



## Lancashire County Council's Cultural Services

Shortlisted for Family Learning in the Early Years

**Lancashire County Council's Cultural Services (LCC) is a family of services including libraries, museums, archives, heritage learning, school library services, music services and outdoor education. They aim for a service where libraries are safe, accessible, welcoming, creative spaces where communities can connect, be active, take notice, learn, and share.**

**As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, LCC saw the wide recognition that children's social and literacy skills had been impacted by periods of isolation and lockdown and wanted to address this.**

### Family Learning Provision

Little Steps is a free scheme in Lancashire libraries for families with children aged 2 to 5, based upon the principles of chat, play, read, and learn. The scheme has been newly created to improve children's communication, support mental health and wellbeing, and encourage families to read and get active together highlighting the importance and impact of reading together as a family from an early age.

A variety of early years development specialists including speech and language therapists and health practitioners, as well as library staff and families, were consulted to identify what would benefit children and what LCC could do to support them.

Families receive a book bag, a card featuring tips on helping their child to start school, as well as their first character card featuring recommended picture books to read and activities to try out at home. The character is designed to help the child learn about identified developmental topics based on the government's seven areas of learning for EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage), such as making friends, emotions, new experiences, and finding your voice.

Examples to explore and think critically include: make a collage of things that make you happy; learn to sign a word; choose an outfit to wear today; try a new fruit or vegetable; visit somewhere fun and take a photo; start a collection, share something with a friend; read a story with a grandparent, auntie or uncle.



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Each library supports Little Steps through regular events, either as completely new sessions or additions to existing early years activities such as Storytimes or Baby Bounce and Rhyme. They have also worked with family hubs to promote Little Steps to their users who may not use libraries, and have hosted outreach stalls at partner events, promoting the scheme to both professionals and service users.

#### Impact and next steps

The service has seen a 204% year-on-year growth in the uptake of early years reading schemes, with over 3,000 children registered and 500+ sessions taking place.

Libraries have fed back regular case studies, with one featuring an elated parent describing how their daughter's progression from being extremely shy to saying animal names during a group activity was "a milestone, because she doesn't talk very much".

LCC has also seen some real social interaction taking place with children offering support and advice to each other about how to ask for help and how to make friends with one child asking for help from a peer, who said "I will show you how and help you" and another child chiming in to say "That's how to be a good friend. You'll have lots of friends when you go to school."

This programme will continue to run with monitoring and evaluation planned to ensure the design stays fresh and relevant to family needs and wants. Recent changes include the addition of completion certificates and more character cards, as well as the change of activities to more easily understood ones that families can carry out together.