



Winner of the Family Learning
in the Early Years Award



The Family Learning in the Early Years Award recognises organisations that best demonstrated innovative approaches to delivering family learning aimed at families with children between 0-5. This year's winner is [Learning Unlimited](#).

Overview

Learning Unlimited is a not-for-profit social enterprise that specialises in adult and family learning, English for Speakers of Other Languages and integration, literacy, numeracy and teacher education. They believe in learning as empowerment and engage adults and families in local communities who face a wide range of issues and barriers to social inclusion. They also train the volunteers and professionals who work with and support them. Learning Unlimited lead on local, national and international projects, develop and publish books and resources and do a wide variety of consultancy work.

The project

Between October 2020 and December 2021, Learning Unlimited ran four 10-week courses of outdoor play sessions for parents and young children called "Play Out!". The aim was to provide opportunities for families with under-5s who were stuck indoors due to lockdown and were nervous of venturing out.

The principles of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework were central to the delivery of the sessions, with every child being recognised for their unique personalities. Each activity was designed to respond to children's needs and interests and children were encouraged to learn at their own rate according to their abilities. The courses helped to build positive relationships between children and parents.

The project supported parents to interact with their children and taught them the importance of physical activity and how to support their children's speech and language development, expanding vocabulary during play.

Activities included digging a vegetable garden, exploring the senses through natural objects, physical play and holding a weekly teddy-bears' picnic which was extremely popular with the children.



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The results

42 children and 37 adults were supported across four courses. Parents improved their knowledge and understanding of the EYFS and became more confident in how best to support their children's learning through play.

Children's physical development, wellbeing and sleep patterns noticeably improved, and nine children were referred for additional support for their health and wellbeing. Many of the parents who attended said that the group was a "lifeline" for them, providing somewhere to "do something novel in a wonderful setting", and in a covid-safe way.

On winning the award, Sarah Rees, Family Learning Specialist at Learning Unlimited, said:

"We are surprised and delighted to have won the award! The "Play Out!" project combines my love of the outdoors with family learning, so I loved running it. We entered the awards because we wanted to show others what you can achieve with a little imagination. Running the project during lockdown meant that the impact of getting together outdoors for the families was even greater and made a huge difference to their well-being. It was great to show them that the weather doesn't need to be a barrier to going out and having fun.

The thing I am most proud of is the long-term impact that family learning can have on the lives of the parents involved. A good example of this is the "Play Out!" Teaching Assistant, who is a parent who started off attending a Learning Unlimited family learning course and has gone on to volunteer with us and now to work for us and support other parents. That's what family learning is all about.

Getting out and learning together through play is vital to families living in this kind of situation. We really hope that it will lead to more work of this kind in the future."

Next steps for Learning Unlimited

Going forwards, Learning Unlimited are seeking funding to continue "Play Out!" and will incorporate more outdoor play in other work with families with younger children. The team are also working with Lambeth Children's Services to deliver similar courses for asylum seekers housed in local hotels.