



Brent families learn English together

Brent Libraries and Brent Adult and Community Education Service are helping parents and carers of children under five with English as a second language learn English alongside their children. **The Learn English With Your Child programme, held in libraries across the borough, has almost doubled in size since it began. While the adults gain confidence both in speaking English and in talking to, reading to and sharing activities with their children, the children enjoy interacting with other children and are prepared for school.**

The effects

Since 2005 Brent Libraries and Brent Adult and Community Education Service have been working together to help parents and carers of children under five with English as a second language learn English alongside their children. The Learn English With Your Child programme, held in libraries across the borough, has almost doubled in size since it began. The sessions include shared craft, cooking, storytime, singing and games. While the adults build their confidence in speaking English, talking to, reading to and playing with their children, the children prepare for school.

“Parents start to let go. They start to converse more with the child. The children become a lot more confident and speak more.”

Tutor

The experience

Sarah Foster, Family Learning Manager, Brent Adult and Community Education Service

Learn English With Your Child is a six-week course for two hours a week, run in partnership with Brent Libraries and Brent Adult and Community Education Service (BACES). It is for parents/carers with English as a second language who have children under the age of five. The aim of the course is to provide ESOL classes to parents/carers together with their children. The course was set up in January 2005 in direct response to the high number of parents/carers with young children on the BACES waiting list for ESOL classes. As the number of crèche places for ESOL classes are limited, parents/carers were waiting a long time for their place on a course. The library seemed a valuable community-learning environment in which to run family learning ESOL classes, so the BACES family learning manager, an ESOL tutor and a CYPS librarian created the course content and ran a pilot course in Jan 2005. The course was a great success and has continued to run in all 12 libraries in rotation.

The sessions are split into three sections beginning with a group activity on a weekly topic (we use Family and Home, Daily Routine, Food and Drink, Shopping, The Body and

Healthcare and Hobbies/Things We Like To Do). The children separate from the parents/carers on to the carpeted area and work with the CYPS librarian while the tutor works with the adults on focused ESOL tuition. After a refreshment break the group comes together again for a final activity. We use the same themes in the adults', children's and joint parts of the sessions as a linking framework. We ran six courses in Brent Libraries (they also run in schools and children's centres) in 05/06 and 06/07, which attracted a total of 50 adults and 50 children. We have planned 11 courses for 2007/08.

Resources and staffing

The course is staffed by an ESOL tutor from BACES and by the Children's Librarian. A folder of materials has been created and topic related book collections and simple puzzles purchased for the sessions.

Partners

The course is run in partnership with:

- Brent Adult
- Community Education Service (BACES).

Outcomes

The course has been running successfully each term since January 2005. It is rotated between Brent's 12 libraries in order to meet demand in all areas of the borough however several courses have been run in high demand areas. Parents/carers have reported feelings of achievement through the sessions and many have formed new friendships through the courses. Through the joint activities, parents have been introduced to songs, books, creative craft ideas, games and cooking ideas. They realise what their children enjoy doing and get a lot of ideas for how they can spend quality time with them. The children get a chance to interact with each other.

Attendance at sessions is consistently good and there is always demand for more sessions to be run. Evaluation forms show very positive feedback regarding parents' increased confidence in using English language skills, sharing books and communicating with their children. The library service has acquired new members and promoted its services and other initiatives such as Bookstart. BACES has been able to promote its other courses, mainly in the Family Learning and ESOL area.

The adult learners have valued the opportunity to improve their language skills and feel they gain confidence in sharing books with their children. The fact that they can learn with their children is a significant factor. The children have also enjoyed coming.

Feedback comments include the following:

"In the morning my granddaughter says 'Mummy it's Friday, we are going to the library to do cutting, sticking, painting and eating.'"

Grandmother who brought her granddaughter to a course.

"I like cutting and sticking and painting and playing games"

Child

" I liked reading with [my child] and using lots of expression"

Parent

A tutor says: *"It is a fantastic idea. It works really well even if it is only for six weeks. Although the course is quite short, it still produces results. Parents start to let go. They start to converse more with the child. The children become a lot more confident and speak more. Parents are coaxied to let their child do something (however imperfect it is) rather than take over themselves. Parents also improve on their English skills."*

Challenges

The main challenge has been in ensuring good attendance in certain areas of the borough and, initially, encouraging parents/carers to come to the library for the course. As in any partnership, it is important to think about how to work effectively together and use the skills and expertise of both staff who come from an adult-focused background on the one hand (BACES) and a child-focused background on the other: for example, to ensure that materials are prepared by the most appropriate member of staff and decide who will take the lead in sessions. The library service meets regularly with BACES to develop or adapt the course content as needed and discuss any problems. It has become clear that BACES has an important role in ensuring that clients who are not regular library users are aware of the courses and are given information on how to access the courses.

The future

Learn English With Your Child will continue in 2009. In response to requests, courses will be trialled for longer periods of 10 weeks.