



Early Years Team, West Berkshire Council

Shortlisted for Family Learning in the Early Years

West Berkshire Council Early Years team is a local authority team with a range of opportunities to help Early Years Providers to meet existing and future challenges. These include providing access to best practice, advice and guidance from a range of sources including other settings, other Local Authorities and external providers.

Helping families get started

West Berkshire council offers three different courses to support parents with children's early literacy and math skills, depending on their confidence and knowledge levels. The Reading Together course is for vulnerable or illiterate parents to encourage them to read with their children. The Flying Start course, which is split into two, is for families whose children will start school in the next academic year. The Targeted course is run in small groups and covers early literacy and maths. The Essentials course is online and open to any parent in West Berkshire.

The courses help parents understand that every child is unique, and children learn at different rates. Parents are shown how the three characteristics of effective learning play an essential role in their child's success by modeling activities. Talk is emphasised, and adults are encouraged to let children take the lead in play and discussions. The courses encouraged curiosity and showed parents how to create activities that engage their children's senses, initiate ideas, explore their world, and seek challenges. The activities focus on natural/everyday ideas and complement the 50 Things app for parents in West Berkshire, and all are free or low cost.

Creating a learning culture

The courses are offered through face-to-face sessions in convenient locations, such as nurseries, pre-schools, and family hubs, as well as virtually on Zoom in the evenings. Working with partners, the team are able to identify and support families that need their support the most.

As a result, parents have felt less isolated as they share their experiences through group sessions. The team provides short regular courses with familiar experts; enabling parents to build trusting relationships so they feel confident to share successful outcomes or ask questions.

Taking a playful approach has meant that parents have felt more confident and empowered in nurturing their child's learning and development at home through everyday activities.



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Responding to parental needs

To support parents into the space staff meet them before the learning starts so they can understand and support their families on an individual basis. For parents who have English as an additional language the team ensure a member of staff is available that can speak their first language. Vulnerable families are provided with resource packs and goody bags to support learning at home. Zoom courses highlighted an increase in male carers and the team have continued to provide online evening courses to support whole-family participation.

Parents have responded by letting the team at Berkshire know they feel more empowered, and are better able to support their child with a range of activities from sharing books to learning maths to language development.

The team adapt the course each week in response to parental feedback. Recent sessions have included the presence of a cost of living advisor and local housing teams to discuss how they can help families and answer their questions.