



East Renfrewshire Early Years Collaborative

Pioneer Project Summary

'Let's Play'

January 2016

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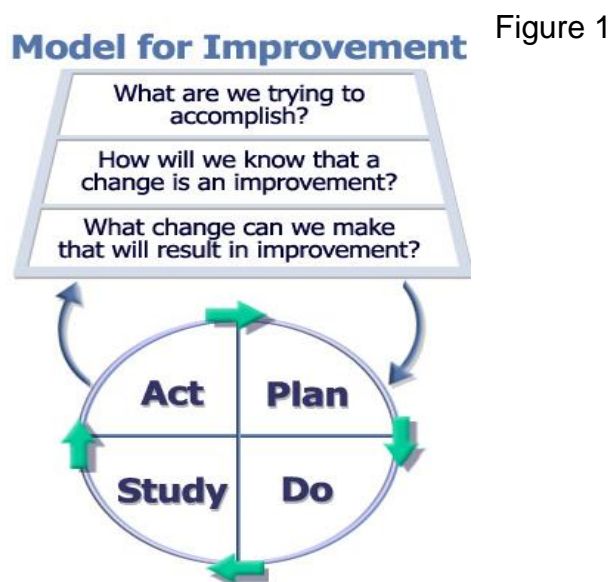
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Introduction

Children's experiences in the first years of their lives have a significant impact on their development and are clearly linked to future outcomes at school and beyond. This is now supported by extensive research evidence from education, health, justice, and economic experts (e.g. Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; Heckman, 2011; Ludy-Dobson and Perry, 2010; Mercer, 2006; Perry, 2009; Perry and Hambrick, 2008; Prior and Glaser, 2006). The Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008) outlines a number of recommendations across key areas:

- The strength of universal services should be used to deliver high quality early intervention and prevention services
- Services should adopt a coherent approach based on sound knowledge of the needs of children and communities
- Services should aim to empower children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves
- Services should work to break cycles of poverty and inequality in the early years and beyond
- Services should aim to improve outcomes and children's quality of life through play
- There should be a continued move towards greater collaboration between services
- Services should aim to simplify and streamline systems and processes

The Early Years Collaborative was launched (Scottish Government, 2012) in order to provide a national framework for action across the key principles outlined above. The Early Years Collaborative vision is *'to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up in by improving outcomes and reducing inequalities, for all babies, children, mothers, fathers and families across Scotland to ensure that all children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.'* A model for improvement was provided to support Community Planning Partnerships to implement changes to systems and practices ('tests of change'). The model for improvement (Figure 1) promotes practice which is evidence based, and which pays close attention to the views and experience of service users.



The Play Strategy for Scotland was published in 2013 (Scottish Government, 2013) outlining a vision for the future of play in Scotland.

Play is vital from the early stages of brain development and bonding with parents and carers, and promotes independence and autonomy for the teenage years. (Aileen Campbell MSP Minister for Children and Young People in Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision).

Investing in children's play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children's health and wellbeing in Scotland. Sir Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland (2005-2014)

Let's Play Project

In light of the above policy drivers alongside Getting it Right for Every Child (Scottish Government) and Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2004) a project was developed in relation to the promotion of interactive play between parents and children. In 2014 Madras Family Centre in Neilston was selected for the initial test cycles due to assessment of need in the local community and high number of projects already existing within other target communities in East Renfrewshire. The project team comprised:

Family Centre Development Manager
Adult and Family Learning Manager
Educational Psychologist
Family Centre Head Teacher
Family Centre Depute

A number of Madras Family Centre parents were approached and offered the opportunity to be involved in a project which would provide:

- Information on the development of nurturing approaches
- Information on the benefits of play and advice around interacting with children during play
- An opportunity to develop further parents' support network

Of the 14 parents who were invited to attend the programme, 10 asked to be involved. The children involved were aged between 1 and 5 years.

Training and delivery

Parents were invited to attend three consecutive half day learning sessions within the family centre. A training package was devised with a balance between theory, discussion, and interaction with children. Group work techniques were used to deliver sensitive aspects of the training to ensure parents' wellbeing was considered throughout. The delivery style was shaped around the needs of the group/individual on a day-to-day basis while ensuring

key messages were conveyed. Workshop presentations and discussions covered the following topics:

Day 1: Attachment theory, brain development and the impact of nurturing adult – child interactions.

Day 2: The benefits of play for children's development. Defining interactive play.

Day 3: The adult's role within play. Benefits of outdoor and risky play. Supporting the development of children's confidence and skill whilst managing risk.

The second part of each learning session provided an opportunity to practise skills learned within the family centre playroom ('learning together'). Family centre staff and the project team used prompting and modelling to support nurturing interactions between parents and their children. Partners from the Family Learning team, the Creative Arts team and Library Services provided valuable support in relation to the preparation of activities and direct support during the 'learning together' sessions. Parents were asked to create a personal plan to increase/develop play activities with their child/children at home and in the community. Parents were encouraged to practise their skills and work on their personal plans for the next three months with help from the supporting professionals. A programme of follow-up activities was offered by a range of partners:

- Local Swing Park Walk& Consultation
- Discovery Play
- Heuristic Play
- Transient Art
- Digital participation
- Trip to Rouken Glen Park
- Queen's Baton –celebration

Of the 10 parents who agreed to be involved, 8 attended the learning sessions. All 8 parents completed the full 3 day programme, with the exception of 1 parent who missed 1 session due to a hospital appointment. The learning sessions took place during the summer holiday period. This linked appropriately with the objective from the East Renfrewshire Parenting Strategy (P11).

We will devise and implement a wider range of services which provide opportunities for families to engage in play experiences with their child over the school holiday periods...

Delivery of the programme during the summer period allowed more time for planning and opportunities to share resources, staff and materials with other family centres in the neighbourhood. Therefore expertise was shared and costs were reduced.

Resources

The planning of the 'learning together' sessions was critical in ensuring that parents could replicate activities in their own home or community space with little or no budget. Evidence based resources were utilised; Play@home (NHS Scotland), Play Scotland information leaflets alongside resources and materials developed using the existing expertise of partners and parents.

Project Aims

The high-level aim of the project is to introduce 'Let's Play' to all family centres in East Renfrewshire by 2020. The long-term aim is to improve outcomes for children as evidenced through Primary 1 developmental milestone screening. The initial aims relating to the first cycle of Let's Play were:

- 90% of parents involved in the project will report increased confidence in relation to supporting their child/children's development through play.
- 90% of parents involved in the project will report an increase in knowledge of how interactive play promotes children's development.
- The family centre depute will report an increase in knowledge of the specific ways in which adult-child interactive play supports children's development.
- The family centre depute will report increased confidence in articulating the benefits of play to parents.

The project aims were linked to local aims and objectives:

- SOA 1.1: Parents are supported to provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for their families (Early Years Strategy)
- Children in ER grow up in nurturing homes where families have formed positive, loving and lasting relationships (Parenting Strategy)
- Children in ER are raised by parents and families who are well informed about parenting and make effective use of the wide range of available information, advice and support about parenting available locally (Parenting Strategy).
- Children and parents are supported by a highly skilled and confident workforce (Parenting Strategy).

Let's Play Project: Key Principles and Approaches

Strength-based Approach

Existing strengths of the family centre were recognised and utilised. Strong links with the wider community and partnerships with other agencies created a

solid base to take forward the Let's Play project. The positive and pre-existing relationships with families, particularly those needing 'a little bit of help', were utilized. The family centre depute already possessed skills and characteristics conducive to working effectively with families and services. A range of partners used their expertise in building relationships as well as the ability to draw on the skills of families, while reflecting on their particular needs and circumstances. It was recognised that parents are in a unique position to shape their child's development. Solution focused language which recognised parents' existing strengths and knowledge was used throughout the learning sessions.

If a parent has sense of self-efficacy and belief in their own ability this will determine whether or not they will fully engage with the process, Emerson et al., (2012).

Partnership and Meaningful Involvement

Design and preparation of the programme was taken forward in collaboration with parents, staff, and partner agencies. Information was shared with regards to the rationale for intervention; Parenting Strategy, Early Years Collaborative and National Play Strategy. Consultation with the full family centre staff team was undertaken by the Educational Psychology Service while the family centre development manager consulted with families who had opted to take part in the Let's Play project. This process allowed for development of the programme content. The consultation also allowed for consideration of potential barriers to engagement and plans were made in response to this information (e.g. timing of the learning sessions).

Collaboration

It became evident early on in the Let's Play project that many services offered opportunities for play for children within the local community but there was room for development in order to increase direct family involvement. An information session was held for relevant partners across East Renfrewshire. This led to services linking together to plan simple, little or no cost activities and events in which families could be involved in play with their children (during the learning sessions and for the three month follow-up period).

Methods for Evaluation

Qualitative information was obtained through observations, focus groups, and pre-post intervention questionnaires. Impact was evidenced through photographs and video footage of interactions within the family centre playroom.

Use of the 'Model for Improvement'

Various elements of the project were tested using the 'model for improvement' methodology. 'Tests of change' (Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) tests) were

undertaken to explore and develop systems which encouraged positive engagement and robust methods for evaluation:

PDSA 1:

Aim: Engage parents via a flyer

Plan: Produce simple flyer to advertise the project

Do: Flyers sent home with children and displayed in the family centre

Study: Low response rate so direct face to face contact would be preferable (familiar staff member)

Act: Change method of promoting programme and create a logo to allow families to engage through recognition

PDSA 2:

Aim: Investigate a process of collating data

Plan: Devise questionnaire

Do: Tested questionnaire with 2 parents and 2 staff

Study: Parents suggested ways to amend the questionnaire to give clearer answers

Act: Use the feedback to amend the questionnaire

PDSA 3

Aim: Respond to views expressed by parents re post questionnaire. Parents would rather take questionnaire away so they could complete in their own time as most felt under pressure to complete on the day. Decided to test sending post questionnaire home to be completed and returned

Plan: Coded questionnaires to track returns

Do: Parents given questionnaires to complete after the programme

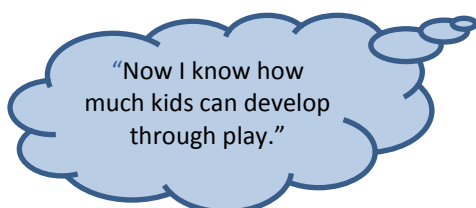
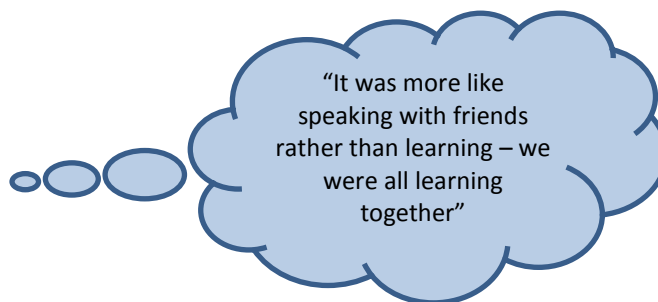
Study: Only 5 questionnaires were returned

Act: Test out alternative methods of gathering feedback

Evaluation and Impact

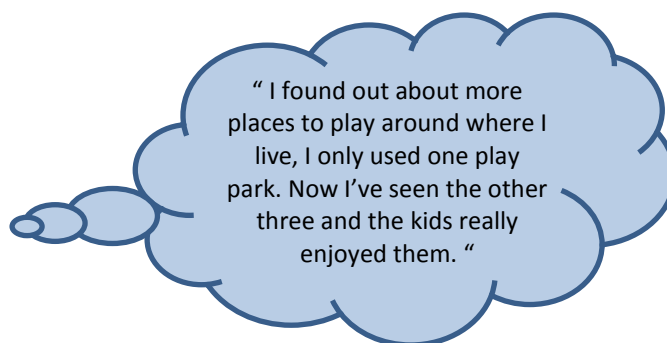
Parents

A focus group with 5 of the parents took place in October 2014, 3 months after they had attended the core programme. Parents reflected that the manner in which they were asked to become involved, and the positive relationships already in place with the family centre, were central to them agreeing to participate. It was revealed that another key factor which encouraged completion of the programme was the support gained from taking part in a group with other parents. The flexible approach, friendly manner, and space for discussion allowed for a climate which supported parents to absorb new information and develop their confidence.



Parents revealed that friends and extended family noticed they were visibly more relaxed with their children. Parents expressed that they felt this was due to following the interests of their children, spending more time with them, and involving them in everyday chores. The common response from the group was that knowing there was an actual purpose for play made a real difference to how they thought about play, and to the experiences they created at home:

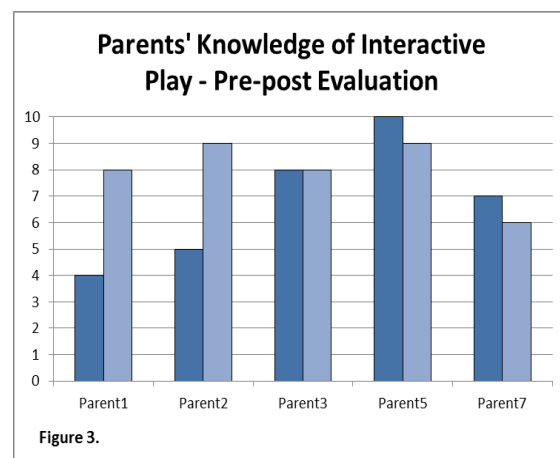
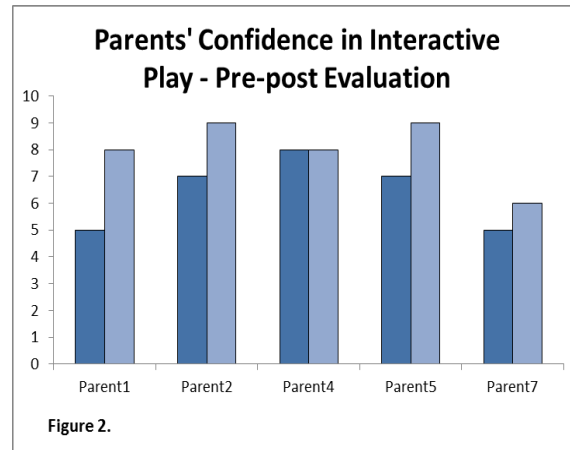
It's not about going on big adventures all the time... it's more about the little things we do that make the difference.



Parents reported that having family events throughout the community during the summer holiday period was very helpful. Parents expressed that this period, in the past, had been a time of stress, as the cost of activities limited the opportunity for their child/children to be involved. As a result, the lack of structure could lead to an increase in challenging behaviour, and a reduction in confidence around their parenting ability. One parent reported that the Let's Play project led to improvements in her child's behaviour as they had become more aware of their child's needs and this had influenced their reaction to challenging behaviour.

Parents' Questionnaire

Five of the 8 parents returned both a pre- and post-questionnaire. For those who returned both questionnaires, 4 reported an increase in confidence in their ability to positively engage with their child during interactive play (Figure 2). One parent showed no change in their confidence level. There are a number of ways in which this may be interpreted. Firstly, this may relate to them already feeling confident at the beginning of the programme as they rated their pre-session score as 8. Secondly, this may have indicated a reluctance to indicate a lower score as they may have felt judged negatively as a result. Thirdly, they may have reported a different score at the beginning of the programme if they had been given an opportunity to reflect on their pre-score at the end of the programme. Finally, they may not have felt that the programme contributed to their confidence. Overall, 80% of the parents who completed both questionnaires felt they had increased their confidence in interactive play over the course of the programme.



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Parents were also asked about their knowledge of interactive play (Figure 3). The results from the pre- and post-questionnaires show a mixed picture, with two parents showing improvements, one parent staying the same and two parents showing a slight decrease. As with the confidence ratings, there may be a variety of explanations that can be explored further in future. It may be helpful to include a question in future that asks parents to reflect on their

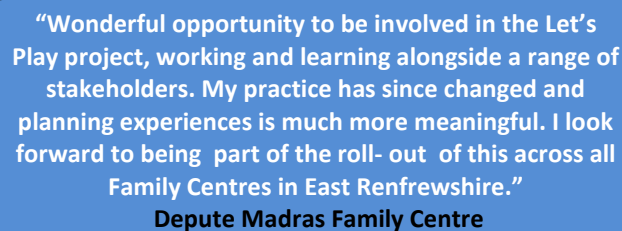
initial rating at the end of the programme to see if they felt that this was accurate. Parents may have learned more about the meaning of interactive play during the programme than they were aware of at the beginning. Overall, 40% of parents who completed both questionnaires reported that their knowledge of interactive play had increased over the course of the programme.

Family Centre Depute Reflections

The family centre depute reported that the experience of being involved with the programme had reinforced her existing knowledge and allowed her to demonstrate this knowledge when working alongside parents. The depute reported that involvement in the project had helped her to be more mindful of

the importance of gaining an insight into parents' current knowledge and needs prior to devising a parent programme. Reflecting on the approach inspired her to think about facilitating parent programmes in a different way: 'shaping programmes to meet the needs of the parent instead of what I think they need.' The depute felt that the small group format helped parents to feel safe and confident. She felt that parents confidently discussed issues, shared challenges and offered solutions to one another.

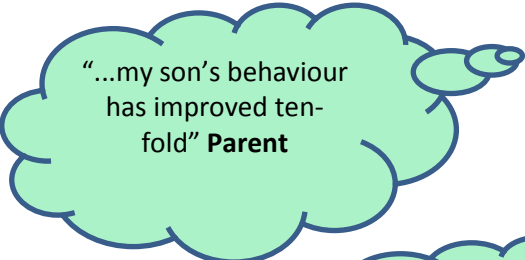
The depute commented that the 'learning together' sessions were inspiring to watch, as parents demonstrated skills and interaction styles which had been described and presented during the training session. 'Parents looked at ease and the behaviour of all the children was really good.' The depute felt that the programme helped parents to learn about the function of their child's behaviour and that this led to improved responses from parents. The depute felt that parents also benefited from the relaxation and drama activities which were included in the programme as these aspects highlighted the importance of caring for personal wellbeing. Finally the depute commented that involvement in the project highlighted how important it is to be reflective, flexible and approachable when working to encourage meaningful parental engagement.



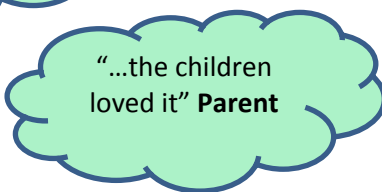
"Wonderful opportunity to be involved in the Let's Play project, working and learning alongside a range of stakeholders. My practice has since changed and planning experiences is much more meaningful. I look forward to being part of the roll- out of this across all Family Centres in East Renfrewshire."
Depute Madras Family Centre

Impact on children:

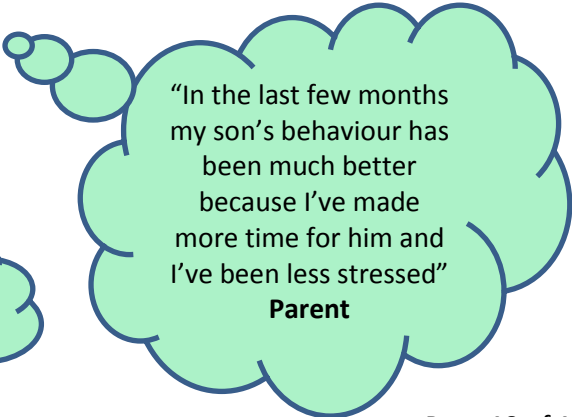
Short term impact on children was measured through observations and feedback from parents. For example, family centre staff and project members reported that children's engagement in activities improved over the period of the intervention. During the 'learning together' sessions, incidents of challenging behaviour were minimal and parents stated that this was different to their usual experience.



"...my son's behaviour has improved ten-fold" **Parent**



"...the children loved it" **Parent**



"In the last few months my son's behaviour has been much better because I've made more time for him and I've been less stressed" **Parent**

Longer term impact on the children will be measured through case review meetings and analysis of Primary 1 developmental screening and wider school screening information.

Partnership

The Early Years Collaborative has an overarching theme that public service delivery should further develop to ensure that services operate in partnership. The 'Let's Play' project has led to greater communication and collaboration across services, utilising existing strengths and promoting joined up working. Partners have had the opportunity to collaborate with each other to share their knowledge, skills, and experience. Feedback from colleagues indicated that collaboration was thought to be beneficial for all involved.

"There was a real buzz about the place after the holidays from parents and staff wanting to know and do more to share this experience with all parents and staff. We have planned to build in play sessions for parents and children as part of our routine in the family centre to ensure all parents and staff have opportunities to learn together."

Head Teacher Madras Family Centre

"IT sessions resulted in parents showing one another good sites to use" (to search for community activities)

Adult Learning Team

"The Let's Play event at Madras Family Centre provided a rich learning experience for all who took part; staff, parents, carers and children from participating families as well as those who were attending the existing summer provision."

Family Learning Team

"I look forward to working with the parents again to take forward their thoughts and ideas in the course of drama."

Performance Arts Team

"The initiatives that came from the Let's Play in Madras encouraged a sense of community, giving the people who matter the chance to contribute their ideas and values on play in their neighbourhood."

Library Services

"It was a great opportunity to share and transfer my skills and knowledge about 0-3's with other Family Centers as well as build relationships and connect with families in Neilston"

McCready Family Centre

It was felt that the interaction style used by the facilitators within the learning sessions was crucial for the success of the project. East Renfrewshire undertook a consultation with a large number of parents as part of the Early Years Collaborative local planning from October 2013 to January 2014 and the outcomes clearly identified that how services communicated with families was crucial in securing positive engagement. In addition, families felt that there was a lack of engagement between the wider community and services. Both these findings demonstrate that the engagement process is vital and that all staff working with families should refer to quality indicators which promote best practice. The Let's Play process reinforced the importance of workforce development, particularly around reflective practice. Key elements of the Scottish Government's 'Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the "Children's Workforce" in Scotland' were used to support discussion throughout the planning process. The Common Core Skills were developed based on the views of children and their families and what they felt would be the key attributes of individuals with whom they worked. This resource helped the project team to focus on teaching the key characteristics and values required for developing positive relationships and supporting children's development. The next stage of Lets play will continue to incorporate the common core skills throughout the planning process and more explicitly through the self-evaluation process.

The project served as a catalyst for further developments in the family centre and community. For example, the head teacher and staff have planned for regular opportunities for parents to 'stay and play' with them during term time or to take home 'Let's Play' bags. Further planning will take place in the new session to work towards developing a further strand of the project which allows staff to communicate key messages from Let's Play to all parents and carers who access the family centre.

The interest and enthusiasm of the parents involved in the project led to a further development aimed to increase their involvement and group leadership skills. A third sector organisation named Parent Network Scotland delivered training for parents from Madras Family Centre to prepare them to become group facilitators. This was well received and parents are now planning to be involved in supporting parents in future Let's Play workshops.

Challenges and Limitations

The project leaders faced challenges in relation to data collection and parents found that giving written feedback at the end of each individual session was laborious. Some also may have felt uncomfortable expressing themselves in the written format. For future Let's Play sessions there will be a focus on reducing the expectation for written feedback and an increase in options in relation to feedback methods.

Two parents suggested that more time would be helpful for learning sessions as at times it was felt that they had difficulty following the content. In future, the information contained within the slides will be reduced in order to ensure that sufficient time is provided for the presentation of key messages.

Two parents required further support beyond the Let's Play intervention and were referred on to a different project which allowed them to access video interactive guidance (VIG) delivered by the Educational Psychology Service.

Information received from parents showed that there was an increase in confidence in engaging with their children during play and some increase in knowledge around why play matters and how interactive play supports children's development. It is hoped that clearer information around play at the consultation stage and refinements to the training materials will lead to greater pre – post test change in relation to parent's knowledge. Qualitative information highlighted that many perceived positive change in relation to their children's behaviour as a result of the Let's Play intervention. This was not measured directly in the initial Let's Play project however the team plans to consider ways to evaluate this more specifically in future projects.

Implications for Practice

Key questions around general practice arose following reflection and consultation which took place during this project:

Q1. To what extent do we allow parents to be fully included in the process of intervention design?

Q2. How do we engage with families?

Q3. To what extent do we draw upon parents' existing strengths?

Q4. To what extent do services offer opportunities for families to engage in play experiences during holiday periods?

Next Steps

The vision for Let's Play, as outlined in the aims section above, is to introduce the programme to all family centres across East Renfrewshire by 2020. It is envisaged that there will be a roll-out in each family centre based on a three-year cycle model. The first phase will be delivered by the project team with support from family centre staff. The second phase will be led by the family centre with support from the project team. The third phase will operate with the programme delivered independently by the family centre staff.

Madras Family Centre will be operating their second phase during the spring break, 2015. This will include revisions to the programme based on feedback from parents, staff, partners and the project team. In addition, improvements will be made to the data collection process to ensure that there is robust information that fully captures the learning from sessions, and the impact on parents and children.

Carlubar Family Centre will commence the first phase of the programme during summer 2015 and will have intensive support from the project team. Key staff from Carlubar will also have the opportunity to attend the planning

sessions for the spring session at Madras to ensure that there is the opportunity to share experiences from staff and partners who have already participated. Awareness raising/training will be provided for partner agency staff to allow all parties to gain an in-depth appreciation of the programme components and the tasks they will be required to plan prior to delivering sessions.

It is hoped that the Let's Play programme will have a positive impact on the wider community beyond the family centre, and that local people, services, and organisations can raise the profile of interactive play between adults and children. For example, by organising a 'Let's Play Neilston' week /fortnight /month', a wide variety of community members could be made aware of the benefits of interactive play and encouraged to engage and further develop play opportunities within the local area. The Let's Play team shares the vision outlined by Play Scotland (2013):

Play is crucial for the wellbeing of our children in Scotland. The right to play reflects fully the right to be a child here and now. We need to ensure that the local physical and social environments are supportive of play ... we want child friendly communities in Scotland supported by play friendly neighbourhoods.

Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge the support provided by Eilidh Lanzani (Educational Psychologist) in relation to the development of the attachment and nurture training materials.

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