



Learning Unlimited

Shortlisted for Family Learning to Support Health and Wellbeing

Learning Unlimited is a not-for-profit social enterprise specialising in adult and family learning, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and integration, literacy, numeracy, and teacher education.

It believes in learning as empowerment and engages adults and families in local communities who face a wide range of issues and barriers to social inclusion. The Welcome Project is the result of voluntary work by two individuals supporting asylum seeker families who were at the time 'locked down' in a hotel due to Covid.

They raised money through a local charity to buy Christmas presents for all the children in the hotel, and subsequently applied to Lambeth council to fund this project.

Emulating early years settings

Part of a series of activities and programmes put in place to support asylum-seeking families, The Welcome Project delivers weekly sessions for families with children under five who live in hotel accommodation.

Sessions take place in children's centres and provide intergenerational arts, crafts and play activities run by trained staff and supported by volunteers. Sessions are designed to emulate early years settings, so children get used to elements such as outdoor play and story and song-time, and parents also learn about their value. Each session provides the opportunity for adults and children to learn English in an informal setting, for example, songs that introduce language such as up, down, and days of the week. Key health and wellbeing topics are covered with parents during each session, including the UK health system, maternity and health visiting services, healthy eating, oral health, bathing babies, sleep, and the importance of outdoor play.

Children can get out of the cramped hotel rooms they are living in with their families, experience outdoor play opportunities and other early years activities that other children their age would usually benefit from. Adults have the opportunity to socialise in a less stressful environment and ask questions of professionals who are there to support them.

The sessions also enable practitioners to identify any issues or problems that the adults and children are facing and act swiftly to make appropriate referrals, support them in applications or liaise with other professionals to put support in place.



Learning Unlimited

Shortlisted for Family Learning to Support Health and Wellbeing

Word of mouth

Parents socialise, discuss pressing issues, get support, and learn about the UK while their children play and learn away from the cramped and limiting conditions of their hotel accommodation.

Families are introduced to health and wellbeing professionals, food and clothing banks, as well as ESOL classes. Many adults have made huge progress in expressing themselves in English but the children, however, surpass them in this area. Through the friendships formed, families now support each other. An older 'grandmother' for example, is now always accompanied by another member for medical appointments which she was avoiding because she found them too stressful on her own.

Promotion and communications focused on two hotels where they recruited families. The project had to be extremely creative to get access to the hotels, as the staff were not co-operative at first.

Before the start of the project, the team would wait outside the hotels to meet families, explain the project and give them flyers (with lots of pictures and very simple English) to share with others.

Attendance has built up through word of mouth. Although the families are from different countries, many speak Arabic so can communicate and translate for each other where their levels of English vary.

"Here my children can run and make noise"

As a result of the project, 11 children have successfully started nursery. One started shortly after arriving in the UK following a traumatic journey and struggled to settle, but Learning Unlimited is supporting the family and nursery towards a more gradual transition.

The children's progress thanks to the project has been remarkable and commented on by health visitors, parents, and children's centre staff, as they very quickly learn routine and develop the language of songs and stories.

Parents have also expressed how important it is to have time with their children in a relaxed and safe environment, telling the team: "Here my children can run and make noise. No-one says shut up."