



Parents and Carers

A report outlining activities and strategies available across West Yorkshire to support Parents and Carers in developing their own educational aspirations, as well as those of their children

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Introduction



There is an extensive body of research which confirms that the role of parents and carers as key stakeholders in the education of children and young people is indisputable. This is reflected in government policy*

However, government policy intimates that many parents and carers have not got the requisite skill sets to support their own development or to support the learning of their children.

Parenting and family support is high on the government's agenda, underpinning each of the five outcomes in 'Every Child Matters' and is a key element of the core offer of Extended Services. This, in turn, has led to a greater awareness of the importance of parental involvement in the education of children.

The need for the involvement of parents and carers in the education of their children is paramount. The focus of the new phase of Aimhigher is to support the attainment and aspirations of young people with academic potential but who come from lower socio-economic groups or from disadvantaged socio-economic groups who live in an area of relative deprivation, where participation in higher education is low. It also includes 'looked after' children in the care system and people with a disability or a specific learning difficulty*2

Over the last five years, some progress has been made to address the issue of the involvement of parents and carers. This has taken many forms, from providing structured involvement of parents and carers in Aimhigher activity, to specific accredited programmes to facilitate the involvement of parents and carers in higher education. Although the evidence base is small, the impact of such approaches is positive and demonstrable.

This report captures the essence of these positive approaches by providing case study exemplars of good and effective practice.

* 'Every Parent Matters' DCSF March 2007.

'Guidance for Aimhigher Partnerships' HEFCE 2008/05



Project Aims and objectives

The Parents and Carers project had a number of linked aims and objectives as specified by the Aimhigher project team, led by colleagues at EducationLeeds.



Jim Hagart - Leeds Aimhigher, Deputy Team Leader

The main objectives of the activity were to:

Identify strategies undertaken across West Yorkshire, to support the development of education aspirations, self-efficacy, motivation and self-esteem, in terms of the most deprived learning communities, with a specific focus on those from BME, white working-class and other vulnerable learning communities;

The creation of case studies, exemplifying best practice in terms of the effectiveness of parents'/ carers' involvement and pathways to further learning;

The production of parent/carer-specific information on availability of a range of provision, including self-efficacy programmes (Steps to Excellence for Personal Success, delivered by the Pacific Institute, Steps facilitation courses, HE programmes for parents/carers e.g. University Certificate in

Personal and Professional Development) as well as information, advice and guidance.

Dissemination of information in a variety of formats, including websites and through Aimhigher district meetings, involving widening participation practitioners, parents and carers.



Case studies of good or effective practice

Through our research activities, we identified a range of project activities across West Yorkshire that sought to engage with parents and carers.

- Case 1: Wakefield, Learning Journey's Project
- Case 2: Calderdale, Aimhigher University visits
- Case 3: Kirklees, Parents and Carers evenings
- Case 4: Leeds, REEMAP
- Case 5: Leeds, Stepping Stones - engaging the carers of looked-after children

Our project sought to 'tell the story' of the above cases. To do this we have utilised a range of data collection approaches. These have included documentary analysis of material produced by projects, individual interviews and focus groups with pupils, parents and those responsible for managing and developing programmes.

All of this activity has enabled us to present rich and informative accounts of these inspiring effective projects.



Source: West Yorkshire Aimhigher Primary Project (2008)

Case 1: Wakefield, Learning Journeys project

The Learning Journeys project was developed in conjunction with Aimhigher Wakefield, the University of Leeds and the WEA and was funded from Wakefield's Post-area Inspection Action Plan and Connexions West Yorkshire.

The overall aim of the project was to attempt to raise the aspirations of parents and their children and highlight the advantages for both of them of continuing in further learning. It is hoped that this project and subsequent projects will impact on the choices children make at 16 and commence the continual cycle of learning amongst parents themselves. Within the project are specific aims for both parents and children.

Aims for parents include:

- To enjoy working with their child in school and at home,
- To learn some new creative skills,
- To enjoy making new friends and working together as a group,
- To have the opportunity to reflect on their own learning journeys and experiences of learning,
- To have the chance to talk about and find out more about further education and higher education and what they mean,
- To build up confidence in their own abilities,
- To have an opportunity to discuss their children's learning journeys and future and explore their worries surrounding this,
- To experience a visit to a university,
- To learn more about the different qualifications and routes into further and higher education for themselves and their children,
- To feel more confident in raising their own and their children's aspirations for the future,
- To realise the importance and value of parental

involvement in school and at home; and

To feel more confident to pursue their dreams in small, achievable steps.

Aims for children include:

- To have the opportunity to talk about what they would like to be/do when they grow up,
- To enjoy working with their parent in school and at home,
- To have fun taking part in new and exciting creative activities,
- To have opportunities to look at their achievements on their learning journey so far and talk about what journey they may take in the future,
- To have a first hand experience of visiting a university and preparing work for an exhibition there; and
- To find out more about staying on at school and reasons why this could be of a benefit in the future.



Learning Journey's project school

Case 1: Wakefield, Learning Journeys project



The project has been successfully run with a number of collaborating schools in Wakefield, including Ferrybridge Infants School, Smawthorne Henry Moore Primary School, Ackton Pastures Primary School.

A range of approaches are deployed to engage with parent and carers. These have successfully included: speaking to the children it is aimed at in a school assembly to increase their interest (and work with them to encourage the participation of their parents and/or carers, using the school's newsletter, if parent champions are in place, asking them to spread the word amongst parents, leaflets, posters (and working with children to design these), and the school's website.

Children who participated in the project activities found them to be positive experiences, as expressed by the following review written by one boy.

"I've really loved spending time with my mum doing stuff we can't do at home and being allowed to get mucky!

I really liked making my plant pot and watering it every day- it actually grew too! It was funny looking back at some of my old photos and deciding what to put on my Hopes and Dreams board I didn't think I'd done so much!

I think I will go to uni one day like my mum or play rugby for Cas, or footy for Arsenal or even Cricket for England - I'm not sure yet.

I've still got my teddy I made at Leeds uni and have it on my bed I'm dead proud of how good it is and it was fun to make. But the best thing about Learning Journeys was I got to make ALL the decisions and have mum all to myself.

Learning Journeys was mint, just not long enough"

Learning Journey's: a parent's story

"My reasons for choosing Learning Journeys was to spend some quality time on a one-to-one basis with my eldest son as having four children time is a rare commodity. I pretty much felt my time for education had well and truly passed by and only thought in terms of my children's education - how wrong I was!

Learning Journeys has helped me in so many ways its impossible to tell you them all, but I'll give it a go!

Never in a million years did I think I could ever go to university. Coming from your typical working class background university was beyond me- it was a privilege for the rich and clever not a working class nobody like me! Having the opportunity to meet other parents, get information and actually visit a university has completely changed my whole life. I've found the confidence and been given the opportunity and information I needed to realise my own ambitions and aspirations to the point I'm now going onto a Social Work degree in September at Leeds University. Without the support and guidance I found with Learning Journeys this wouldn't have ever been possible. Not only is my future looking brighter but my children's aspirations and expectations have also risen. As parents we sometimes forget how important we are to our children's educational ambitions. I can't count how many times I've told my kids to try their best and aim high - maybe its time we all took our own advice"

Case 2: Calderdale, Aimhigher University visits



As part of their activity to support and engage with parents of Aimhigher students, Calderdale provide regular visits to local Universities

Calderdale Aimhigher recognise that in order to ensure positive impact of their interventions, parents and carers would need to become more involved in their activities. Engaging parents and carers in Aimhigher events, school activities and follow-up University visits means that parents can appreciate more directly what their children may be considering undertaking.

A number of local University visits took place during 2009 to support this activity - a visit to Bradford University, a visit to Manchester University and a visit to the University of Huddersfield. Over 120 expressions of interest to attend these events came from families of children who were typically targeted by Aimhigher in Calderdale.

Content of a typical University visit - University of Manchester, June 2009

Programme:

10.00 - 11.00am. Talk by member of university staff on the benefits of going to university; financial help available, student life, why Manchester?

11.00 – 11.30am. Student ambassadors will escort groups on campus tours, taking in the University Library, academic departments and the students' union.

11.30 – 12.00 noon. Question and answer session with student ambassadors.

12.00 noon. End of the morning programme.

The Calderdale project deliberately target 'M62' Universities as young people within Calderdale typically progress to Universities within this area.

Parents and carers appeared to place great value on the University visits as they enabled them to gain a greater understanding of the organisation, size, function and requirements of University. Generally, their queries in relation to University study were answered during or immediately following the visits through their discussions with Aimhigher colleagues in Calderdale. The following feedback from parents and carers was received.

"The visit to Manchester University was very useful and answered most of the questions on our mind regarding higher education. It also gave us an insight into University education. Our child really enjoys the visit and [it] will definitely motivate her to work harder to achieve her goal of admission to a University."

"The visit to the University has provided a clear view of what help and support is available for young children in their journey of education...It's a good way of motivating young learners to start planning for their future and finding ways to reach their goals. I would personally use this opportunity to thank all the Aimhigher team."

"I think Aimhigher has been great. It's opened our eyes and now I feel like normal people go to university, people like us."

Case 3: Kirklees, Parents and Carers evenings

Following on from successful events held in previous years, the 14-19 Transition Team funded through Aimhigher, held two consultation evenings for the parents/carers of Year 11 learners from Kirklees schools.

The parents and carer evening events were organised in two locations within Kirklees – one venue in the North (Batley, Dewsbury and surrounding district) with the second in the South (Huddersfield and surrounding district). Venues were selected as being central for each area and offer an easy form of access and/or parking. The venue for North Kirklees was Dewsbury Town Hall and the venue for South Kirklees was the University of Huddersfield.

Information was sent out by means of a direct mail shot to the parents/carers of all Year 11 learners in Kirklees schools. Using the Careers Service database, the mail shot took the form of a letter explaining the events and included the invite. Also sent was an IAG booklet specifically written for parents/carers by the Careers Service and information about the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

No restrictions were placed on parents/carers in their choice and they were able to select their preferred event and venue.

As in previous years invites were sent to providers of Post 16 learning and training in Kirklees. These included all schools with sixth forms, further education colleges, sixth form colleges and work based learning providers.

In addition, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the wider 'services' - Police, Fire, Army, Navy and Airforce were invited. Also in attendance were Calderdale and Kirklees Careers to provide additional independent and impartial IAG for parents and carers.



Case 4: Leeds, REEMAP

Leeds Aimhigher's commitment to engaging parents and carers is well documented, and the importance of parental engagement figured prominently in a recent evaluation of the Leeds Aimhigher and Gifted and Talented programmes.



Shazia Shah - REEMAP

REEMAP, an educational charity formed in 2002, is dedicated to countering under-achievement and poor aspiration levels amongst black and ethnic minority young people in the city.

Parental engagement forms a critical element of their strategy to achieve this, and with Aimhigher support REEMAP runs an annual parents and carers' event. In 2009 this took place in the Leeds Metropolitan University, and the event, *Aspiring to Achieve*, forms an important element of REEMAP's information, advice and guidance provision for parents and carers.

Parents and carers who attended the 2009 event, which was introduced by Mrs Inderjeet Hunjan, Chair of the Board of Trustees, heard a presentation by the motivational speaker Mr Action Jackson, and had a choice of three workshop sessions covering

the Leeds 14-19 prospectus, Steps to Excellence for Personal Success (STEPS) and the Parents' Academy.

The impact of the day is illustrated by the parents and carers' feedback forms, all of which marked all the event's activities as either 'good' or 'excellent', with none marked 'satisfactory' or 'poor'. The feedback forms also allow parents to design future activities for REEMAP, and suggestions from 2009 include further parental engagement activities, greater publicity for REEMAP and its resources, and programmes specially dedicated to excluded or hard to reach young people. Parents and carers also said they would like to see programmes aimed at children as early as Year 7 to enable them to improve in core subjects before they get entered as 'foundation' or 'intermediate' for their GCSEs. "The Junior Fellowship helped my daughter gain a lot more confidence in herself and her abilities and because of this she has learnt to speak in public which she would have never done previously." Parent.

Making the Difference

All REEMAP's attainment and aspiration raising activities are encompassed by the brand name *Making the Difference*, and collectively currently engage with the best part of 400 young BME people from Key Stages 3 and 4 in Leeds. They also offer post-16 support. *Making the Difference* is centred on Junior Fellowship Schemes for Year 10 and 11 students, and SATS Success for Year 9 students.

Case 5: Leeds, Stepping Stones - engaging the carers of looked-after children

Provision for looked-after children in Leeds has been developed and refined over recent years. This has included the development of the innovative 'Stepping Stones' project.



Ken Campbell - Stepping Stones Consultant, Education Leeds

In 2003 Ken Campbell, a consultant on looked after children, approached Leeds Aimhigher with a raft of suggestions for activities that would raise the aspirations of young people in care, something the Aimhigher team were keen to develop. Aspiration-raising activity for looked after children elsewhere in the UK, they felt, tended inappropriately to link provision for young people in care with that for children with special needs. Stepping Stones is the central element of this provision, and the programme includes a suite of collaborative activities designed to engage young people and show them measured pathways towards achievement.

Ken Campbell gauges the success of Stepping Stones' engagement activity in terms of participation rates, something that he feels is

important in terms of raising the aspirations of the carers themselves as well as of the young people they look after.

"We measure success by the number of carers who get involved in all our activities," he said, "where we invite young people and their carers to come along and find out about university summer schools, it's raising the aspirations of the carers as well as of the young people."

Personal contact is important in terms of encouraging carers' engagement, he feels, and from this perspective Aimhigher's working relationships with colleagues in social care is central. "In order to get to the carers you can't just send out a load of information," he said, "you've got to have somebody who can contact them directly, who knows them and who can chivvy them along a bit."

Activities include university summer school evenings, family days and trips to places like Harlow Carr Gardens in Harrogate and RAF Linton-on-Ouse, which give everybody the opportunity to get to know each other better. Stepping Stones also runs an annual dinner for young people and their carers.

Ken feels that, as local authorities must take on the role of parents when it comes to helping looked after children succeed, helping them to plan for their futures and supporting their aspirations, it is important that Stepping Stones also engineers a change in corporate attitude. He wants to see "a corporate culture wherein the achievements of young people are recognised and applauded."

Some further help: sources of advice and guidance

Afasic

<http://www.afasic.org.uk/>

Afasic was founded in 1968 as a parent-led organisation to help children and young people with speech and language impairments and their families. It provides information and training for parents and professionals, and produces a range of publications.

Aimhigher

<http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk>

National Aimhigher site, hosted by the Government's Directgov site. Contains many resources about higher education, particularly for young people considering going to university.

Aimhigher West Yorkshire

<http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/westyorkshire/home/>
Web site of Aimhigher in West Yorkshire, general information, downloadable resources and case studies.

Ask Bruno

<http://askbruno.org/>

Ask Bruno's ASD forum contains information and links to hundreds of downloadable resources for teachers, parents and carers to support learners on the autistic spectrum.

Autism Education Trust

<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>
The Autism Education Trust (AET) was launched in November 2007 with funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It is dedicated to co-ordinating and improving education support for all children on the autism spectrum in England.
Becta (British Educational Communications Technology Agency)
www.becta.org.uk/
Government agency leading the effective education usage of technology, Becta offers useful guidance about online reporting.

Children's Workforce Development Council

<http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/>
The CWDC links employers and the children's workforce, and takes a lead role in connecting the activities of the various agencies concerned with children and working with children across England.

Communications Trust

<http://www.ican.org.uk/Communication%20Trust/Home.aspx>

The Communication Trust raises awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication across the children's workforce and to enable practitioners to access the best training and expertise to support the communication needs of all children. The Trust is funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and others, and was founded by BT Better World, Afasic and Council for Disabled Children and I CAN.

Contact a Family

<http://www.cafamily.org.uk/>

The only UK-wide charity providing advice, information and support to the parents of all disabled children.

Department for Children, Schools and Families

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/>
The government department with responsibility for schools, families and children, formerly the Department for Education and Skills.

Downs Syndrome Association

<http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/>

The Downs Syndrome Association's website with support for the parents and carers of children with Downs Syndrome.

Early Support – helping every child succeed

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/healthandwellbeing/ahdc/earllysupport/home/>
Early Support is part of the DCSF's Every Child Matters site, and was developed by parents, carers and practitioners to ensure families are kept at the heart of discussion and decision making about their child.

Every Child Matters

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/>
The website of the DCSF's Every Child Matters initiative, which aims to take forward the Government's vision of radical reform for children, young people and families.

Family and Parenting Institute

<http://www.familyandparenting.org/parentalEngagement>

The Family and Parenting Institute is the leading centre of expertise on families and parenting in the UK. Families, in all their diversity, form the basis of our society and the foundation for the future. The Institute's mission is to support them in bringing up children.

I Can

<http://www.ican.org.uk/>

I CAN is a charity that works to support the development of speech, language and communication skills in all children with a special focus on those who find this hard: children with speech, language and communication needs.

ICT Register

<http://www.ict-register.net/pe.php>

The ICT Register is a unique resource of innovative practice about all aspects of learning with technology and it is freely available for schools around the world. It is operated by the Specialist schools and Academies Trust in partnership with Becta.

Inclusion

<http://inclusion.ngfl.gov.uk/>

Inclusion is a free, searchable catalogue of on-line resources that support teaching professionals, parents and carers in meeting individual learning needs.

National Coalition for Parental Engagement in Education

<http://www.ncpie.org/>

National Coalition for Parental Engagement in Education (Washington DC, US), American site dedicated to advocating the involvement of parents and families in their children's education.

National Deaf Children's Society

<http://www.ndcs.org.uk/>

NDCS provides information and resources for families on supporting children with hearing impairments, and early identification in particular.

National Literacy Trust

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/>

Formed in 1993, the National Literacy Trust is an independent charity that changes lives through literacy. Many downloadable resources, includes the Talk to Your Baby site.

Scope

<http://www.scope.org.uk/>

Charity dedicated to achieving a world where disabled people have the same opportunities to fulfil their life ambitions as non-disabled people.

Selective Mutism Information & Research Association

<http://www.smira.org.uk/>

Selective Mutism is an anxiety disorder in which affected people speak fluently in some situations but remain silent in others. SMIRA provides information and training for parents and professionals in supporting children with this anxiety disorder.

Skills for Care

<http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/>

Sector skills council for social care in England.

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust

<https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/>

An independent, not-for-profit membership organisation dedicated to raising levels of achievement in secondary education.