

Happy Day's Project – Interim report

1. Overview

The Happy Day's project has seen us actively deliver across three temporary accommodation hostels within Nottingham City. These three hostels have been chosen to work with as they were the three hostels where no other children and family play sessions were facilitated within the hostel. The demographic of the three hostels is that 2 are family hostels and 1 is a hostel for the placement of young mothers. Our work during the reporting period has seen us be able to undertake a range of play activities that aim to support children's development alongside including parents within these to increase their involvement with their child's development, increase familial bonds and ultimately remove barriers to their access to mainstream education.

As detailed below we have during the reporting period engaged with 63 children from 53 families and have engaged with 40 parents. We are particularly pleased with the number of parents involved in relation to children engaged with as from experience it can be notoriously difficult to initially gain this engagement with parents.

In order to fully assess the outcomes of the project and the benefits to participants we have this period trialled a range of monitoring evaluation methods as described in our evaluation plan. In addition to this we have also commissioned an external evaluation of the programme to look at the quality of delivery and to pinpoint areas of development. We hope that this report will be made available to us by the end of January and will therefore be the first stage in the process of finding areas of both good practice and areas of improvement so that we can implement these going forward.

2. Outputs

Measurable Output	Numbers achieved July - Dec
Number of Children engaged with	63
Number of Parents engaged with	40
Number of Families	53
Number of Hostels	3
Number of play sessions delivered	72

3. Outcomes/Benefits

The key aim of the project is to break down the barriers that homeless children have to successful learning. We aim to do this through the 4 key objectives below.

Improving familial bonds

Our activities around this objective have centred on involving the whole family in the same activity in order to engage them together in play activities. Examples of this has been to do cooking activities where parents have led the activity involving their children in the aspects that have been safe for them to be involved. Likewise, we have also provided a number of activities that have seen the child lead the activity such as role play, free play and arts and crafts where the child has been in charge of the activity and the parent has been directed by the child. We have found that this mixed approach not only encourages parents and children to play together and improves parental engagement but also gives both parent and

child the opportunity to take responsibility for their relationship. We have found that families to take part in both types of activity are more likely to re-engage with us and thus continue to play together.

Building self confidence

Our activities around this objective have been two fold, one addressing the self-confidence within the children themselves and other addressing the self-confidence issues with parents. Our activities with children and families have been structured that we have gradually increased the level of challenge within activities for the children that is appropriate to their age. This allows a child to see that they are succeeding but also stretches them to develop thus creating an increase in their self-confidence. Likewise, we have also encouraged families to create peer support groups within hostels with other families. We have found this to be beneficial as often self-confidence issues within parents are passed onto their children and therefore having this support can be invaluable to both children and parents. Likewise, it increases self-confidence within the children as due to the nature of their situation they are often isolated and encouraging this interaction can and has been seen to improve their relationships and interactions with other children.

Developing trust in the world around

Our work around this objective has been focused around us providing a safe and secure environment for children and their families to play in. This goes beyond creating a play space that physically offers safety by also creating clear boundaries for the children. This has been observed not only improving behaviour of the children but also increasing their ability to test boundaries, which is a fundamental part of a child's development, in a safe managed way. Likewise, parents have commented that this behaviour and engagement has been transferred into both the home setting and within nursery.

Likewise, we have also worked with parents to begin to break down the mistrust they have towards some agencies. This has been done again on two levels not, with us through conversations about individuals experiences and assessing why things have happened in a certain way but also through signposting and supporting individuals to specific support that addresses this fully in order to prevent this mistrust being passed on to the children.

Improving access and engagement with mainstream educational provision

Activities from this objective have stemmed from the work of the previous however, from the above being completed we have been able to promote local services that fit into this. We have been able to support individual parents and in one hostels case a small group of parents and families to sign up to local libraries. This in itself is not only beginning to involve the parents in a mainstream educational tool but also directly impacts on a child's development through the process of a parent reading with a child as well as improving familial bonds.

Likewise, we have also been promoting and supporting families to access local children's centre activities. This has been crucial as most families when moving into temporary accommodation find themselves removed from their local environment to an area of which they have no knowledge. Therefore having support to not only identify local provision but also someone to help a parent to physically access this is crucial to ensure that children

whilst homeless are not placed at a disadvantage to their peers. We have found this directed and individual process has been the most successful in supporting parents to help their children access mainstream provision.

In addition we have supported parents by informing them of different support agencies that address individual children's needs as well as in a number of cases supported them to access services that address the effects of domestic violence on both children and the wider family. We have also provided a number of families with learning resources relevant to their child/children's ages whilst they have been waiting for a school place in their new area to try and minimise the impact on learning not accessing educational provision can have on a child.

4. Lessons learned

As referenced above a key part of our programme as funded by the British and Foreign Schools Society is to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and to prove the benefits of the interventions. As in our evaluation plan our aim was to use a control group in order to compare programme beneficiaries to that of a comparable control group and to gain access to such through parents links with nursery's and schools. We have found this to be more difficult than originally envisaged due to the nature and situation of the beneficiaries on the programme. This can be demonstrated through a number of examples and situations, the first of which being that beneficiaries often have a large amount of distrust for agencies for a number of reasons, therefore we often find that we are not only attempting to get parents to engage but also to trust us. This has an impact as it means parents are less likely to reveal more information about their family situation in order for us to use this as a baseline, and likewise, even less likely to give us information about the other provision their child/children attend in order for us to contact them.

Moreover, following on from this, our approach to combat this has been to allow more time to establish relationships with parents in order to enable them to feel comfortable to share this information before asking for this. This has been both successful and unsuccessful as it has allowed us to build much more successful relationships with parents built on trust however, it has held up the collation of this information and sometimes prevented it where a relationship has been built and when approaching this stage a family has been offered a permanent home and therefore moved out of the hostel within a matter of a very short period of time.

Given the above we have now created a series of evidence collation questionnaires that require less in depth information from both parents and where applicable children in order to establish information from a much earlier point in the process in order to negate the effect of waiting to establish relationships with parents. Although this will provide us with less in depth information it will provide us with at least a starting point. We will however, also continue the original process in order to gain this more in depth information where possible.

5. Future Activity

Our future activity will stem across two main strands for the next period; these will be around direct delivery and the evaluation of programme. Our delivery with families will

continue to focus around the development aspects of play as well as looking to our external evaluation in order to create more areas of best practice and working on areas that are identified for areas of development.

Our evaluation work will progress as described as above, and as detailed in the evaluation plan however, our key focuses will be to engage with a control group and to engage more effectively with other agencies working with the children and young people concerned.

6. Sustainability

In terms of sustainability of the project we are extremely pleased that through the programme we have been able to secure a project called family learning. This programme will see us deliver parenting courses whilst offering a 'stay and play' type service for those children whose parents are undertaking the course. This will enable us to not only offer parents an enhanced understanding of the impact play activities have on their child's wider development but also further support the work within the play activities. Likewise, if the pilot of the programme is successful the provision is likely to be re-commissioned.

Likewise, the purpose of the in depth evaluation of the programme is in the hope to make the programme more sustainable through the collation of a strong evidence base which is able to demonstrate the clear benefits the programme has for children and their families.

7. Finance

Item Description	Funding received for reporting period	Total Cost during reporting period	Cost to BFSS during reporting period
Staff Time – comprising co-ordination, delivery and liaising with control groups	£8,627.20	£16,691.00	£8,627.20
Materials	£512.00	£612.79	£512.00
Refreshment	£256.00	£137.62	£137.62
External Evaluation	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Total	£9395.2	£17,441.41	£9276.82

As can be seen above our spend total has been almost as anticipated against our spend profile, however there has been a small underspend in relation to refreshments. This is because beneficiaries have led and shaped decisions around this aspect and how the money has been spent, which has led to a cost saving. However, we believe this to be positive as the lower the cost of refreshments makes any activities carried out with these more easily and affordably replicable at most beneficiaries homes.