

ERIQ FLLN: Family Language Case study

Case study title:

Family Language: Partnership working for successful recruitment and progression

Pilot LA/provider:

Stoke-on-Trent

Contact name and job title:

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Introduction:

Since 2007, Stoke-on-Trent has seen a steady rise in the number of bilingual families, mainly from Eastern Europe, coming to live and work in the town. This has meant an increase in the number of bilingual children in schools and children's centres. Schools were reporting the need to make contact with these new parents and encourage them to engage in school life to support their children's learning and development. The English language levels of the parents were often at low Entry level and their contact with school minimal. There were issues on how to engage with these parents and how to support them once on course to progress to further learning or employment. The 12-hour family language pilot aimed to engage the families in learning activities at home, develop an understanding of how school is organised and how parents can be involved and increase English language skills.

Description/outline of activity, process, etc.:

The course took place at two schools in partnership: Alexandra Infants School and Alexandra Junior School. These are schools on different sites but they have very close links geographically, educationally and pastorally.

Initially Karen Gibson, the local authority outreach worker for the south east of the city, met with the two home-school linkworkers, Debbie Walters (infants school) and Faz Naveed (junior school). The initial meeting was successful, with both Faz and Debbie immediately seeing the great opportunities available to their families through the 12-hour family language course.

Both schools had recently enrolled children from newly arrived Eastern European

families and Debbie and Faz were keen to develop their links with them. Both schools already had excellent home links, but this new client group provided a challenge to the two linkworkers. Communication was a major problem but Debbie in particular felt that because they already had a large percentage of EAL families in school (50% +), they already had some key skills in working with people with low levels of English.

The determination and perseverance of Faz and Debbie to make this course work was evidenced in their total commitment to supporting the mums they recruited. Reminder phone calls and chats on the playground were part of that support, but both were willing to 'go the extra mile' and collect parents from home and make phone calls via other family members or friends whose English skills were better.

Those recruited were from families from Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania.

Impact:

Six parents completed the course, with huge gains in confidence, self-esteem and a sense of pride in their achievement, including making progress with their English. They developed a sense of community within the group, within the school family and within the local community. The children took pride in their parents and in themselves as a consequence. At the end of one session, one young boy rushed in to see his mum. He was disappointed that she had already left but was keen to make sure that she had been to class that day. Teachers reported that the course helped the children develop a sense of belonging to the school community, giving many examples of children feeling more confident and at ease and integrating well in their classroom.

The course gave the opportunity to SfL ESOL tutor Syma Mughal to extend her teaching into Family Language. She rapidly created a friendly, positive and welcoming atmosphere within the group using simple but interesting techniques to engage learners.

The partnership working between herself and the linkworkers ensured the best possible learning experience for the families.

Key factors for success:

The major factor in the success of the project in Stoke was the staff involved in it, the positive and determined attitudes of the link workers, and the friendliness and flexibility of the tutor. In a very informal atmosphere, a most professional project was delivered.

Any developments since the activity described or plans for future:

The parents have progressed straight from the course on to a Keeping up with the Children course. The linkworkers have supported several of the mums to join an ACL 'Look Good, Feel Fine' (health and beauty) course, running for ten weeks in school. Some have joined in other family learning provision being offered in school. Three learners have also enquired at the local neighbourhood college about ESOL courses. The linkworkers, Debbie and Faz, did a presentation in June 2008 at the local family

learning conference about their work on this project. They both received very positive feedback and were a source of inspiration to colleagues from other schools who were experiencing recruitment difficulties

Quotes from parents or practitioners:

In the view of Kath Reynolds, family learning and city outreach coordinator:

'The personalities of Debbie and Faz (the schools' linkworkers) were a great strength of this project. They are enthusiastic, patient, empathetic and dynamic. Throughout the five weeks of the course, they only "lost" one mum – and this was because she was successful in gaining employment in shop work!'