

# adult learning & skills

FAMILY LEARNING EDITION



## Contents

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# adult learning & skills

<b>Moving family learning forward</b> 4	<b>Building bridges</b> 20
<i>Alan Tuckett discusses recent developments and the benefits of increasing the depth and breadth of family learning provision</i>	<i>Jackie Horne highlights wider family learning and discusses the benefits of making better links with family literacy, language and numeracy</i>
<b>Unlocking the treasure chest: progress, achievement and progression in family learning</b> 7	<b>Extended schools – opportunities and challenges</b> 23
<i>Jeanne Haggart analyses what we know about how families progress through family learning</i>	<i>Julian Piper makes the case for extended schools</i>
<b>New online resource for family learning practitioners</b> 10	<b>Working together to extend and embed family literacy, language and numeracy</b> 25
<i>Juliette Collier analyses how the National Family Learning Network is promoting a more cohesive approach to family learning.</i>	<i>Sian Welby reports on the Skills for Families initiative</i>
<b>My life has changed as a result of family learning</b> 11	<b>The benefits of networking</b> 27
<i>FouFou Savitsky spotlights the voice of learners</i>	<i>Vicki Maris highlights the work of the Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Network</i>
<b>Challenges facing family learning</b> 13	<b>National Occupational Standards for family learning and parenting education</b> 29
<i>Penny Lamb examines key issues</i>	<i>Yvonne Nolan provides an overview of the project</i>
<b>A week in the life</b> 15	<b>Family learning in action</b> 30
<i>Flora Sheringham provides an insight into her role as a family learning manager</i>	<i>Lyn Devlin reviews Kent LEA's handbook for tutors</i>
<b>Fathers' involvement in family learning programmes</b> 17	<b>Web reviews</b> 31
<i>Rebecca Goldman presents early findings from her review of research and practice</i>	

# Foreword

**“It is time to take Family Learning from the margins into the mainstream.”**

***Ivan Lewis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Vocational Education,***

***Family Learning Weekend launch, October 2003***

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) knows that family learning works, that it provides parents with a route back into learning and improves their children's attainments, particularly at primary school level. And the LSC is delighted that family learning also supports the widening participation, the voluntary sector, skills and *Skills for Life* strategies, thus contributing to tangible targets and priorities.

We also recognise that family learning positively influences a much wider range of developments. *Every Child Matters*, the green paper from the Department for Education and Skills, highlights the benefits that family learning can bring to children through engaging parents in their child's development and education. Government policies such as *21st Century Skills* and *Extended Schools* also recognise the benefits that family learning can bring to communities through encouraging adults back into learning. One of the key challenges for Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) and their providers in the year ahead will be to develop family learning through the *Learning Community* test beds and make links with *Extended Schools* in addressing the *Every Child Matters* agenda.

The LSC and the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) will be funding a further year of the successful *Skills for Families* initiative. This project has been working to extend and embed family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) across Local Education Authorities and LLSCs. Improvements to local infrastructures for planning and management, along with staff training and capacity building for schools, can benefit both FLLN and wider family learning, with both areas sharing many of the same resources. Other developments such as the National Family Learning Network's new website and extended service will help promote the sharing of resources, good practice and a more cohesive approach to family learning.

The challenge for LLSCs and providers is to harness all of these developments to make sure that family learning truly does become an integrated part of education and training at a local level.

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# Moving family learning forward

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## Alan Tuckett discusses recent developments and the benefits of increasing the depth and breadth of family learning provision

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It is an interesting and exciting time to be involved in family learning. The case for family learning is simply made. As the American researcher Tom Sticht puts it – family learning is a ‘double-dealing dollar’, or as the African proverb suggests, if you teach a woman to read and write, a whole village will learn. Confidence and curiosity spill over: parents are a child’s first educator, and if they engage in learning their children do better at school. But it works the other way, too, as Veronica McGivney’s (1998) work with the Pre-School Learning Alliance shows. Children’s excitement in learning can stimulate adults to give learning a go.

Family learning has a higher profile than ever before; the research evidence linking parental attitudes and involvement in learning with children’s achievement has been well publicised recently and a number of Government policies and agendas are noting the benefits of family learning. Nevertheless, family learning needs to be higher up the agenda if we are to reach a wider range of parents, children and families who can benefit from participating in family learning, and if we are to realise these gains for the economy and society as a whole.

### A short history

Parents and children learning together, or family learning as we now know it, has been around in one form or another since the 1970s when family centres and other community venues laid on such opportunities. Family learning received a significant boost in 1996 when the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) evaluation of four family literacy demonstration programmes showed measurable, lasting gains for both parents and children in terms of their abilities in literacy and in their confidence and attitudes towards learning. This led to the setting-up of the Standards Fund, the first central Government

funding programme for family learning in local education authorities (LEAs). The publication of the Moser Report in 1999, which commended family literacy programmes as a “particularly encouraging way of helping many parents to improve their literacy”, provided another boost and led to further development of family literacy programmes, and family numeracy, led by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA).

### Recent developments

Since the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) assumed responsibility for Department for Education and Skills (DfES)-funded family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes in 2002/03, developments in family learning have accelerated. As well as an increase in funding for FLLN, the DfES created a new funding stream for wider family learning. At the same time, the LSC made family learning one of the national priorities for adult and community learning provision. NIACE was also commissioned to carry out a major evaluation of LSC-funded family learning programmes, which reported in March 2003.

Following the lively dissemination and consultation events on the findings of the evaluation, the LSC has been working with NIACE and other organisations to take forward the report’s recommendations. A number of encouraging developments have taken place. This includes the BSA-led *Skills for Families* project, which as part of its remit is developing a wider menu of FLLN programmes. This will be welcomed by LEAs as it gives more choice and flexibility in how LSC funding can be used for FLLN, something which was called for in the NIACE evaluation. Most importantly, it opens up the range of literacy, language and numeracy opportunities for learners.

There are also welcome improvements being made in the support frameworks for practitioners working in the field. The

National Family Learning Network (NFLN), a partnership between the Campaign for Learning, ContinYou and NIACE, is taking forward the development of regional and local family learning networks, as well as developing the national network itself by launching an interactive website. This family learning edition of *Adult Learning and Skills*, together with the three family learning events that NIACE held with the LSC in early March, is part of the strategy to raise awareness and knowledge of family learning across local LSCs. NIACE has also been working to take forward one of its key recommendations of developing the status of wider family learning and achieving more depth and breadth in the curriculum offered by LEAs.

Alongside these developments, we’ve had the first full round of ACL inspections by the Adult Learning Inspectorate. Whilst the inspection reports for family learning were largely positive, a number of challenges remain in improving the quality of family learning, as Penny Lamb discusses in her article. In the context of quality, it is pleasing to note the development of National Occupational Standards for family learning and parenting education and support (see Yvonne Nolan’s article). This should hopefully lead to greater recognition and status for the people that work so hard to deliver learning for families.

### Research evidence

Recently publicised research evidence on the benefits and importance of learning within families has also given a boost to family learning. Feinstein and Symons (1999) found that the effect of parental involvement and interest in a child’s learning is eight times greater than the impact of other elements such as social class or parents’ occupations on children’s achievements. Professor Desforges’ literature review for the DfES also showed learning in the home to be the biggest influence on the achievement of children aged 3 to 7.

This high-profile research evidence is particularly valuable to family learning. This is because it shows the importance of both formal family learning programmes (it is known that these programmes increase a parent’s interest and involvement in their child’s learning) and informal family learning, that is, learning that families themselves do in the home. The research also shows the critical importance of the attitudes and beliefs held by parents towards learning. We can safely conclude that the benefits to adults from participating in family learning are a crucial part of realising the benefits of family learning for



children.

NIACE is currently reviewing the literature on the benefits of participating in family learning and developing a model of the benefits and their interactions. Our review of the research to date for adults and families shows considerable evidence of improvements in adult's confidence and self-esteem, and progress in learning, together with improvements in parenting skills and increased understanding of children's learning needs. The research also provides evidence of further learning, volunteering and entry to employment by adults following participation in family learning.

Of course, all of these benefits are well-known to those who work in the field. However, anecdotal evidence is not enough to persuade the likes of HM Treasury who hold the purse-strings. This does not mean we should discount the power of individual stories or the voices of individual learners. Fofou Savitsky's article provides a powerful reminder of the deeply personal benefits that can arise from participating in family learning.

### Recent Government policy

It is particularly encouraging to note that a number of recent government policy documents have recognised the benefits of family learning. This is against the backdrop of the Skills Strategy *21st Century Skills* which stated the importance of providing a wide range of adult and community learning (ACL), not only as an important first step back into learning for many, but also for the wider purpose of "culture, leisure, community and personal fulfilment." 21st Century Skills made a helpful and important commitment to safeguard 3 per cent of LSC funding for this type of provision. The pledge to build 'Learning Communities' – using a wide range of learning opportunities to tackle low aspiration and skill levels in disadvantaged areas – also presents valuable openings to further develop and integrate family learning provision.

The extended schools initiative (see Julian Piper's article) also offers welcome opportunities for family learning, but also challenges to local LSCs and LEAs in terms of working in partnership with extended schools to reach new learners, avoid duplication of services, and contribute to the extended schools agenda. However, it is *Every Child Matters*, the green paper published in autumn 2003 by DfES, which may offer the most opportunities for family learning. *Every Child Matters* stated that family learning "offers opportunities to increase involvement in learning, to break down barriers between schools and parents,

and act as a link to targeted help and support." Furthermore, it proposed that family learning programmes could become a universal service, "open to all families as and when they need them."

### Moving forward

This is all very encouraging and is worthwhile recognition of what family learning can achieve. However, it is clear that with all these opportunities now is not the time to be resting. Much work will be needed to push open these doors, in order to build on the quantity and quality of current family learning provision.

In this vein, NIACE submitted a formal response to the DfES consultation on *Every Child Matters*, putting the case for family learning. In the submission, we highlighted the multiple benefits that family learning offers parents, children and families. We outlined the contribution that family learning can make to the agenda of *Every Child Matters*, but also to a wide number of government policies; from schools standards through to child poverty and social inclusion, and from *Skills for Life* through to lifelong learning and neighbourhood renewal. NIACE is of the view that family learning offers excellent value for money and that its full potential is not being recognised. NIACE believes that the Government should make clear moves towards family learning becoming a universal service.

In the same response, NIACE also made the case for a broad and balanced family learning curriculum in order to attract 'more and different families', particularly from groups who are currently under-represented in learning. Both the OFSTED (2000) survey of family learning and the NIACE (2003) evaluation found that a broad family learning curriculum has the greatest success in attracting participants from disadvantaged and under-represented groups. As Jackie Horne outlines in her article, a broader family learning curriculum should not detract from the importance of FLLN and the *Skills for Life* agenda. Indeed, if the right connections are made between wider family learning and literacy, language and numeracy provision, whether in a family context or otherwise, a broader curriculum can contribute much towards reaching those adults who are most reluctant to participate in learning yet have the greatest basic skills needs.

In terms of the range of families participating in family learning, NIACE would like to encourage 'more and different families' in all their shapes, sizes and forms to participate in

both formal and informal family learning activities. This includes more men, including non-resident fathers, more grandparents, more young families, more foster families, more black and ethnic minority families, and more families with learning difficulties and disabilities. Family learning has much to offer all families and much work remains to be done to reach families new to learning and to develop high quality provision that is sensitive to their needs.

Family learning also has much to offer to the economy and society as a whole as demographics and family shapes and patterns continue to change and exert new pressures on family members. With currently low levels of male participation in the labour market, Chris Humphries, Director General of City and Guilds, calculates that a 10 per cent increase in the amount of women participating in the labour force will be needed to meet the demographic pressures of an ageing population. Families, particularly men, are likely to have to adapt to changing roles and responsibilities. Family learning can play an important role in helping families adjust to these changes, whilst making sure that the important role of parents as a child's first educator is not forgotten.

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# Unlocking the treasure chest: progress, achievement and progression in family learning

Jeanne Haggart analyses what we know about how families progress through family learning



For many families, involvement in family learning is the beginning of a learning journey. The milestones along the way and the final destination may not be clear at the outset, but from the moment of embarking, adults and children are 'on the road' (see the article by Foufou Savitsky). The metaphor of the journey captures the complex mix of adventure, challenge, discovery and camaraderie of intergenerational learning. Providers and practitioners have a responsibility to make learners' journeys as productive as they can be, ensuring that progress, achievement and progression are supported and facilitated.

## Starting points and pathways

Crucially, it is when families first embark on learning that the possibilities for achievement and progression are unlocked. What McGivney (2003) writes of adult learners generally is likely to be true for family learners: 'Once they have engaged in deliberate learning of any kind, people frequently continue learning.' For this reason, providing a wide range of starting points for families is important.

Many adults are drawn back into learning through an interest in their child's learning, despite a loss of confidence in their own learning through schooling. For these parents, informal learning opportunities in a non-threatening environment are a good starting point, enabling them to dip their toes into the water without feeling too much anxiety. McGivney (1998; 1999) found that involvement in pre-schools offers parents a non-threatening route back into learning for themselves. Many parents went on from volunteering in pre-schools to further learning and training and even employment. Today parents using some neighbourhood nurseries are given information and advice on basic

skills provision in the Government's 'Step into Learning' programme.

Families themselves are so diverse that the starting points, too, must be wide-ranging if families are to be encouraged to make that all-important first step into learning. NIACE (2003) found that a wider family learning curriculum was effective in reaching some target groups, not all of whom will have basic skills needs (see Jackie Horne's article). Some of the hard-to-reach groups such as fathers (see Rebecca Goldman's article) respond to carefully customised starting points.

Once they have made a start, many families will be looking for what else they can do, and this is where providers need to build curriculum pathways to take learners on to the next steps. Providers should make links between different strands of their provision, including family literacy, language and numeracy, wider family learning, adult and community learning provision and further and higher education opportunities.

The winner of the 2002 NIACE Family Learning Award, the Parent House at Kings Cross, London, provides a number of starting points and pathways conveniently housed under one roof. There are a wide range of classes, including those in basic skills, ICT, ESOL and childcare. Many parents come to the Parent House for information and advice on employment opportunities. They can even undertake work placements in childcare in the centre's crèche. Furthermore, parents gain valuable experience in managing the services themselves.

### Valuing progress, achievement and progression

Many families experience what Nashashibi (2004) describes as the 'alchemy of learning', that is, the power of learning to transform individual and shared lives. Some of their achievements will relate to intended objectives, but they will also be surprised by unforeseen benefits such as enhanced confidence, excitement about learning itself and more active involvement in their neighbourhood. Effective tutors help families to reflect on their progress and achievements for they are crucial elements in the 'alchemy of learning'.

The delicate balancing required in raising awareness of learners' progress is described by Nashashibi (2002) in *Learning in progress: recognising achievement in adult learning*. She writes, 'The challenge to providers is to increase the focus on learner progress without losing sight of learners' perspectives and preferred styles, and to look for ways of recog-

nising learner achievements that match these perspectives and styles.' A further challenge, writes Penny Lamb of the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) in her article in this journal, is to 'capture and evidence the achievements of wider family learning.'

'Progression' in learning, in the current post-16 context, writes McGivney (2003), refers to learners' transition from one course or programme to another one, usually of a higher level, in the same or a different learning environment. In its guidance to LLSCs and LEAs on family programmes the LSC notes that family programmes can often lead adults to progress to further education or training. ALI, too, expects to see providers signposting progression routes for parents. Question 6 of the Common Inspection Framework asks, 'How well are learners supported and guided?' Specifically, ALI requires evidence of 'the quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance to learners in relation to courses and programmes and career progression.'

The focus on 'progression', however, ought not to overshadow 'learner progress' and 'learner achievement', for it is in ensuring that all three are valued and supported that families are likely to experience the long-lasting benefits of family learning.

### Supporting progress, achievement and progression

Practitioners play a major role in the support and encouragement they provide to families. NIACE research (2003) found that many families require a high level of support if they are to progress to another learning opportunity.

One way to support parents and children on family learning programmes is to adopt a 'learning outcomes methodology' which Nashashibi (2002) describes as:

*...an approach to planning, facilitating and assessing learning which takes as its starting point the definition of desired learning outcomes. As practised in adult and community learning it typically includes negotiation and agreement of learning outcomes between tutor and learners, optional re-negotiation during the learning programme and the use of planned outcomes (individual or shared) for reviewing progress and assessing learners' achievements during the programme and at the end.*

This approach guarantees that both adults and children are focusing on their goals and reviewing the progress they are making, increasing the likelihood that they will want to progress.



NIACE research (2003) also shows that many adults in family learning think primarily of themselves as parents and supporters of children's learning rather than as learners themselves. Effective tutoring can support the development of a parent's 'learning identity', with learning goals that are separate from the child's learning. As Flora Sheringham points out in her article, Cambridgeshire tutors regularly signpost opportunities for parents. By virtue of the trusting relationship developed with families, tutors have a particularly important role to play in supporting parents to develop learner identities.

Tutors and providers can build a range of helpful support measures into their provision. They might, for example, invite the local college to visit a family learning group to discuss the next steps in learning. They might organise trips to the college for the entire group or for individual parents who are keen to move on. They can provide information on and access to the National Test in literacy or numeracy for parents who wish to take it, for the satisfaction of passing an externally-set challenge can be a great boost to confidence and to the drive to continue learning.

Many ACL services develop links with a specialist information, advice and guidance (IAG) provider that can come in at the appropriate point in a family learning activity/programme. Learners should be provided with comprehensive information that outlines the full range of choices, and not simply what their own provider is offering. Sue Taylor (2002) argues, however, that information by itself is not likely to meet the needs of adults who, as parents and carers, attempt to 'fit learning round their work and lives.' While some manage to negotiate the best route and stay on track, others will benefit from a higher level of advice and support. She argues that 'A continuum of support is required, from light-touch information services through to in-depth client-specific guidance. A proactive approach is called for, since adults actively seeking help to improve their skills tend to be in the minority.'

### Partnerships

So much of the good practice described above depends on effective partnerships in family learning. NIACE research (2003) found that the two-thirds of LEAs that responded to its request for information on family programmes were working with a range of partners, and significantly, all of the two-thirds cited partnerships with schools. LEAs also reported that partnership working is resource intensive and was often underestimated and

difficult to fund. For example, time is needed to develop a common understanding of family learning and a shared sense of purpose. Tett (2003), in *Working in Partnership*, provides this account illustrating the challenge in building up a common understanding of family learning:

*We had agreed that the overall aim of the partnership was to increase parents' involvement in their children's education and to achieve their own educational aims. The trouble was that the schools seemed to think that all our resources, that were mainly for parents' own learning, should be devoted to increasing children's attainment by being used to show parents how to help their children more effectively. We had to work very hard at educating the head teachers that the resources that we each had should be shared and clearly devoted to our overall purposes. (Family Learning Worker, Argyll)*

On the other hand, successful partnerships create a wealth of opportunities on the doorstep for families, as this example in Watters and Quilter (2003) demonstrates:

*Stoke on Trent LEA and Stoke on Trent College (FE) work in partnership so that learners can access 'College in the Community'. Learning opportunities, including Family Learning Programmes, are provided at over 120 centres, including three 'neighbourhood colleges', school community rooms and other community venues. Provision is developed in partnership with voluntary and community organisations such as residents' associations ... As a formalised partnership, 'College in the Community' can respond flexibly to diverse needs.*

### Building the infrastructure

Without the infrastructure that supports learner progress, achievement and progression and strong partnerships, there cannot be long-term and lasting gains for families that embark on learning journeys. Many of the contributions to this journal demonstrate how partners are working together to improve pathways for family learners. Flora Sheringham describes how Peterborough and Cambridgeshire have pooled resources to share information about opportunities across the region. A co-ordinated approach of this kind is likely to improve opportunities for progression for families.

Vicki Maris describes how an initial audit carried out by the Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Network identified referral

and progression links between family learning service providers. This information was crucial in developing the 'planned, purposeful and progressive' nature of family learning that the Network values. Sian Welby describes how the Skills for Families collaborative partnerships are developing new pathways into literacy, language and numeracy for parents. Finally, the newly-launched National Family Learning Network described by Juliette Collier will extend good practice in recognising progress, celebrating achievement and encouraging progression.

### Conclusion

While the challenges for LLSCs and LEAs and their partners are considerable in encouraging learner progress, achievement and progression, it is as nothing compared to the challenges and satisfactions that families experience when they embark on their learning journeys.

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# New online resource for family learning practitioners

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1 April 2004 sees the launch of a new web-based help and information service for family learning practitioners. Juliette Collier explains how the National Family Learning Network is promoting a more cohesive approach to family learning

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Family learning has a crucial role to play in creating a culture of lifelong learning. It provides the opportunity to break the cycle of disengagement and negative associations with learning, which can pass from one generation to another: a kind of double whammy that impacts on both adult and child.

In June 2003 Professor Charles Desforges published his report on parental involvement for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It reviewed research which concluded that the effect of parental involvement and interest in a child's learning is eight times greater than the impact of other elements such as social class or parents' occupations. For adults, family learning can be a non-threatening first step back in to learning, which often transforms lives.

Family learning practitioners are developing stimulating and diverse new provision for families which reflects the needs of their learners. The challenge for the National Family Learning Network (NFLN), led by the Campaign for Learning in partnership with NIACE and ContinYou, is to ensure that this is not done in isolation and that information about successful models, resources and expertise are disseminated more widely and effectively. In the same way that individuals within families can feel isolated and undervalued, so practitioners can feel that they are lone voices, resolving problems through trial and error, on a huge and frustrating experiential learning curve. One of the most valuable roles that the NFLN can have is to make the connections between practitioners and enable solutions to be shared.

The creation of a central resource for family learning will also provide direct benefits to LLSC officers. By joining the Network, officers can ensure that they have easy access to news, information and networking opportunities with family learning practitioners. They will

also be able to refer practitioners to the Network for help and support on certain issues.

A three-month consultation process was undertaken with practitioners to determine how they would like to see the NFLN develop. This process identified the priorities for the Network. These included developing a central web-based resource ([www.familylearningnetwork.com](http://www.familylearningnetwork.com)) where practitioners could access information on news and policy developments that impact on their work, as well as key research, staff training, funding opportunities and lots of practical ideas to help anyone working in the field of family learning. One of the key features of the new website will be an **Ask Us** facility, which will enable practitioners to use one click of their mouse to generate an email to the NFLN, asking for a response to any questions on family learning. The Network will be able to make links to other organisations which have found solutions to specific problems or can offer practical suggestions in terms of accessing funding, developing ideas for engaging new families, imaginative family learning activities and guidelines on issues such as child protection and passing inspection.

In order to respond directly to the needs of practitioners, the Network will also provide a **Tell Us** facility. This will encourage feedback from Network members that will be used to inform and improve the service offered to practitioners. It will also enable the site to be kept up-to-date in an environment where there is a culture of innovation and a huge number of challenges.

The National Family Learning Network is working to support individual practitioners and encourage the development of effective local and regional networks, but beyond this it will facilitate improved links between the many agencies working in this area and pro-

vide a forum where practitioners can resolve issues and inform national policy. The NFLN Steering Group and the new site will have input from a whole range of organisations including libraries, museums, early years, and parenting education and support.

Family learning, perhaps more than any other area of learning, demands that practitioners develop a joined-up, inter-agency approach to their work. Partnership working is a crucial feature, rather than an optional extra, in order to meet the needs of whole families and improve the learning outcomes for both children and adults. The Network will promote partnership working between agencies who are adult-focused and those which are child-centred.

Another key challenge for practitioners is engaging more men in family learning. The Network's national conference on 1 April will examine how practitioners can make family learning more 'men-friendly' and ensure that their crucial role in supporting their children's learning is valued and promoted. 2004 is the 10th anniversary of the UN Year of the Family and the NFLN will be supporting the drive for a month of celebration of Family Learning in October 2004, to include Family Learning Week (formerly Family Learning Weekend), which will run from Monday 11 to Sunday 17 October 2004 and National Parents' Week. There has not been a better time to become involved in promoting and delivering family learning.

Membership is free. If you would like to join, email [jcollier@cflearning.org.uk](mailto:jcollier@cflearning.org.uk) or ring Juliette Collier on 0121 643 0774. The new website address will be [www.familylearningnetwork.com](http://www.familylearningnetwork.com)

*Juliette Collier is Manager of the National Family Learning Network*

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# My life has changed as a result of family learning

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FouFou Savitsky spotlights the voice of learners

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The title of this article may, at first glance, appear to be a wild exaggeration, claiming excessive outcomes for family learning<sup>1</sup>. However, where provision is tailored to meet the needs of parents, to reflect their interests, skills and concerns; where the provision is flexible, taking into account the demands made on parents; where the starting point of both the content and delivery of sessions recognises parents' many skills rather than focussing on their difficulties, LLU+ (formerly the London Language and Literacy Unit) has found that family learning can be a life-enhancing experience. To illustrate this I will quote extensively from a recent publication, *On the Road – Journeys in Family Learning*<sup>2</sup>, where parents testify much more eloquently to the benefits of family learning than any statistics, data or learned reports could ever do.

## Basic skills and family learning

One of the many aims of family learning is to tackle the issue of basic skills, either directly in family literacy or numeracy provision, or indirectly in a course such as *Helping My Child*

“These courses are so encouraging especially if you are shy and your wings are broken and you don't know where to go.”

Sawsan

*with Reading & Writing.* There is much debate as to whether provision should be inclusive (for any interested parent) or specifically targeted at a particular group of parents (for example, those with problems in the area of

literacy). Merle is clear that learning in an environment where everyone shared the experience of finding literacy an issue enabled her to address her difficulties. “I was able to work on my own literacy in an environment where it didn't matter if you got your spelling wrong...the reading and writing was at my level. It's given me lots and lots of confidence to go on and do other things.” Sandra, on the other hand, attended a mixed-level course where the parents' own literacy was not the focus. “I left school when I was 15 but really I had stopped attending school at 13. I left with no qualifications. I had a poor basic level of education... Before doing these courses I would only read a daily newspaper, the *Sun*, but now I like reading. I've quite often got a book with me... I'm on the third part of the Dave Pelzer books... Now I turn the telly off and read!” By being exposed to various elements of literacy on the course and by learn-

“I have a sense of direction now. It has prepared me for work that I wasn't thinking of at all before.”

Aisha B

ing about literacy, Sandra was able to progress in her own reading and writing and gained enough confidence to take and pass GCSE English.

Mavis from Grenada, who left school barely able to read and write, is clear that in her very mixed-level class<sup>3</sup> her literacy skills have



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improved and, moreover, she has developed skills which help her cope with learning in a college environment, "It even help me with

**I've learnt that education is very important – my daughter will be going to university!**

**Sandra**

writing letters and everything as well. I'm in college now and it helping me with my college, the way I set out my work, my English, the way I write it. I able to cope with a whole class now whereas before I had so much problems in class."

#### **Parents for whom basic skills are not an issue**

The benefits of family learning are equally important to parents for whom literacy is not an issue. Working in mixed-level groups frequently adds to the learning experience for all. Jane, who has a degree and works in IT, found that "it was very interesting for me to see people's strengths and how these could be very different to their educational background or what they had achieved at school. Sitting in the group I would have said that I was equal to anyone else in terms of education and yet some people had very little for-

**There is no way I could have considered doing a degree before becoming involved with family learning classes.**

**Samantha**

mal education at all." Jameel, a doctor from Pakistan with extensive experience of working in hospitals in the UK, found learning about how children are taught and the system of education very rewarding and also identified a

benefit crucial to good home school relations. "I've developed a huge amount of respect for teachers following these courses, and I see how difficult their work is." Thelma, a secondary school teacher, found that "the course impacted both on my professional life and my life as a parent... Throughout the course I was thinking, 'if only I'd known this five or six years ago...'"

#### **Benefits for children**

We must not, of course, forget the effect of family learning on children. Sandra has changed her attitude to education as well as her aspirations for her daughter. "I've learnt

**My husband is a bookworm himself now and I think the course has really changed him.**

**Aisha S**

how to help my child and support her in education – not just her reading and writing but her science, maths, everything... I've learnt that education is very important – my daughter will be going to university! ...Without family learning I'd probably be in a market stall in Deptford freezing in the winter and my daughter helping me every other day instead of going to school."

#### **New beginnings**

Finding work, discovering new ambitions or choosing a different career are also frequent outcomes directly connected to family learning. Errol, a carpet cleaner who left school with no qualifications, identified these benefits. "Before I wouldn't have said I was an ambitious person but now I have ambition. Now I feel I can contribute on a much larger scale." He has trained to run family learning courses, is employed as a tutor and is frequently asked to run workshops and address conferences. Samantha too has new aspirations: "I have now undertaken study with the Open University with a view to gaining a degree and going on to train as a teacher myself... There is no way I could have considered doing a degree before becoming involved with family learning classes."

#### **Wider benefits**

Other outcomes are sometimes unexpected but at least as valid as those which meet Government targets and agenda. Ruby from Sri Lanka and recently widowed is clear that "The course changed my life a hundred per cent". She identifies the usual outcomes relating to her own and her children's learning but, for her, the most important outcome is different. "After my husband died I didn't know anyone in England. Now in the playground everyone shouts, 'Ruby, Ruby!'. Now I can go out, I have friends and I can study." Maryam was also facing a very difficult situation. "I couldn't possibly believe that there was anything wrong (with my son) because he came from me...I believed that my children would be a replica of me." She attended a family learning course at a local Muslim women's centre and there, as the result of the course and being supported by other women, she "learned to face up and love my child for who he is".

#### **The wider family**

Participants on family learning courses frequently mention the impact their own participation has had on other members of their family. Aisha recognises this with regard to her husband. "He came from a family where they didn't have books. If they had any, they were only schoolbooks and he used to throw them out on the road because he never worked at school. It's funny because we now have a library in our house, he's got shelves and shelves and shelves of books. My husband is a bookworm himself now and I think the course has really changed him...Now he actually picks up a book in English like *A Duck in a Truck*, which is Abdullah's favourite story, and he'll translate it into Arabic."

**FouFou Savitsky is Assistant Director and Head of the Family Learning Division at LLU+**

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- 1 The term *family learning* is used generically to include all family learning provision, that is, family literacy, numeracy, language (FLLN) and the wider range of opportunities offered such as family art, family learning and museums, which embed a wide variety of skills often including literacy and numeracy
- 2 *On the Road – Journeys in Family Learning*, London Language & Literacy Unit, 2003, ISBN 1 872972 35 7
- 3 See below, "Parents for whom basic skills are not an issue"

# Challenges facing family learning

Penny Lamb examines key issues

NIACE invited me to give the keynote address at two of their autumn 2003 family learning conferences "Broad, Balanced and Embedded – challenges and starting points in developing wider family learning provision". This article provides an overview of my contribution and my thoughts on the challenges facing us all in family learning, whether we are inspectors, practitioners or LSC officers. My thoughts apply as much to family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) as they do to wider family learning.

## Challenge One is to capture and evidence the achievements of family learning

My own journey started in the early 1990s on a City Challenge project in Wolverhampton. We were teaching GCSE English to women returners in an access centre based in a school in an area of high deprivation. Anyone who has taught in this situation will share the sheer pleasure of gigantic strides in learning, the gains in confidence and new horizons opening up, not least parents sharing knowledge and understanding with their children in the school on the same texts. We were delivering "family learning" in "an intergenerational context" before the terms became buzzwords.

In the move to inspection of family learning, targets and provision defined by funding streams, we need to maintain that essential intergenerational impact. We are not good at capturing and evidencing these achievements, including all the secondary evidence. We need to ensure that programmes are evaluated effectively so that they add to the knowledge as to how family learning enhances the Government priority agendas. As we move to a common understanding / definition as to what we mean by wider family learning, we must maintain the wider intergenerational impact, even if it is harder to measure. NIACE's evaluation report on LSC-funded provision found a number of different wider fam-



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ily learning programmes across Local Education Authorities (LEAs) as a whole. Examples included ContinYou's SHARE programmes, Workers' Educational Association (WEA) programmes such as Helping in Schools, arts-based programmes, story sacks, and so on. However, considering the volume of provision in individual LEAs, the range was rather limited. On inspection to date, we've found ICT programmes, arts programmes, museum trips and visits, and 'Dads and Lads' programmes, but where are the science programmes for families? We haven't found the broad-based curriculum of family activities. Is it becoming lost in the overall planning of inspections or does it not exist?

Back to my journey for the next challenge. We started to deliver one of the early Basic Skills Agency (BSA) family literacy pro-

grammes, the model of parents and children working together, with parents developing their own skills and working towards accreditation. I became fascinated as to the origins of this model and how it related to what we now call 'wider family learning'. This took me on a journey of all the political implications and variety of models of family literacy that were developed in the United States of America. As part of the research I was doing at the time, I wanted to track down the origins of the term 'family literacy'. I now think numerous people are claiming to have invented the term, but at the time the earliest reference I could trace was to an American ethnographic researcher, Denny Taylor. She claimed to have coined the phrase for her doctoral thesis in 1981 on long-term research on the social and home context in which young children learn to read and write. She found that interactions around print were different in each family and occurred "at the very margins of awareness". These activities were not added on but rather evolved as part of everyday life.

## Challenge Two is "Learning takes place at the very margins of awareness"

There are enormous challenges to recognise how and when informal / non-formal learning takes place in families and then to build these activities into learning programmes. As practitioners and inspectors we are not good at discussing and debating these issues. On inspection, too often we find over-concentration on the teaching and not the learning. A "one size fits all" approach does not meet the needs of many adult learners. We have a responsibility to recognise that some families' literacy traditions are not the same as those in schools. We need to celebrate the rich traditions of multiple literacies and literacy practices. It is particularly challenging to think about recognising tacit learning and differences in home literacy practices and then to build these into meaningful family learning programmes for all families in the sessions to take part in. Some of us at the conference started to address this challenge when Kate Pahl shared her current research on home literacy practices. She is researching how objects and activities within family life represent a family's positioning of itself and a re-affirming of cultural identity in activities that Kate calls "narratives of migration". Practitioners then started to explore relating these activities to programmes for families. On inspection we've seen some particularly effective use of school link workers supporting that bridge between the often very different cultures of home and school.

### Challenge Three is working within and around the funding structures and ensuring progression

My experiences in the mid-1990s working in a further education college leave me with one over-riding memory of trying to shoe-horn family learning programmes into a funding system that wasn't appropriate, whilst at the same time trying to make programmes appropriate to the needs of the learners. The big challenge then, as now, was how to attract parents and carers who are new learners into programmes without using deficit models. It's all too easy "to finger" parents and pressurise them into attending programmes. Equally, if the aim of a programme is to widen participation, it is a waste of resources and a failure of delivery to fill programmes with often very enthusiastic but incredibly well-educated parents. The balance can only be gained by effective publicity material and recruitment methods, especially word-of-mouth at the school gates and in community centres, and giving a high priority to informal, non-threatening enrolment and initial assessment.

The key challenge is to recognise that individual learners do not fit into neat programme definitions. There must be an interaction between wider family learning and the Skills for Families agenda. Many of us shuddered when a delegate spoke of his experiences as a participant on a family learning programme where many of the group failed to return after an over-zealous application of a written initial literacy assessment in Week One of a course. There has to be some recognition of starting points to know if learners' needs are being met or if they are on the right programme. However, this has to be sensitive to the needs of learners and not used as a blunt instrument or we lose the advantage of re-engaging learners through family programmes. Once hooked, there has to be adequate progression routes for parents, both within family learning programmes and onto other programmes. The NIACE evaluation recognised that often progression does not happen immediately and that we need to develop systems to track learners. The evaluation also highlighted that the demand for wider family learning programmes is much higher in some LEAs than can be provided, ironic as many delegates reported that they were unable to recruit enough parents within the tight definitions of FLLN programmes. It's pleasing to hear that the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU)-approved menu of LSC-funded FLLN programmes for 2004/05 will be wider and will build on the current Skills for Families initiative.

### Challenge Four is recognising that embedded wider family learning is not a quick fix: it is often a process involving many years

In the late 1990s, I worked for a community organisation that facilitated many activities to engage local families in a variety of social activities. For many people this was the first step in learning. For example, parents bringing their children to junior football, becoming involved as volunteers and gaining skills in fundraising, working on committees, articulating the needs of the local community and then moving onto other programmes. The individual journeys of learning for many adults have a starting point of learning framed in the context of being a parent. But it takes people a long time to work through that process.

It often needs a partnership approach with community organisations to make it happen so that the learning input occurs at the right time. On inspection, we've seen some very effective partnerships both at a strategic level and at operational level. For inspection purposes (and funding purposes), the challenge is to make a clear distinction between when the social activities end and learning activities begin. That is not to negate the importance of the outreach and engagement process which are crucial for widening participation. It is also not to lose the fun and taster side of family learning and of engaging people in different environments through, for example, use of toy libraries and parent and toddler groups. These are equally vital. It is about being very aware of when learning will take place and equally when there is no intention that learning will take place. There is a vital role for social activities and clubs, especially in terms of enabling community cohesion, but we should be honest in recognising when there is no learning intended and fund these activities through other methods.

### The final challenge has to be the introduction of inspection of family learning as part of adult and community learning inspections.

However, this one isn't as challenging as the rest. In the majority of inspections to date, family learning provision has been judged as satisfactory or better. The challenge of inspection is the same as the challenge of providing effective programmes. It is about ensuring that family learning is effective, not in terms of rhetoric or "funding bid speak" but from the learner focus. It's about ensuring that the needs of the adults on the programmes are met as well as those of the children, ensuring a balance between the adult and the children's

agenda. There are issues about the Inspectorate's focus on the adult provision but it doesn't mean that we ignore the impact of the learning on the whole family. Good provision ensures that diversity is celebrated. It can evidence the wider social and economic benefits of family learning, not in terms of increasing bureaucracy for programme providers but of ensuring that systems are in place to prove that programmes facilitate learning and in what ways. If widening participation is the core aim of a programme, then it's critical to measure the recruitment of new learners and their retention and achievements in relation to their starting points. It is about ensuring there are opportunities for learners to make progress, either within other family learning programmes or in wider provision, and knowing if learners take up these further opportunities. It's about ensuring that there are accurate and systematic ways of collecting this information and evidencing achievements. It's about moving away from the anecdotal and being more systematic in approach. But actually, this is not about inspection, it's about providing effective programmes and knowing what works well and why, and then sharing that information with inspectors.

And that's the real challenge in a time when so much focus is on the economic imperative and the vocational agenda. It's the challenge to provide government and policy makers with the body of evidence that broad and balanced family learning provision has a critical role to play both in the social and community agenda and as a starting place to re-engage adults in the learning process and sometimes into employment or more skilled jobs.

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# A week in the life

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## Flora Sheringham provides an insight into her role as a family learning manager

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Cambridgeshire has long had a commitment to family learning. Increasing national awareness and significant funding from the Learning and Skills Council specifically for family learning has brought about innovative and exciting schemes. I manage both wider family learning and family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN). In my position as Family Learning Manager, I am trying to develop a seamless service across the two areas of work. To achieve this objective and to deliver the variety of benefits that family learning can offer families new to learning, my tasks and responsibilities vary considerably. A flavour of my job is outlined in my diary below.

In family learning we work on the premise that informed and confident adults are those who are best able to help their children to learn. To this end much of what we do is aimed at helping adults to identify their own learning needs, progress their own learning and, in so doing, help to raise their children's achievement.

Wider family learning can draw in those who do not usually see themselves as learn-

ers. It is a means of fostering a positive attitude to learning within the family through varied provision, often intergenerational, offered in a supportive way. Through attending all forms of family learning, participants often raise their self-esteem and become aware of a desire to continue learning. Cambridgeshire LEA always provides opportunities to guide people on to further learning for which they have expressed a preference or have an identified need.

One of our aims is to signpost learners from wider family learning on to FLLN, where this is appropriate for them, offering them the levels of support so crucial in this area of work. In order to reach our target audience we work closely with a number of agencies in the community, both statutory and voluntary. It is also vital for us to work closely with schools as this is the most direct way of making contact with families who have the most need for what we can offer. However, it often takes considerable time to develop and maintain these links with schools, marrying the adult/child agendas to our mutual advantage.



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### Monday am

#### Minus One to Five Training

The first training course for Minus One to Five projects workers starts today. Minus One to Five is a Family Play project for parents /carers and pre-school children. It focuses on 'learning through play', that is, the interaction of children and adults in a play situation and the importance of developing early literacy, numeracy and communication skills. It is funded through the LSC as an extended FLLN workshop.

The day offers guidance on planning, monitoring and evaluation, and I need to emphasise the importance of these processes, not least because they are good practice. One doesn't want to scare off the new recruits, but the criteria for the Common Inspection Framework must be met. My input will cover how the project fits into a family learning context. I'm also talking about how the project is resourced.

### pm

#### Partners in Learning Conference

I am attending the launch conference of the Cambridgeshire *Partners in Learning* project 2003 this afternoon. There will be a series of presentations to headteachers and parent governors from a representative from the DfES, who are funding the current phase, our Director of Education and the *Partners in Learning* group. The focus of the afternoon is to highlight the 'parents matter' agenda and showcase multi-agency projects in the county that could be examples for future work. There will also be an exhibition from organisations that work with families.

I'm part of the county group *Partners in Learning* which considers the question of how the LEA and its schools can best build on and develop what we know about effective home-school partnerships and share the good practice that exists in Cambridgeshire schools. We were recently approached by the DfES to be part of their current strategy to involve parents in their children's education.

The occasion is an excellent opportunity to remind schools of the role that wider family learning and FLLN play in meeting the priority being given to work with parents. We still have to work on developing understanding, both in schools and with parents, of what family learning is and what it offers – we need to show how relevant it is for them.

### Tuesday am

#### Family Learning Steering Group

The Family Learning Steering Group (FLSG) was launched earlier in the year. Membership

of the group includes the LEAs, LSC, Social Services, Health, Sure Start, Learning Partnerships and voluntary organisations that develop and deliver wider family learning and FLLN in the county. The group's activities are LSC-funded. I'm the current chair and this meeting is to begin to develop an action plan for wider family learning and FLLN that will take us through the next three years. I know that a main concern will be how we can plan within formula funding. Also, we need to ensure that all partners from all sectors feel included in the process and can take ownership of the plan produced.

Our priority areas for the work are easily defined through indices of deprivation and the priority groups identified by the LSC. We have done a mapping exercise of existing provision. Our plan needs to consider how to increase capacity to deliver family learning, looking at recruitment and retention of staff that deliver wider family learning (there is already a county group looking at similar issues for *Skills for Life* within which FLLN fits in this particular context); providing training opportunities for existing and new family learning staff; resources (funding and fundraising); linking wider family learning and FLLN, ensuring the connections to *Skills for Life*; and consulting with user groups and communities. There is much to be resolved here, not least the issue of universal versus targeted provision – much heated debate on this one, I'm sure!

**pm**  
**Meeting of the Cambridgeshire Family Learning Website Editorial Group**

A website ([cambsfamilylearning.org.uk](http://cambsfamilylearning.org.uk)) has been built. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Family Learning Services have jointly funded it through their monies from LSC. Part of the remit of the FLSG is to look at a communications strategy for family learning. At our launch event in February practitioners asked for information on events, funding, training, sharing good practice and an arena for this to happen. The website will help provide this to an extent, once we have people trained to enter material and make sure it is current. I must remind the group that our focus needs to be local and that links to the forthcoming National Family Learning Network website and others such as Skills for Families and NIACE can help to provide the national perspective.

**Wednesday**

I called in on one of our family ICT workshops last night. We are piloting these in four pri-



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mary schools. It was fantastic to see parents, grandparents and children all involved together. This session was the fourth of five sessions and the place was buzzing. For quite a few of the adults, the workshops have been the first frontier. One lady said she would never have done an IT course if it had not been presented to her through school and now she was hooked. It reminds you of what family learning is all about!

Today, I'm catching up on paperwork, mountains of it. Oh well, head down...

**Thursday am**

**Meeting to review training for 03-04**

We have decided not to go for a generic family learning training course until the National Occupational Standards for Family Learning are in place. The consensus is that, for the moment, we will still offer the City and Guilds 7307 (Certificate in Teaching Adult Learners) with a bolt-on family learning package. There are excellent practitioners who would benefit from this qualification. In addition, there are subject-specific supporting workshops over the year covering both wider family learning and FLLN, including the embedding of basic skills. I'm aiming towards basic skills being embedded in all the provision offered through wider family learning.

**pm**

**Primary Heads Forum**

There are three of these across Cambridgeshire – for Cambridge City and surrounding villages, Huntingdonshire and Fenland. Information sessions are being held to update heads on the literacy and numeracy strategies. Jaki (FLLN worker) and I are covering these

events to promote FLLN courses. Today I'm in Fenland. I'm hoping that the headteacher from one of the local schools who has a very active wider family learning and FLLN programme will be along to rally the troops a bit. Nothing like a bit of support from the inside!

Now that we have additional capacity (and higher targets to meet) we have to be proactive. We must be very clear that this is a partnership between schools and the LEA, and also how family learning fits into schools' priorities and the national agenda. We also have a new option for schools to deliver their own programmes. To do this, schools need to agree to initial training for staff around the basic skills needs of adults and that the programme will be subject to our quality assurance.

**Friday**

**Review of Family Learning Weekend**

Family Learning Weekend (FLW) looms. This has become such an important point on the calendar for us. We need constantly to be raising the profile of family learning and our service, not just to families, but also to potential providers and in new settings. Family Learning Weekend has helped considerably. Last year there were nearly 5,500 participants.

It is clear that the job of family learning manager is important. The job is crucial in bringing together learners and providers, enabling the return to learning in 'small steps' for some and widening the range of learning opportunities for others. I find it worthwhile, challenging and very enjoyable.

*Flora Sheringham is Family Learning Manager, Cambridgeshire LEA*

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# Fathers' involvement in family learning programmes

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Rebecca Goldman presents early findings from her review of research and practice

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In recent years, numerous initiatives have emerged to promote involved fatherhood. At the same time, there have been moves in education to promote the key role of parents as their children's "first educators". The Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (2003) speaks of the importance of family learning programmes, of better communication between parents and schools, and of involving fathers in school life. Yet, to date, many family learning programmes and much of the research published on family learning use the term "parent" but involve almost entirely mothers. The OFSTED survey of family learning (2000) stated that "there is a disturbing absence of men involved in family learning".

DfES have convened a Fathers Advisory Group of practitioners, and alongside this, I have been carrying out an evidence review at the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) to look at what the research literature has to say about fathers' involvement in their children's learning and education, focusing on school-age children (ages 4-16). I have also mapped relevant projects and practice in Great Britain. In this article, I present some interim findings on fathers and family learning programmes from this research.

## Why should family learning involve fathers?

Research clearly shows that fathers' overall involvement in their children's learning is associated with better educational, social and emotional outcomes for children, including better exam results, better school attendance and behaviour, less criminality, higher quality of later relationships, and better mental health (Fluori and Buchanan, 2001; Nord, Brimhall and West, 1998). This association with fathers' involvement is independent of mothers' involvement (Fluori and Buchanan, 2001), and exists for two-parent families, "father-only" families and non-resident fathers in the USA (Nord, Brimhall and West, 1998). Additionally, it is well known that boys as a group are doing worse at school in the UK

and some other countries than are girls (McGivney, 1999). Many experts propose the importance of fathers and other "father figures" acting as male role models for boys' learning and reading. And fathers' involvement is not just about future outcomes. Evaluations of family learning initiatives that involve dads (uncovered through NFPI's mapping) report that children enjoy it when their dad is involved. There is also the potential for family learning to be a 'progression route' to further learning for fathers, but there is as yet little evidence on this specifically.

## David (1998) argued that mothers bear the responsibility of involvement in schools and children's learning. Does this apply to family learning programmes?

The research clearly shows that there is very low participation by fathers in family learning initiatives. An evaluation of Learning and Skills Council-funded family programmes (NIACE, 2003) estimated that about five per cent of learners participating in family language, literacy and numeracy (FLLN) programmes in 2002/03 were men. The percentages were higher for wider family learning in which it was estimated that men comprised about 12 per cent of learners.

Similarly, the evaluation of Basic Skills Agency (BSA) family literacy demonstration programmes (NER/BSA, 1996), which worked with parents with poor basic skills and their children (aged 3-6) reported that 96 per cent of 360 parents in the research were mothers. Similarly, for the BSA numeracy programme, 97 per cent of parents in the research were mothers (Brooks *et al*, 2002).

Fathers do therefore get more involved in wider family learning than in FLLN, and sometimes also when courses are shorter and run outside the working day. In the NFER/University of Sheffield evaluation of the BSA *Keeping up with the children* course (literacy and numeracy) which lasted 12 hours, nine per cent of the participants were fathers (Brooks

*et al*, 2002). However, there is some evidence that when fathers do join school-based family learning programmes where mothers are in the majority, and they are held during daytime hours, they are likely to drop out (MacLeod, 2000; Millard and Hunter, 2001 citing Lewis's 2000a evaluation of Share at Key Stage 2).

It is important to remember that the low participation of fathers in family learning is part of a wider issue of men's low involvement in non-vocational adult education generally. McGivney (1999) writes that "local education authority provision and community-based adult education courses...continue to be heavily dominated by women."

The good news is that the NFPI's mapping has uncovered many examples of family learning initiatives which specifically involve fathers. Sometimes these are on stereotypically male themes such as sport, ICT and technology, but there are also examples in the curricular areas of the visual arts, music, reading and creative writing.

There is also some evidence from small-scale research that even where fathers do not attend events, they may increase their involvement as a result of the mothers passing learning onto them and through encouragement by their children (Brassett-Grundy, 2002, Karther, 2002).

## Which fathers get involved?

There is very little research evidence on which fathers are more or less likely to be involved in family learning. However, it is possible to take a guess based on the evidence on fathers' involvement in children's learning more generally. Fathers are more likely to be involved (Fluori and Buchanan, 2001; Fluori and Buchanan, 2003; Nord, Brimhall and West, 1998) if

- the child's mother is involved in the child's learning and education
- the father is resident with the child
- there are good relations between the father and the mother, especially if the father is non-resident

- the father is better educated or is from a higher social-economic group (also holds for mothers' involvement and for male involvement in adult learning), although long working hours can mediate these effects
- the father and the mother (where co-resident) have more egalitarian roles generally in the household
- there has been earlier (postnatal/pre-school/primary school) involvement by the father
- the child is in primary school rather than secondary school (which also holds for mothers' involvement in education)
- the father comprises a "father-only household" – "father-only" households are as involved in school in the US as "mother-only" households.

### What are the barriers to fathers' involvement in family learning initiatives?

The main barriers highlighted in the research literature are presented below.

A "macro-factor" is *traditional gender roles within families*. Lewis (2000b) wrote that "cultural stereotypes of fathers as 'providers' and 'breadwinners' continue to exert a strong

influence over men's, women's and children's attitudes to parenthood"; and this may be particularly so in some traditional working-class areas (MacLeod, 2000). These issues affect father involvement generally.

*Work and lack of time* are also major barriers. These are also issues for working mothers, and they affect all kinds of father involvement, and involvement in all types of non-vocational adult education. However, fathers are much more likely to work full-time than mothers; and fathers are more likely to work than men overall (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003). In fact, fathers in the UK have the longest working hours in Europe (EOC, 2003). Millard and Hunter (2001) suggest that fathers' daytime activity is a key barrier in relation to fathers' involvement in CEDC (now ContinYou) family learning programmes which are usually held on weekday afternoons. However, some research finds little increase in fathers' participation when sessions are scheduled in evenings or at weekends (Fletcher and Dally, 2002). It could be that work overload is responsible, or that other barriers are also operating.

Family learning practitioners and participants are mainly female, which creates a 'fem-

inised environment'. Fathers see schools and community education as women's spaces (MacLeod, 2000; Razwan, 2002); and learning (especially literacy) as 'women's work' (MacLeod, 2000; Fletcher and Dally, 2002). These attitudes often start when they are in school themselves as children. Low-qualified mothers and fathers may both have little confidence or interest in learning themselves or helping their children learn. But this barrier may be more pronounced amongst fathers. The 1997 National Adult Learning Survey in England and Wales reports that men are more likely than women to say "nothing would encourage them to learn" and that men are more likely than women to say they had not enjoyed learning at school (see McGivney, 1999).

*Family learning practitioners' (mainly female) attitudes towards men and fathers* may affect their behaviour towards fathers and limit their efforts to involve them. There is no evidence on this specific to family learning, but there is some evidence from small-scale UK and Australian studies that female teachers in schools expect fathers to have minimal involvement (Clough et al, 2000), and may fear abuse and aggression from men (Bright et al, 2002).

*Mothers can act as gatekeepers or facilitators* to fathers' involvement, depending on their attitudes and motivations. MacLeod (2002) argues that "women...unconsciously operate within the norm of male uninvolvement". It can be argued that mothers are most likely to be gatekeepers when fathers are non-resident (Baker and McMurray, 1998).

*Fathers' individual circumstances, such as geographic distance from the child for non-resident fathers* which can create financial as well as time implications; and language skills in English (see Razwan, 2002).

*Inappropriate recruitment and practice in programmes* for attracting fathers is common, such as recruitment based on a help-giving model and a female orientation to the delivery and content of programmes (MacLeod, 2002).

Of course, the relative impact of these barriers differs for different groups of fathers, such as different social classes, ethnic groups and family status.

### Good practice

The NFPI mapping has uncovered many initiatives that successfully involve fathers in family learning, and there are many good practice recommendations in the research literature. My research report for NFPI, which is due to be published later in 2004, will cover this in much greater detail, and also includes case studies



of a range of projects which involve fathers in their children's learning. There is much diversity amongst fathers relating to degree of masculinity, leisure interests, social class, employment status, ethnic groups and regional cultures. It is important to remember to consult fathers themselves and that one model does not fit all. The emphasis in the literature is on attracting fathers themselves through recruitment and family learning activities designed specifically for fathers. A small selection of recommendations is presented here.

### Recruitment of fathers

- Involving fathers needs effort, creativity and persistence – it can be problematic and slow.
- Appeal to **children** to ask fathers to participate with them in learning. Use e-mail and telephone when fathers are working.
- Use incentives to fathers to recruit, and attract sponsorship such as tickets for football matches and the cinema.
- Sell the activity as 'something' you are doing for your children (Bryant and Henderson, 2002), as men are more likely than women to fear exposing lack of knowledge (McGivney, 1999) and are less likely to seek help across a range of services (Lewis, 2000b).

### Learning content and style

- "Give men strong and masculine things to do" (MacLeod, 2000). This is often important as a starting point, but it may be beneficial later on in a project to think about taking more risks with learning content (Bryant and Henderson, 2002). This is to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes and to cater for different interests amongst fathers. Use ICT (McGivney, 1999: "working on a computer is safe and private with no risk of humiliation or losing face").
- Use non-fiction and non-conventional reading materials (Brookes, 2002; Fletcher and Dally, 2002; Ortiz, 2001; Lloyd, 1999).
- Use high quality materials and equipment (but can prevent replication of activities at home by parents if the materials are too costly).
- Use dynamic and active learning styles – games and fun (Bryant and Henderson, 2002) – not too much discussion.

### Scheduling events

- Take account of local work patterns, local football, TV sport and daily prayer times (for example, for Muslim fathers – see Razwan, 2002).

### Further research

There is a need for further research in this interesting and topical area. Priority areas include the following:

- the involvement of non-resident fathers and other specific groups in family learning;
- the involvement of fathers in 'wider family learning' programmes;

- family learning practitioners' attitudes towards father involvement; and
- clarification of some unresolved practice issues.

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# Building bridges

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## Jackie Horne highlights wider family learning and discusses the benefits of making better links with family literacy, language and numeracy

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'Wider family learning' was a term coined during the NIACE evaluation of LSC funded family programmes (NIACE, 2003) in order to distinguish between family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) and wider forms of family learning provision. Wider family learning includes provision as diverse as family ICT, arts and crafts, family science, family football and parenting classes. It therefore includes some of the most fun and exciting family learning. Nevertheless, it can be seen, by some, as the poor relation of FLLN.

Indeed, some practitioners and policy makers have asked why there should be a distinction between different forms of family learning. After all, all forms of good quality family learning share the same core elements of parents and children learning together and/or separately about each other in a fun and confidence building environment. It is also known that wider family learning shares many of the same benefits as FLLN does, such as developing the confidence and self esteem of both adults and children, and encouraging a greater level of involvement with and understanding of children's learning by adults. Furthermore, the NIACE evaluation also found that both areas of family learning were effective in attracting learners from the *Skills for Life* target groups.

However, aside from the issue of there being two separate LSC funding streams, it can be helpful to have some clarity between the two areas of family learning. This relates to the different needs of learners. The NIACE evaluation (2003) and the OFSTED (2000) *Survey of Family Learning* found that family learning activities that were focussed on a broader range of activities than basic skills had greater success in attracting families from disadvantaged and under-represented groups. Rebecca Goldman's review of the research evidence in this edition of ALAS suggests that men in particular prefer activities that fall within the remit of wider family learning rather than FLLN. This includes, but is not restricted to, traditional masculine and non-threatening subjects such as ICT and technology.

Furthermore, it should be recognised that not all adults who need encouragement to return to learning and/or who want to understand more about how their children learn have basic skills needs themselves. The Keeping Your Language Alive project (see case study 1) is a good example of family learning provision which helps literate parents teach children the language of their native country. The second case study in this article, the Nurturing Programme from Family Links, is an example of a high quality family learning programme that fits closely with many of the issues identified in the Government's green paper *Every Child Matters*. This programme would be beneficial to adults and children from all walks of life, regardless of their basic skills needs.

Therefore, distinguishing between the two areas of family learning can encourage practitioners and policy makers alike to think about the different needs of learners. It can also encourage innovative relationships between FLLN and wider family learning. Given the abil-

ity of wider family learning to reach the Skills for Life target groups, and the most disadvantaged groups in particular (NIACE, 2003), some LEAs have started to consider the relationship between wider family learning and FLLN provision in terms of progression routes. For example, Flora Sheringham (see page 15) states in her article that one of the aims of Cambridgeshire's wider family learning provision is to signpost learners with basic skills needs on to FLLN courses. The LSC and the Skills for Families project are also looking to develop wider family learning courses which link into FLLN provision. This is very valuable in terms of attracting people with the highest level of basic skills needs who are most reluctant to return to learning. Wider family learning can be the route whereby such learners build their confidence and find their identities as learners through doing something that interests them in a fun and non-threatening environment. Once such learners have found their feet and a taste for learning, with the right guidance and support, they are more

### Keeping Your Language Alive (Case study 1)

The 'Keeping Your Language Alive' project was developed between the languages department of Southend Adult Community College and the South East Essex Chinese school after observing that parents were very keen to encourage and support their children to learn Mandarin. Apart from supporting parents wanting to teach their children their own language, it shares many of the objectives of other family learning programmes. This includes increasing parents' awareness of the school education system, raising confidence and self-esteem and encouraging parents' to take their own education further. Initially the course was delivered only at the college where the Chinese community already gathered every Sunday. However, other courses have since been offered in local primary schools to all parents whose first language isn't English, including participants from Morocco, Russia, Kenya and Angola.

In the course, parents learn general basic techniques on how to teach their children their native language. Parents are asked to integrate songs, rhymes, games and stories that are traditionally learned by children in their country of origin into their work. Throughout the course parents build up a portfolio of evidence required to gain a Level 1 NCFE certificate. The completed portfolio of work contains valuable information and knowledge that can be used by parents in the future. Another key strength of the project is that it has brought parents and children from around the world together to explore, exchange and celebrate the value of language, traditions and heritage from their own cultures.

A "Teaching Your Children Toolbox" has been developed. This is a learning package that contains all the items needed to deliver the course. It includes course specifications, a set of handouts, clear delivery instructions and resources. As the course is generic it could be used for the teaching and learning of not just languages but maths, science, art and so on.

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likely to continue learning and address their basic skills needs. Some leavers will perhaps be motivated and confident enough to take the National Test, thus contributing towards the *Skills for Life* targets.

However, it should be borne in mind that wider family learning can and should act as more than a reception class for people with basic skills needs to be signposted on to FLLN provision. The relationship between FLLN and wider family learning is more complex than that. For example, after finishing an FLLN course, some learners may lack confidence to move onto further learning at their local college and/or may just want to continue learning close to their home, for a variety of reasons (NIACE, 2003). Given the non-linear progression routes of many adult learners, particularly parents, and their different needs and interests (see McGivney, 2003), wider family learning can keep people involved in learning until they feel ready and able to move on. In terms of a more complex relationship

### The Nurturing Programme by Family Links (Case study 2)

The Nurturing Programme is an emotional literacy course for children and adults promoted by Family Links. Its overall aims are to build healthy and strong relationships in families, schools and communities by promoting and teaching the benefits of emotional literacy and emotional health. The course emphasises the importance of nurturing in family learning.

The programme is based on four key concepts, known as the Four Constructs; appropriate expectations, self-awareness and self-esteem, positive approaches to discipline, and above all empathy (the skill of recognising and accepting someone else's emotional point of view). The programme also looks at attitudes that promote and inhibit learning and the role of different learning styles. Parents and children learn about issues such as choices and consequences, anger and how to deal with it, the importance of praise and criticism, and personal responsibility. This promotes healthy attitudes and behaviour and enables both adults and children to enhance their family and other relationships, improve their motivation, cope with challenges, and get the best out of life. In many ways, it fits very closely with the outcomes identified in *Every Child Matters* by children, young people and families as being important to their lives. These outcomes were being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, economic well being, and making a positive contribution.

Family Links offers training in and provides resources for the use of the Nurturing Programme. To date, Family Links has trained 120 schools trainers, approximately 800 parent group leaders and some 6,000 school staff (teachers and support staff) to deliver the programme. From March 2004, a board game, card game and a video for schools will be available.

Contact [FamilyLinksUK@aol.com](mailto:FamilyLinksUK@aol.com) for further information.

### Family Learning Through Football and Coaching (Case study 3)

"Family Learning Through Football and Coaching" is promoted by Sunderland AFC Foundation and Durham's Family Learning Partnership. The project is targeted on SRB6 wards and aims to increase the capability of the most disadvantaged families by helping parents support their children's development whilst raising their own skill levels and confidence. Durham Family Learning has found that football can remove barriers and engage people from all backgrounds. This includes, but is not limited to, men who often have a limited level of involvement in learning as adults themselves and in their own children's education. Using football as the hook in deprived communities, other issues including cultures of underachievement and lack of aspiration can be tackled.

During the ten-week-long informal education programme that makes up Family Learning Through Football and Coaching, children develop physical and fine motor skills, concentration, cooperation and self-confidence, which ties into the National Curriculum. Parents find out about how their children learn and how to coach their children positively in other areas of their lives. Programmes cover issues including why exercise is important, children's developmental stages and behaviour patterns, how parents influence children and setting realistic goals. Parents are given the option of completing a portfolio of evidence that can be accredited through the Open College Network at levels one and two (the majority of parents are doing this). Children are given a certificate of achievement. Further units are to be developed and written in Family Learning Through Football and citizenship, environment, health and skills for life with options for learners to progress from one to another.

One of the most important aspects of the programme is identifying other needs in both children and their parents, particularly basic skills, and signposting learners to other relevant agencies that can provide support. Improving communication between families is a vital aspect and enabling children to have the knowledge to make decisions, which affect them, is also part of the programme. A spin off of the partnership between SAFC Foundation and family learning in Durham has been involvement with ContinYour's 'Active Dads' programme. 'Active Dads' encourages dads to undertake activities with their children, and to begin to address the problems of social exclusion recognised to be more widespread amongst those with poor relationships with their fathers.

The project is also an excellent example of partnership working. As well as Durham LEA and Sunderland AFC itself, the partnership includes four local FE colleges, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), 5 Primary Care Trusts, Social Services, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, Connexions and the IAG service as well as the 7 district councils. Two SAFC coaches/family learning workers have recently been appointed to roll out Family Learning through Football across Durham.

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between wider family learning and FLLN, there is also the important issue of embedding basic skills within wider family learning provision. This has yet to be fully addressed by both practitioners and policy makers.

At the time of the NIACE evaluation, LEAs estimated that the demand for wider family learning was higher than they were able to supply. However, the breadth and depth of wider family learning provision was not as large as NIACE expected to find. In many ways this is not surprising given that the fieldwork for the evaluation was conducted during the first year of LSC funding for wider family learning. Provision has certainly moved on from then. As well as ICT, arts and crafts, parenting programmes such as *Parents as Educators*, and the well established voluntary sector programmes such as ContinYour's SHARE and the WEA's *Helping in Schools*, NIACE is aware of a more diverse range of provision. This includes examples of family history and family science, as well as family learning through football and emotional literacy for

families, as highlighted in the case studies.

However, as stated in its response to the Government's green paper *Every Child Matters*, NIACE feels that more should be done to develop family learning provision as a whole. While there are a greater number of different examples of family learning provision, there is not yet an adequate breadth or depth of family learning embedded across all LEAs. Family learning has the ability to impact on a number of government policies and agendas – from schools standards and *Every Child Matters* through child poverty and social inclusion, and from Skills for Life through Learning Communities and neighbourhood renewal. Combined with its ability to attract disadvantaged groups, including those under-represented in learning, NIACE feels that more should be done to reach 'more and different families'. This includes more fathers, including non-resident fathers, more grandparents, more young parents, more black and ethnic minority families, more foster families and more families with learning difficulties and



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disabilities.

The evidence highlighted above suggests it will be a broad, balanced and embedded family learning curriculum that will have the greatest success in attracting 'more and different' families and meeting their varied needs. This includes the development of a wider range of family learning opportunities, including FLLN. It also includes the development of better links between what has become known as wider family learning and FLLN. After all, FLLN and wider family learning have much in common, as well as much to offer each other. With this in mind, the development of family learning should include putting the case for family learning as a whole and the wide range of benefits it can bring to all families. The challenge to all of us is to make sure this happens.

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The case studies in this article are taken from the forthcoming NIACE publication *Starting Points in Developing Wider Family Learning Provision*, edited by Clare Chisholm, Jeanne Haggart and Jackie Horne

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# Extended schools – opportunities and challenges

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## Julian Piper makes the case for extended schools

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The development of Extended Schools across the country is causing a great deal of interest amongst a variety of agencies. These include statutory and voluntary groups working in:

- health and social care;
- adult and family learning;
- parenting support;
- childcare;
- study support; and
- sport and the arts.

All schools are being encouraged to extend their work with their communities as part of the latest drive to raise standards. Many schools have seen a rapid rise in attainment resulting from substantial improvements in teaching and learning, but they are now reaching a plateau and there is a strong belief, backed up by increasing evidence, that the next rise in standards will come from engaging in greater partnership with the community.

### The current programme

Government funding is supporting the roll-out of the creation of full-service extended schools in all local authorities by 2005-6, when it is hoped that at least 240 will have been developed. Full-service extended schools are those that are developing activities across the full range of areas listed above. Extended schools, which are being supported through a variety of disparate local funding mechanisms are those that are developing one or more of the areas but not necessarily the full range. Some of these schools have been working actively with their communities for many years. A key distinction between the current policy and the community schools of past generations is the inextricable link to raising standards. Whereas schools were previously encouraged to provide a key focus for the community through building large volumes of activity, not necessarily linked to their core business in any way, OfSTED and school governors are now charged with ensuring that any extended activity complements the

school's core role in improving the levels of achievement of its pupils.

Alongside the roll-out, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has contracted with ContinYou to provide a national support service for extended schools. A team of development officers is responsible for supporting the full-service extended schools individually and also supports the development of extended schools across England through regular networking and by scheduling instructional seminars.

### Adult and family learning

Schools looking to create quick wins in this area are already realising that adult and family learning activities can have considerable impact within a short research timescale. Evidence from the recent DfES research report by Professor Desforges shows that parental involvement in children's learning can have the greatest of all impact on levels of achievement, whilst the impact of qualification levels of mothers on the eventual outcomes for their children has long been known. Schools in areas where there are low levels of basic skills

can be key players in encouraging parents to take up training opportunities. There is also growing evidence that initiatives such as the national literacy strategy and the national numeracy strategy have disenfranchised parents who do not now understand the teaching methods used by schools and find it very difficult to support their children at home.

This is not an area where schools, and in particular their staff, have great expertise historically. Some make the assumption that their teachers will inevitably be good at working with adults and parents and therefore consider direct delivery of courses to adults. There is a strong case, however, for encouraging schools to work in partnership with other agencies, for example further education (FE) colleges, Local Education Authority (LEA) Adult Education and other training providers, to ensure the highest quality of provision and to tap into greater expertise and support for tutors. This route also reduces the burden on schools for data collection and quality control. There is a powerful argument for LEAs, with a responsibility for securing adequate adult education provision, for developing bespoke

### Case study

Mitchell High School in Stoke-on-Trent had a poor record of achievement when headteacher Debbie Sanderson took over in April 2001. She clearly understood the necessity to involve the community much more actively in the life of the school and saw the potential benefits that would accrue. Three years on, the evidence is there for all to see and the school is developing as the full-service extended school in Stoke. There have been important structural changes: for example, garages and storage spaces have been turned into a bright, pleasant, well-equipped and easily-accessible Community Learning Centre and library, and a former caretaker's house has been turned into MAC's place (Multi-Agency Centre) to provide pupils with a wide range of support services linked to the school's pastoral system. There have also been significant partnerships built to support the core work of the school and the community. WorkStart (provided by the local SureStart scheme) is providing access to training for significant numbers of local people. The local Residents' Association provides key-holder and security functions to enable the premises to be open for extended hours. A growing number of adults are taking part in learning opportunities, particularly Health and Social Care GNVQ and ICT (often with normal school classes). Exam results have improved dramatically from a low baseline towards national averages. Mitchell High School is keen to build on its success and is now looking to run ContinYou's SHARE family learning course.



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programmes which are available for delivery in partnership with schools to support the overall LEA aim of improving standards. Family learning programmes would be high on the list of priorities in this context. However, training for classroom assistants, lunchtime supervisors, childminders and those involved in early years work can also have a major impact on communities and schools.

### Staff development and training

Schools, sometimes facing difficulties in recruiting staff at various levels (both teaching and support staff), are increasingly adopting a 'grow your own' policy and seeing innovative progression routes for local people. Examples of these are seen in those who progress through volunteering to classroom assistant or mentoring training and on to initial teacher qualifications. The same idea is frequently applied to clerical and administrative staff who may have been recruited from on-site NVQs in business administration and then through customer care NVQs and a variety of accountancy routes, might progress to bursars or business managers.

However, it is in the area of widening participation that LLSCs and extended schools may have most to gain from each other. Schools, by virtue of being universal services, have access to people. We have much to learn,

perhaps, from the Children's Aid Society in New York as they created their Full Service Schools and sought to involve parents in numbers hitherto beyond their wildest dreams. They found that the first stage was to 'eradicate the traditionally ambivalent invitation to take part in their children's learning'. The antidote was that everyone connected with the school and community (from midwives, health visitors and school nurses through to caretakers, librarians and even the most senior teachers) promoted the same consistent message about the importance of parental involvement and the specific ways in which parents could exercise their commitment. Here is a lesson for schools and adult education providers – that a consistent message from as many contacts with parents as possible can create a substantial shift in culture and promote an increased value in learning activity. For this to be successful, schools and adult education providers will need to ensure that there is widespread access to information for all those who have the opportunity to act as 'missionaries' in the field and that the benefits of learning are well publicised and acknowledged.

### Working with extended schools

Schools, used to a considerable degree of autonomy in their working practice, some-

times feel that they have to deliver all the services required in an area by themselves and they are often unaware of other related activities provided locally by voluntary organisations, FE providers, LEA Adult/Family Education services and private companies. The DfES guidance on extended schools explicitly instructs schools to consult widely before embarking on extended activities and they would be well advised to take advantage of other local surveys and information. Looking at it from the consumers' perspective, there is great mileage in schools being part of a well planned 'climbing frame' of local opportunities where entry routes to learning and exit routes to other progression opportunities are clear and offer a variety of different delivery models. LLSCs will have access to considerable amounts of information that will be of value to schools as they seek to find their place in the frame and understand how their provision links to others in the area. It is vital that this information is made available to schools, linked to advice on skills shortages and employment opportunities in their area in order to avoid unproductive duplication of effort and to ensure a well-informed and coherent provision of opportunities.

*Julian Piper is National Programme Director of the Extended Schools Support Service, ContinYOU*

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# Working together to extend and embed family literacy, language and numeracy

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Sian Welby reports on the Skills for Families initiative

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Families can play a big role in getting adults back into learning, and the Skills for Families programme aims to make sure this happens. Skills for Families, supported by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), is working with 12 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) across the country to help meet the need for effective family literacy, language and numeracy programmes (FLLN). It is concentrating on developing new models, joint planning, good evaluation and mainstreaming. One of the key aims is to try and make sure good connections are made between schools, Local Authorities and the post-16 sector.

The initiative consists of four strands:

- piloting local infrastructures for planning and managing FLLN;
- developing and testing a range of delivery models, including work with secondary schools, fathers, workplaces and voluntary-based organisations to reach and engage a wide audience;
- testing approaches to teacher training and capacity-building for schools and other organisations working with families; and
- disseminating effective practice to other LEAs, LLSCs, voluntary organisations and other relevant agencies.

## How the project works

The initiative is based on 12 regional collaborative partnerships, with one pilot in each of the nine Government regions. This includes Knowsley, Wirral, Cheshire, Newcastle & South Tyneside, Wakefield, Derbyshire, Coventry, Suffolk, Croydon, West Sussex, Portsmouth & Hampshire and Gloucestershire.

- The policy context is set by the DfES and the LSC;

- the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) and its partners develop strategy, monitor targets, review progress and performance;
- the LEAs and LLSCs set a broad strategic direction;
- the Skills for Families Consultants lead, manage and support the work in the LEA and LSC; and
- local schools and organisations contribute to the strategic direction of the partnership.

## Making a difference

We know that strong collaborative partnerships make a difference to the quality of FLLN programmes. The work is even more effective when it is mainstreamed within the wider Local Authority agenda in strategic planning and implementation. However, key challenges remain. The lessons of OFSTED and ALL inspections on the variable quality of FLLN projects, as well as the findings of the NIACE evaluation of LSC-funded Family Programmes, have set an agenda for where quality can be improved.

## How partnerships work in practice

A selection of the collaborative partnerships are highlighted below. More information, including case studies and resources from all of the partnerships, can be found on the Skills for Families website [www.skillsforfamilies.org](http://www.skillsforfamilies.org)

## Hampshire and Portsmouth

Skills for Families enables both Portsmouth and Hampshire to share, develop and embed their strengths and expertise in various aspects of delivering and managing FLLN provision. Examples of this partnership's innovation include work with teenage parents. For more information on Skills for Families in Portsmouth, please contact Romy Warren e-mail: [romy.warren@portsmouth.gov.uk](mailto:romy.warren@portsmouth.gov.uk). For

information on Skills for Families in Hampshire, please e-mail Kerry Longhorn at [kerry.longhorn@hants.gov.uk](mailto:kerry.longhorn@hants.gov.uk).

## Newcastle and South Tyneside

Skills for Families in Newcastle and South Tyneside is a partnership between Newcastle LEA and South Tyneside Family Learning Services and Tyne and Wear LSC. Building upon the extensive FLLN programmes running in both areas, this partnership is developing new programmes in Family Finance, ESOL, Play and Language and Family Literacy in secondary schools. For more information on Skills for Families in Newcastle, contact Una McNicholl on 0191 211 5335, [una.mcnicholl@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:una.mcnicholl@newcastle.gov.uk). For information on the project in South Tyneside, contact Helene Walke on 0191 519 1909 or e-mail [helene.walke@s-tyneside-abc.gov.uk](mailto:helene.walke@s-tyneside-abc.gov.uk).

## Knowsley

Capacity-building events in 2004 for key groups and agencies are focussing attention on some of the key priorities for family learning in Knowsley, such as developing provision in early years, the Extended Schools programme and increasing the participation and engagement of men in FLLN. For information on Skills for Families in Knowsley, e-mail the Skills for Families Consultant, Keith McDowall at [keith.mcdowall@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:keith.mcdowall@knowsley.gov.uk)

## Coventry

Coventry LEA has over 25 years' experience of developing and delivering family learning programmes and basic skills programmes, gaining national recognition for their work. The project has created partnerships with local employers and businesses to encourage workplace learning. For more information on Skills for Families in Coventry, contact Dorothy Hunter on 024 7640 5700 or e-mail

dorothy.hunter@westcafes.coventry.gov.uk or Margaret Deaville on 024 7660 2590 or e-mail margaret.deaville@eastcafes.coventry.gov.uk

### Cheshire

Cheshire's Skills for Families project is being managed by a team with ten years' experience in family learning. The LEA is piloting a number of new delivery models including ESOL Family Learning workshops delivered in partnership with Chester Asian Council. For information on Skills for Families in Cheshire, please contact Anne Pedley on 01244 603078 or e-mail [anne.pedley@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:anne.pedley@cheshire.gov.uk)

### Derbyshire

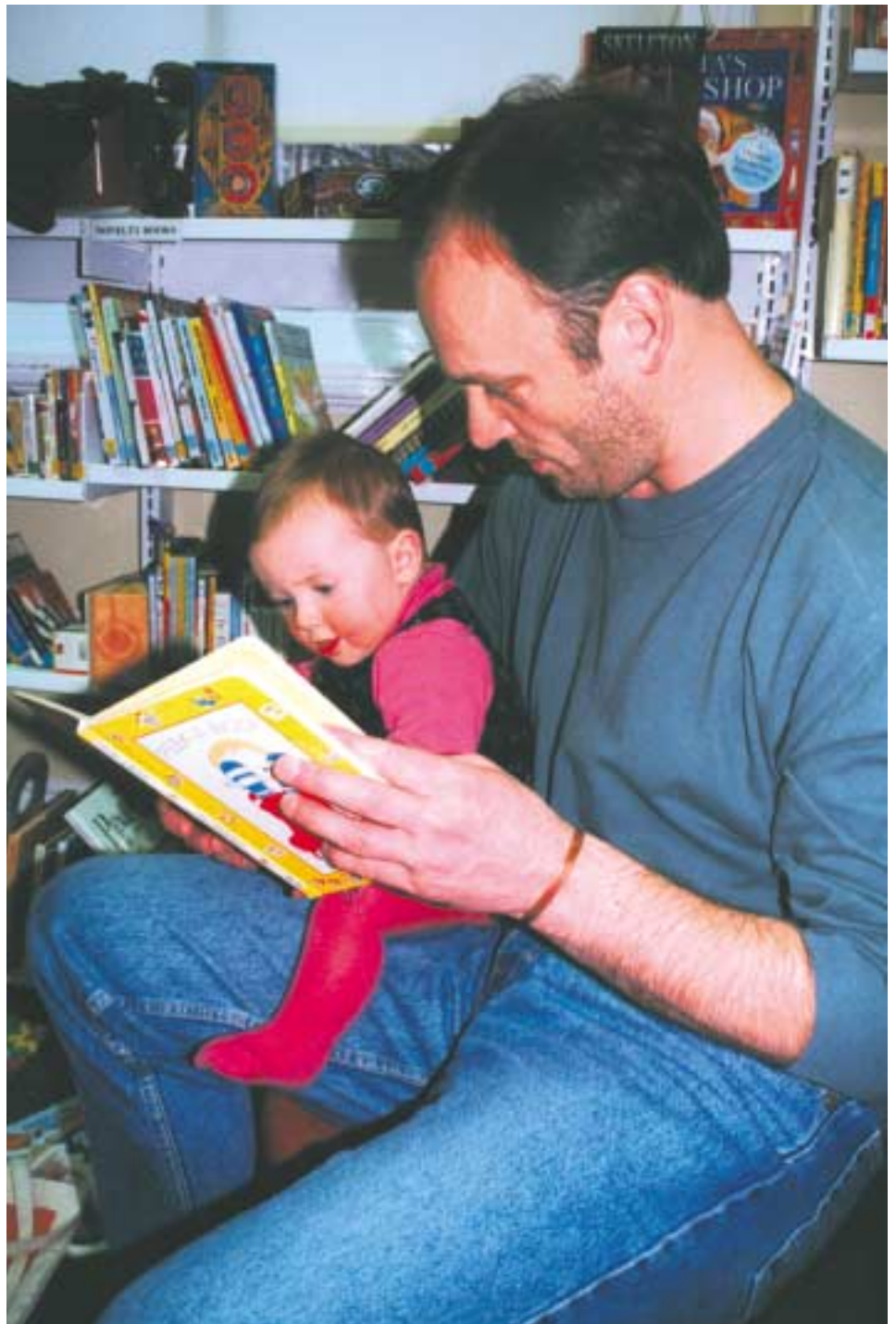
Derbyshire LEA, through Read On-Write Away! (ROWA!), has a comprehensive, well-developed and strategic approach to FLLN. ROWA! is a partnership of local and national agencies, hosted by the authority but acting independently from it. To find out more about Skills for Families in Derbyshire you can also visit their website [www.rowa.co.uk](http://www.rowa.co.uk). The site includes a Virtual Resource Centre that has been designed to assist tutors and staff in literacy, numeracy and ESOL to keep up to date with new developments in their areas. For information on Skills for Families in Derbyshire, contact Karen Hanson on 01773 535232 or e-mail [khanson@rowabridgecentre.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:khanson@rowabridgecentre.fsnet.co.uk)

### Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire LEA, working with the local LSC and Gloucester EAZ, is the South West's Skills for Families project. It is focusing on Gloucester City, building on established programmes and relationships, as well as liaising with partners, providers and practitioners across the county as a whole. The project is piloting new programmes such as Homefront, which offers Financial Literacy to families in five local schools. For information on Skills for Families in Gloucestershire, please contact Joanna Jackson 01452 426768 or e-mail: [jjackson@gloscc.gov.uk](mailto:jjackson@gloscc.gov.uk)

### Verdict so far

Skills for Families is well on the way to developing workable infrastructures and new approaches to planning in FLLN, in line with the objectives of the programme. The projects are committed to working in partnership with other local agencies and voluntary and community groups. They are also committed to the objectives of Skills for Life and the Early Years, Primary, Key Stage 3, and social inclusion strategies. This involves increasing participation and learner achievement and improving quality and planning.



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**"Skills for Families has enabled Knowsley LEA to progress from a situation where family learning was fragmented and lacking in strategic direction to one which is increasingly being seen as a core part of the LEA's provision and essential to meeting key strategic priorities. Presenting a case for FLLN and winning the support of Leadership Team has been crucial to this"**

Keith McDowall, Skills for Families Consultant, Knowsley LEA

**"Skills for Families has arrived at just the right time as our service has developed. It is a real opportunity to drive both improvement of the quality of what is on offer, as well as our capacity to deliver more to the greatest need."**

Richard Newton, Family Learning Co-ordinator, Wakefield

**Sian Welby is Head of Family Programmes at the Basic Skills Agency**

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# The benefits of networking

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## Vicki Maris highlights the work of the Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Network

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The Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Network was set up in 1999 by Warwickshire College as part of a European Social Fund (ESF) project, and brought together a wide range of family learning practitioners and policy makers from across the sub-region. At the outset most areas of the post-16 sector were represented including both local education authorities (LEAs), all but one of the further education (FE) colleges, the Adult Guidance Network, the local lifelong learning partnership, libraries, the local Open College Network and the Local LSC (LLSC). However, any organisation which is involved in delivering and promoting family learning has always been welcome to be part of the network. When the initial ESF money ran out in 2000 the development of the Network was picked up by the Coventry & Warwickshire Learning Partnership, and chaired by the head of the Children and Families Service (Coventry LEA). It was clear at the time that the emerging LLSC, whilst it did not have family learning as an early priority, was going to have an interest in this area as a strategy for addressing a number of its developing agendas, particularly basic skills. It was felt critical, therefore, that the momentum of development was maintained. A Network Steering Group was formed and began looking seriously at producing a sub-regional Action Plan in conjunction with the LLSC, the first stage of which would logically involve an audit of current activity.

### The audit

In spring 2002, Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Network commissioned a research project to audit the family learning provision in the sub-region. The main objectives in carrying out the audit were to:

1. Provide a baseline map of the current range, type, location and capacity of family learning service providers in Coventry and Warwickshire, at all levels of provision,

- including the numbers and types of families using the provision
2. Plot the funding (types, levels and sustainability) being used to deliver this range of family learning services.
3. Identify referral and progression links between family learning service providers and family learning opportunities.
4. Establish the nature and extent of any gaps that exist locally in family learning services (e.g. in terms of level or location) and to identify opportunities to develop new services in the area.
5. Contribute to the development of a family learning strategy and action plan for Coventry and Warwickshire.

In developing the boundaries of the audit, the group spent considerable time arriving at a definition of what should constitute a 'family learning opportunity' and, in the interests of future planning, agreed to count only opportunities which could be described as 'planned, purposeful and progressive'.

In concentrating on family learning activities which followed these principles, the audit had the necessary clarity and focus needed to inform resource planning. Nonetheless, the audit did capture a wide range of formal and less structured family learning services and opportunities.

### Conclusions of the audit

The results of the audit showed just how extensive and inventive family learning provision is but also concluded that there may be a lot of family learning-related provision that was called something else. Not surprisingly the audit showed that family learning was still on the edge of things and too dependent on short-term funding.

The final recommendations were to:

- Consolidate and strengthen family learning where it had an established foothold in

raising standards for children and adult learners (for example, through basic skills), in widening participation in learning, creating more lifelong learners, and in helping people to grow and develop as individuals. Most of this work is already concentrated in disadvantaged areas, which naturally lends itself to more of a social inclusion/community development focus.

- Broaden the base, extend the reach and increase the penetration of family learning through programmes and initiatives that are designed to combat social exclusion, build stronger communities, regenerate disadvantaged areas (such as in the Coventry and Warwickshire regeneration zone) and contribute to workforce development (especially in relation to basic skills).

### Developing a strategy and an action plan

The audit was just the beginning of an extensive period of local research and consultation conducted throughout Coventry and Warwickshire during 2002. The strategy and action plan which came out of this work were intended to inform debate and stimulate new activity over the next three years and have been well received across the sub-region and nationally.

The background and context outlined in the strategy make clear links with Government policy and funding streams and very clearly define what is meant by learning opportunities that are 'planned, purposeful and progressive' – the three P's. In particular, 'progressive' means events and programmes that are designed to encourage the learner to continue in learning, including further education or training, whether accredited or not.

Another main aim of the steering group was to extend the reach of family learning as an activity that has the potential to make a contribution to a range of public policy fields. The strategy therefore targets a broad policy brief, suggesting that family learning has both intrinsic value – as an educational tool or device – and wider applicability and relevance, for example in relation to community capacity-building and regeneration. The strategy and action plan outline a series of headline issues and development tasks that are currently being taken forward by stakeholders at various levels.

Considerable potential has also been perceived in linking family learning to other learning themes such as basic skills/ESOL, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), Access to Higher Education, and can be seen as providing opportunities for agencies such



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as libraries, Connexions and Education Business Partnerships to enhance their existing portfolios of activity.

### More recent progress

To date progress has been made on the following activities and targets:

- a family learning development worker has been recruited to support the quality, curriculum, staff and infrastructure development objectives (with funding from the LSC);
- a local FL quality standard has been agreed based on the ALI model;
- collection and dissemination of informa-

tion (for example, the setting-up of a collection of family learning resources, the construction of a database, a newsletter, a web page and work-in-progress to establish a family learning chatroom);

- working links have been made with other networks (Family Learning Works, Essential Skills Professional Development and Resource Centre, and Skills for Families);
- OCN Central England (OCN CE) accreditation programmes and opportunities have been made available; and
- generic marketing information has been developed.

The appointment of the sub-regional Family Learning Development Worker has been a

critical factor in moving the Network on to the next level by having the resource to drive forward on many of the action plan targets and priorities being carried out voluntarily before by partners.

### Benefits of a local network

The family learning network has been instrumental in giving family learning in Coventry and Warwickshire a strategic direction and in improving the quality and availability of family learning provision for learners. Membership of the network also offers many direct benefits to the different organisations involved in family learning, including:

- Working collaboratively to tackle issues relating to family learning;
- Partnership approach to delivery of services;
- Raising the profile of family learning, including free promotion of family learning activities;
- Increased referrals from other member organisations;
- Training workshops;
- Easy access to information on OCN-accredited courses; and
- Shared information/resources (for example, information on funding, a newsletter, entry into the Coventry & Warwickshire Network database/directory.)

To date the family learning network has achieved a great deal through the determination and hard work of the members of the steering group. For example, there are particularly good examples of the network supporting the development of and involvement in innovative activity, such as the Family Learning Works project, an exciting development promoting and developing family learning in the workplace using distance material; or the development of courses for male carers within the Skills for Families project. In addition, accredited training programmes for family learning co-ordinators have been developed with OCN CE to promote continuous professional development in this area of work.

The work of the Family Learning Network Steering Group has resulted in considerable achievements, and with a dedicated Family Learning Development Worker, the network is looking forward to achieving even more of its targets.

*Vicki Maris is the Family Learning Development Co-ordinator for Coventry & Warwickshire Family Learning Network.*

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# National Occupational Standards for family learning and parenting education

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**Yvonne Nolan** provides an overview of the project and how practitioners can get involved

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The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has provided funding to PAULO, the National Training Organisation for the family learning sector and the parenting sector to develop National Occupational Standards. These are essential for developing the quality of family learning and parenting education provision through recognition and development of the varied skills of the workforce. NIACE and the Parenting Education and Support Forum (PESF) are supporting the work.

The development of National Occupational Standards will build on and flow from the Occupational and Functional Mapping which has already been undertaken in both sectors. (For family learning, see the NIACE and DfES report *Walking Ten Feet Tall: The Next Steps – An Occupational and Functional Mapping of Family Learning Practitioners*.) The development process will take place between now and July and includes an important consultation phase which practitioners should be involved in.

## Why develop National Occupational Standards?

Both sectors make a fundamental contribution to the strategic objectives of meeting the skills challenge. The national Skills Strategy and the regional Frameworks for Regional Employment Skills Action (FRESAs) have all identified the importance of social inclusion in relation to skills development. The involvement of parents and families in the process of knowledge and skills development is essential in closing the achievement gap that has been identified.

There is also a need to develop National Occupational Standards in order to help provide a means of measuring and demonstrating the development and effectiveness of family learning and parenting education. The lack of National Occupational Standards inhibits the

identification of skills gaps, staff shortages, entry and exit points from the workforce and (last, but not least) workforce development strategies.

## The maps for family learning and parenting education and support

An *occupational map* provides information about the scope and nature of the sector workforce. It includes information about training, qualifications, career pathways, pay scales, job descriptions and job titles. In other words, this provides information on who is working in a particular sector. It is clear that family learning and parenting education and support share many features: both sectors are hugely diverse in nature and have a wide range of workforce entry routes, and both have aspects of practice which are covered in associated training and qualifications. However, neither currently have an identified and agreed set of competences and body of knowledge.

The occupational maps for both sectors identified that many people entering the fields did so initially by becoming parent-helpers or, for those in teaching, through the basic skills route. Others had been 'graduates' of a parenting programme. Some had become involved in family learning or working with parents through an educational aspect of a professional role, such as midwifery or health visiting. Others had been involved in early years education and had supported parents in helping their children learn, whilst others had been scientists and journalists. The mapping process therefore identified a wide range of professional histories. Consequently, a wide range of skills and abilities was identified as having relevance for both sectors.

The *functional map* provides a detailed breakdown of the work undertaken by practitioners. In short, the functional map provides clear information on what is done in the sec-

tor. The functional mapping for both sectors showed that although there are some common functions, there are also many key roles and functions which are unique to the individual sectors.

## The standards

The progression from occupational and functional mapping is to develop a set of National Occupational Standards for each sector which provides comprehensive information about how the work of the sector should be carried out. National Occupational Standards provide a sector with the opportunity to determine common standards and expectations throughout all aspects of its work. Clearly, this has a vital role in improving the quality of provision through reducing inconsistency and variability of practice. However, it also makes a valuable contribution to a number of other important areas such as staff training and development, benchmarking and developing qualifications.

## Get involved

The success of the development process rests on the involvement of the practitioners in each sector. Comments, feedback and information from practitioners at all levels and in all types of setting are vital to ensure that the final standards truly reflect the work of the sector. You can contribute by:

- joining the electronic comments group
- attending a focus group – held throughout the country during March and April (email [info@newdirect.co.uk](mailto:info@newdirect.co.uk) for further details)
- providing your feedback through the NIACE ([www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)) or Parenting Education and Support Forum (PESF) websites ([www.parenting-forum.org.uk/training.asp](http://www.parenting-forum.org.uk/training.asp))
- contacting the consultants ([yvonne@newdirect.co.uk](mailto:yvonne@newdirect.co.uk), 0151 343 0998)

*Yvonne Nolan is a consultant at New Directions*

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# Family learning in action

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Lyn Devlin reviews Kent LEA's handbook for tutors

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As is the case for many Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Kent has seen its family learning programme grow considerably over the past few years. In addition to a varied programme of cross-curricular family learning activities offered as one-day taster events, daytime, early evening and weekend courses and holiday events, Kent Adult Education Service (KAES) has also managed a series of eight residential family learning weekends. Venues are varied and include schools, community halls, museums, theatres and art galleries. In all cases the events require close working partnerships and invariably involve staff from both organisations delivering the family learning sessions.

In order to run such a large programme many tutors have been recruited over the years with a broad range of expertise and with a variety of backgrounds. It seems that family learning fires everyone with enthusiasm. The tutors, regardless of their backgrounds, are able to rise to the occasion and deliver a huge and varied programme that is well received by the families. However, from the start it was apparent that KAES was asking a lot from school staff to manage adult learning and from adult education tutors to apply their teaching techniques to include children. Regular training events are offered but, for a variety of reasons, are not necessarily the best way of ensuring that everyone receives the same information and support. Staff began to express a desire for a set of materials that could be used as an ongoing resource for both new and existing family learning tutors. When the idea was discussed with Department for Education and Skills (DfES) colleagues, they offered to fund the development and production of the Family Learning Tutor Handbook on the understanding that KAES would distribute it nationally!

The aim of the Family Learning Tutor Handbook *Family Learning in Action* is to provide an induction for new tutors and to act as resource material for more experienced prac-

tioners. The layout therefore ensures that information is easily accessed and that the document is attractive and of good quality.

The ten sections guide the reader through a process, from understanding where family learning fits into the wider national and local perspective of lifelong learning, to planning events and knowing who else can support both tutors and learners, to understanding how individual family members may prefer to learn. KAES managers were concerned that whilst they themselves were experienced in family learning, that was not necessarily the case for all tutors, many of whom had become involved in family learning as a very enjoyable alternative to their 'daytime job'. It was therefore felt to be essential that all tutors understood the important role they had to play in delivering high quality family learning, particularly in encouraging adults back into a learning environment.

As most of the KAES family learning pro-



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gramme is delivered in outreach situations, that is, not within designated Adult Education Centres, it is important that tutors do not feel isolated and unsupported in their role. The second section encourages the tutors to think about where their support might come from and provides names and contact details of the various staff employed to support both tutors and learners. Section Three discusses the role of, and skills needed by, the tutor, in terms of preparation, delivery, support and reflection. Like other organisations, KAES has since drawn up a learner's charter that could be included in this section.

In order to make the document 'come alive' the reader is introduced to a family in Section Four and invited to consider their family learning experience. The scenario provides a basis on which to emphasise the need for careful planning, pitching the session appropriately and ensuring that all participants enjoy a good learning experience.

Section Six highlights what support tutors should expect in terms of induction and ongoing training. Good practice and quality assurance are discussed throughout Section Seven and key policies outlined in Section Eight. Some of these are very specific to Kent, but could be replaced by the reader with more relevant documents or used as a basis on which to develop local policies. Section Nine provides templates for schemes of work, lesson plans and evaluation; the documentation that is considered essential paperwork to ensure the learner experience is of the highest quality. There is even a suggestion for an ice-breaker activity.

Over 1,000 handbooks have been distributed to date and another thousand have been printed. Distribution stretches the length of the country from Sunderland to the Isle of Wight, to Devon, via national and local conferences and through direct contact with KAES. Feedback from Kent-based tutors, LEAs and other organisations involved in family learning has been very positive. In some cases, just as intended, others have used the Family Learning Tutor Handbook as a tool on which to base and develop their own materials. Should you wish to request a copy, or copies, of the Family Learning Tutor Handbook (boxes of 18 can be distributed) please contact the new Family Learning Co-ordinator, Helen Woodruff, on 01795 415900 email [helen.woodruff@kent.gov.uk](mailto:helen.woodruff@kent.gov.uk).

Lyn Devlin was formerly Family Learning Co-ordinator for KAES. She is now Community Schools Development Manager for Kent County Council

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# Web reviews

The websites listed below are in addition to the forthcoming National Family Learning Network ([www.familylearningnetwork.com](http://www.familylearningnetwork.com)) and other established websites such as [www.familyprogrammes.org](http://www.familyprogrammes.org) (the family programmes website of the Basic Skills Agency)

## [www.nfpi.org/index.cfm](http://www.nfpi.org/index.cfm)

This is the website of the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI), an independent charity aimed at providing support to parents in raising their children and promoting the well-being of families. However, as the website demonstrates, NFPI's work is far from simply a support arm; it is also proactive in conducting research into the concerns of families and in finding innovative ways of providing support.

The site is extremely easy to navigate and is helpfully set up to enable quick links to information. For those wishing to keep abreast of the latest findings and information from NFPI, the 'what's new' area of the website is particularly useful, whereas the 'Research and Policy' area helpfully displays the latest research, presenting useful synopses and key points of information.

The website has an extremely useful links page of organisations that work with parents and families, coupled with a direct link to the Office for National Statistics, for quick facts on families. This makes it an effective search engine for most family-related enquiries. The website's eclectic mix of key, up-to-date information; publications, press releases and its parent-services directory (to name but a few services) would appeal to everyone working in the field of family learning, but also as a useful resource to families themselves.

## [www.parentcentre.gov.uk/](http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk/)

The Parent Centre is a Government initiative from the Department for Education and Skills, with UK online, designed to assist parents in helping their children to learn. One of the appeals of the website is that the term 'children' incorporates all age ranges from conception through to a child's options for further study at 16+. The site is exceptionally easy to use and children's ages have been helpfully banded into seven categories, e.g. 0-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-7, and so on. Simply click on one of the age bands and the site evolves into key information and advice and guidance for parents on the stage of education that their child is currently going through.

One distinct advantage of the site being a Government-funded initiative is that the information tends to be up-to-date, especially with regard to hot topics such as 'funding higher education' and the reforms to the Advanced Level (A-level) qualification system. The site also offers an extensive list of useful publications, frequently asked questions for parents, and games for children themselves.

## [www.family-learning.org.uk](http://www.family-learning.org.uk)

This is the website of Family Learning in County Durham, which is an initiative funded through the Single Regeneration Budget, Round 6, with support from a wide range of partners throughout the County. Their friendly and welcoming site offers a wealth of information for tutors and teachers, learners and parents which is easily accessible through drop-down menus from the home page.

The local aspect of family learning in County Durham is covered well, with information on locally-available training and events. The 'resource bank', is rather limited and contains listings of hard-copy resources available to borrow. However, there is a good links page which any visitor would find useful, which contains many sites where downloadable resources are freely available.

There is both local and national information on Working with Men, and a developing section of the website details ContinYou's SHARE programme project.

The discussion forum for teachers and message board for learners give the site an interactive element allowing the sharing of good practice.

## <http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting>

The parenting site from the BBC has a wealth of practical, inspiring and educational ideas for parents. Through the many links to other parts of the BBC website, i.e. Learning, it is easy to find up to date information on children's early learning, Surestart and learning resources.

The well-known face of the BBC means that the site has instant appeal and is a good starting point for parents and children to explore together. The 'Play and Do' section has a great personalised story book which can be printed out and made into a book which parents/tutors and children can share.

The Learning section is split into age groups and includes separate information for teachers and parents, but with a fun element it will also appeal to children who can access games (of an educational nature). The Little Animals Activity Centre in the pre-school section has a wide range of activities for 4- to 8-year-olds, including stories, maths and music games.

*Jude Pearson, Research Assistant (the Regions)  
and Clare Chisholm, Family Learning team*

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