory agencies.

See also: Case studies 8 & 9

“In many ways the course has given her support at a very critical period of her life and that of her child.”

This learner attended the introductory Early Years Foundation Stage course and progressed to the short 30 hour course. She was a white female who had moderate learning difficulties. Her four year old child attended the nursery that was a partner for this programme. The mother was targeted to attend the course because the nursery staff had concerns about the child and had seen evidence of domestic violence to the mother.

During the course, the learner disclosed her own abuse as a child to the teacher. It became apparent that her husband was very controlling and constantly rang or texted her throughout the course. Most of her course work was destroyed at home, which she initially blamed on her young child. As the course progressed, she gained in confidence and began to disclose about domestic violence to the tutor, and to share with the group the difficulties she found with parenting. The personal, social and emotional aspects of the Early

Years Foundation Stage course helped her to articulate her behaviour and that of her family and to see how it affected her child.

The joined up approach of the family learning team and the nursery school helped her to see that agencies worked together. She started to trust people more and to get more involved with the agencies that were trying to help her. When she decided to leave her husband, the group provided a supportive environment for her. Although she was not able to attend all of the sessions, she was there most of the time and did attend the trip to the farm at the end of the course.

The Family Learning tutor commented:

“The trip to the farm was wonderful for her and her child as she was able to put into practice what she had learned on the course. She was communicating very effectively with her child. It appeared as if the support of the group and staff had given her more confidence as well as the skills. Her child was really happy.”

Case study 12 – Cornwall – Male carer on Family Numeracy course

Provider: Cornwall

Region: South West

FLIF Programme / Course Title: Family Numeracy

Case study focus: Male in his early 20s. Oldest of six children supported by lone mother, living in deprived ward and taking on caring responsibilities for siblings.

Key messages:

1. The learner was encouraged to return to learning by his mother's engaging in family learning;
2. The learner went on to take both numeracy and literacy tests;
3. He was able to support both his mother and siblings with their numeracy skills.

This learner is in his early 20s. He has never been employed and, as the oldest of six children supported by a lone parent, he has taken on a lot of the caring responsibilities for his siblings. He attended the course with his youngest brother, aged six. Their mother had attended an earlier numeracy course and had hoped to continue with the Family Numeracy programme. However, she was unable to, as she had successfully moved into employment. The family lives in a ward of Cornwall that is the second most deprived in the county and has multiple deprivation measures.

The learner had left school with a couple of low grade GCSEs. This was due in part to his family circumstances and the support he had to give to his mother and siblings, but also to his low levels of confidence and self-belief. When his mother began attending family learning programmes, this encouraged him to return to learning. He completed a family literacy course in 2007/2008, attending as the carer of his youngest brother. He had hoped to take the national literacy test in 2008/2009, but did not.

His confidence levels were boosted by the progress he made on the FLIF Family Numeracy programme. He was keen to attempt the numeracy test and subsequently took the literacy test too. He even started some part-time work during the course and was very interested in the information, advice and guidance visit that was part of the programme. He is now keen to continue his education and will hopefully progress on to the next level very soon.

He is now helping his mother with her numeracy skills so is reinforcing his learning by supporting her. He also feels that learning alongside his youngest brother has brought them much closer together. Working together on aspects of the programme has helped develop a strong bond between them.

Case study 13 – Sheffield – Men on Wider Family Learning course

Provider: Sheffield

Region: Yorkshire & Humberside

FLIF programme: Wider Family Learning

Course title: Family K'nex

Number of hours: 20

Target audience: Fathers

Case study focus: Engaging fathers in family learning

Key messages:

1. The challenge aspect of the programme helped to engage fathers;
2. All family members were encouraged to support each other in the task, including those not able to attend the sessions;
3. The course was developed in consultation with participants.

"More understanding of how maths is taught. Enjoying having more interaction with my children"

This 20 hour National Open College Network accredited course focused on the subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The Family Learning Service worked with schools, the community team and district service managers, who all targeted the families to take part in the programme.

Learners were supplied with a K'nex Discovery Building Set and each week were involved in a building challenge with a mathematical and/or science focus. All family members were encouraged to take part and learners kept a scrap book recording what they had done and who had participated in the challenge. The emphasis on the course was intergenerational learning, with all members of the family supporting each other in each task. The majority of learners were new to accredited courses and 17.5% of all learners were male. Feedback from the scrap books also showed that male family members at home, who were not in a position to attend the sessions, were becoming involved. The course was delivered differently each time it ran, based on consultation with the participants.

One of the fathers was an absentee father, not living with the family and without much access to his son. He asked to be put on the course and attended every week because he enjoyed working with his child. Another father got a job, working a night shift, just as the course started, but he still attended the course regularly. Following the course, some of the fathers were interested in a computer course and approached the head teacher about arranging one.

"Have enjoyed the course enormously, has engaged the whole family in learning."

Case study 14 – Trafford – Lone parent on FFC course

Provider: Trafford

Region: North West

FLIF Programme: Family Financial Capability

Course title: Money Bags

Case study focus: Lone parent receiving family support

Key messages:

1. The learner became more confident about making her own financial decisions;
2. The course also helped her to develop her understanding and confidence in dealing with officialdom which enabled her to communicate better with the professionals involved in her and her child's life.

The learner is a lone parent who is unable to work due to family commitments. Her older child has been identified with possible Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and her younger child has been allocated specialist nursery placement due to identified language impairment. She has been receiving family support from social care and education professionals, as well as from the Counselling and Family Centre who were partners in running this course.

Through this course, the learner began to reflect on her own attitude to managing her finances. She also thought about how she may be able to make her money go further and became more confident about making her own financial decisions in the future. She found that discussions around whether information was biased or unbiased were of particular relevance to her, and she felt able to share her thoughts and experiences with the group. She was particularly interested in finding out about money comparison websites and websites designed to help the consumer save money.

The course not only helped this mother in learning to manage her finances and to access and evaluate financial information, it also developed her understanding and confidence in dealing with officialdom. She felt more able to put forward her opinions in meetings with professionals, and this was particularly useful in discussions concerning the transition of her child to a different nursery setting.

She is hoping to attend further courses in the future.

Case study 15 – Oldham – Learners living in refuges

Provider: Oldham

Region: North West

FLIF Programmes: Wider Family Learning and Family Financial Capability

Target audience: Learners living in refuges.

Key messages:

1. Learners progressed to skills for life courses;
2. Improved confidence and communication skills, gained through the family learning programmes, made a significant difference to learners' lives.

“I can communicate better with my children, I’ve learned lots of new words and I feel very happy about the work I’ve done on this course”.

Oldham Lifelong Learning Service used the Family Learning Impact Funding to develop their work with parents living in local refuges. The following profiles illustrate changes that have happened over several sessions, of which Family Learning Impact Funded programmes have formed a significant part.

Learner A, a Pakistani woman with minimal English language, had recently arrived at the refuge when she started the Financial Capability course. She was withdrawn and did not communicate with her peers. She did not smile and was extremely unhappy. By the end of the course, she communicated with the tutor and the group and enjoyed taking part in the numeracy activities. She moved on to a language class and health and fitness courses. She felt confident enough to do her own shopping.

Learner N, a 31 year old single mother from Afghanistan, came to England in 2007, having lived in Russia and Holland after leaving Afghanistan at the age of 18. She had qualified to become a dental nurse but had never had a paid job. She had been bringing up a family since her early twenties, and had four children, ranging from 8 months to 16 years old. She lived in a refuge and had little money. She had never controlled any finances or had employment, and she had never gained life experience with maths. When she was living with her husband, she had limited money to buy food and clothing. N completed a Family Financial Capability course and progressed to a Skills for Life numeracy course.

Learner T, a Bangladeshi woman with limited English, was in her early 20s when she joined a course with her two year old daughter. She was very quiet and lacking in confidence. Her confidence grew and she became determined

to learn English, taking homework home and sitting in her room in the refuge doing work every night. She passed the City and Guilds Literacy exam at Entry 1 and moved on to an ESOL and a sewing class. She was adamant that she would learn English and find a job despite having no family support (her parents lived in Bangladesh and her husband's family had abused her). By the end of the course, she was lively, cheerful and spoke clearly in English.

Learner SQ first attended an 'English with Art' course during the summer school holidays in 2006. She then attended numerous language courses with this current year having the themes of Family Finance and Health. She was a teacher in her home country before coming to England, but was unable to obtain her documents from her husband. She has expressed her desire to teach again several times over the years. She is now in a better position with her life and has asked about the route to becoming a classroom assistant with a view to progress towards more formal teaching.

Learner D had very little spoken English and was unable to read or write at all in English. She initially communicated through the outreach worker. Over the two courses she attended, she became more animated and willing to speak in English. Her cheerful personality shone through and added a wonderful spark to the class. She now lives independently, having left the refuge. She has begun to talk to white, British people in the playground and has made friends with her neighbours. She has become a role model for women still in the refuge.

Learner H had mental health issues and was initially supported by an outreach worker who transported her and accompanied her to the first session. In the first session, she was quiet despite having English speaking and listening ability at Entry 3. She was unable to read and write in English at all. In the second session, she took a taxi to the venue and her appearance was much smarter and more confident. She began to join in the lessons verbally and asked for bilingual support in reading and writing. She enjoyed the classes immensely, particularly the arts and crafts within the sessions. She made friends and enjoyed the other women's company. The lesson became the highlight of her week, and she made the following comments:

"I feel confident...I like making friends...I can express my feelings...I've learned how children learn in school."