



The Experiential Library

The future of family
learning

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Contents

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Common Vision (CoVi) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank launched in 2014. We look at issues which require long-term, intergenerational solutions and which reach beyond conventional partisan debates or sector-driven interests. We use creative and crowdsourced methods to promote civic engagement and policy understanding beyond a politically active minority, and help build a vision of society based on the common good.

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The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) leads and manages public libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is made up of the head of service of every authority and takes a leading role in the development of public libraries through sharing best practice, advocating for continuous improvement on behalf of local people and leading the debate on the future of the public library service.

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Foreword

Space affects how we think, grow and create. It can nurture and nourish us, or stifle us. Libraries have always understood the importance of physical space and tried to create environments where people of all ages are inspired to read, learn and reflect.

Libraries are open, well-lit, comfortable and, above all, staffed by people who care about knowledge. This report highlights how public libraries nurture not only individual learning but also learning and growth as a family. Why is this important? Because studies show that parents and carers have the most direct

impact on children's education. If parents approach new concepts with excitement, children are more likely to grow up with a thirst for knowledge.

Family learning can take many forms. We regularly see families working on homework together after school—often multiple generations. Grandparents and grandchildren visit the library to take part in music sessions, playing instruments side by side. Carers and parents join children in coding and innovation labs. Creative writing, mosaics, dance, recording—these are just a few examples of family activities that libraries encourage and facilitate.

Learning underpins all of the Universal Offers which the Society of Chief Librarians has identified as services which are essential to a 21st century library service: Reading, Digital, Information, Health and Culture. This report will help shape our thinking on how more family learning opportunities can be created in libraries, and new ways that libraries can foster learning and skills development.

Neil MacInnes
President, Society of Chief Librarians





Executive summary

In a time of limited state resources, creative thinking about the “enabling” activities that institutions can provide - using the resources, assets and relationships that are already available – to support local people is vitally important to future social prosperity and community wellbeing. Family learning is one such opportunity.

As a term, “family learning” broadly describes activities where different generations of a family are present, and where both adults and children benefit from learning. In practice, “family learning” is not used as a phrase to promote or market activities. Rather, it is an approach applied to lots of different workshops, classes and community events delivered by a variety of





local agents including libraries, schools, museums and arts and cultural organisations, digital and maker spaces and sports and leisure facilities, as well as formal learning and skills providers such as community colleges.

Our working definition of family learning for this project was “**activities outside of a formal education setting, undertaken by members of two or more generations who have a family, guardianship or caring relationship.**” It is important to note that this is not solely about adults teaching children, or adults being present when children learn. Family learning describes when adults and children learn new things or develop softer skills and behaviours alongside each other.

Whilst family learning is sometimes seen as synonymous with early years activities, this definition does not do justice to an approach which can be applied much more broadly. We draw on examples of family learning approaches applied to other age groups and life stages, including families with children at primary and secondary school ages, and indeed teenagers and young adults.

Family learning enjoyed a period of policy focus and government funding a decade ago. The main purpose of this scoping study is to examine how activities are currently delivered in public libraries and other community spaces, and whether the social outcomes of these activities mean they continue to be important in local


places. We think this is the case – not least because institutions and public spaces cannot survive by solely being repositories of information or goods in local places – to remain relevant to citizens and communities they must host valuable experiences and cultivate relationships with the community. This is what we mean by the “experiential library”.

Libraries have long done certain types of family learning – even if they don’t label activities as such. There are clear opportunities, particularly as public libraries continue to reflect on their purpose and offer to local communities, to shape and frame many more activities so that they contribute to family learning outcomes.

This piece of work used case studies from libraries, developed from qualitative depth interviews with librarians, as well as a review of literature and impact studies relating to a variety of family learning activities from different sectors. This helped develop a typology of family learning described in **chapter two**. Rather than specific activities which were labelled “family learning”, we set out to find whether there are distinctive characteristics to a family learning *approach* to delivering activities and services, and what family learning *outcomes* look like.

As discussed in **chapter three**, many of the definitions we have examined make explicit that family learning should be assessed in terms of the learning outcomes for both adults and children when they learn together. We have viewed learning





outcomes through three lenses – the knowledge and skills that are *taught* through the learning activities (from literacy and numeracy to skills such as cooking or arts), the behaviours and changes in attitudes that result from the *learning interactions* (such as parenting or other interpersonal skills), and the additional benefits by virtue of learning in a *community setting* (such as increased engagement with the host organisation).

In **chapter four** we discuss how family learning dovetails with recent policy discussions about local libraries. Family learning is not only a key element of the unique ‘cradle-to-grave’ service for lifelong learning that is recognised as core to public libraries, it is an approach which can underpin other aims and outcomes. These include those set out by the 2016 *Ambition* strategy and the four key areas of service known as the Universal Offers, defined by the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) together with Arts Council England (ACE) and The Reading Agency. We identify how a better understanding and measurement of family learning could help strengthen the “Learning” Offer in libraries, but as an approach this is equally relevant to each of the other Universal Offers.

In **chapter five** we consider the opportunities to extend impact: by tailoring activities for audiences and family members who do not usually engage in conventional family learning; by applying a family learning approach in conjunction with cultural, arts, digital or health initiatives (amongst others); and by using

technology to add value to, and improve the experience of face-to-face learning.

We emphasise that while some activities require dedicated space or professional facilitation, there are many outcomes that can be achieved by “lighter touch” methods. Planned family learning need not seek to replace what families already do together – but provide tools to enhance what already happens. Activities can be run by community partners, volunteers, or indeed can be self-facilitating, such as through treasure trails or other “gamification” approaches.

Finally, in **chapter six**, we describe a six step approach to thinking about family learning, intended as a provocation for local organisations and groups who would like to develop and embed family learning into existing and new activities.





1. Introduction

Wellbeing and strong community relationships in local places is a topic of keen interest for policy makers and civil society alike. It is often the small scale or informal activities that lay the foundations for healthy, resilient communities.

Why is family learning important in this context? There are a number of reasons why it is useful to examine the activities that help make places safe, fun and conducive to improved relationships within families, and amongst the communities in which families live. Not least because of a number of trends and developments regarding the shape and dynamics of the family unit.

changing community life

The make-up of communities is changing on a local level. With the decline of the traditional town centre and new forms of technology facilitating social

interaction, the ways in which we form and strengthen relationships, and experience our local places and neighbourhoods are very different to two decades ago.

This has key implications for the role of local institutions. In the age of the internet, adding value and purpose to physical spaces and structures is both a challenge and an opportunity. Just as high street shops must look beyond being “places to buy things”, libraries are no longer repositories for books, museums for artefacts, or town halls for public records.

Public libraries – which have provided many of the case studies and insights for this work – have had to respond to challenges in terms of budget cuts and service closures, and continue to reflect, adapt and redefine their role in local communities.

the relationship between the state and society

There is widespread recognition of the impact of the family on social and economic outcomes. The family is a structure where the things that are learned range from social behaviours to soft and hard skills, which are passed down to further generations.

The importance of family circumstances on early years child development (the period from birth to school age) remains a key focus area in children and education policy, having risen in prominence since the 1990s.



Beyond early years policy however, the family is also an institution that is often assumed to be “out of bounds” for direct state intervention. In what may often be described as the more individualistic society that we live in today, but certainly one in which state resources are more stretched, an “enabling” approach has been described as one where instead of traditional “top down” approaches to social needs, national and local government plays a more facilitative role, providing opportunities for people to take control over their wellbeing.¹

changing family roles and structures

The family itself is changing. The generation now becoming parents, otherwise known as the “millennial” generation (those born from around 1982-2000), experience key differences in family structure and experience to the generation of parents before them. Young children are more likely than ever to have both parents in full time work, and there are some key differences in the divisions of caring responsibilities between mothers and fathers, and other family members too. Grandparents are also living longer and healthier and often take on caring responsibilities for grandchildren whilst the parents are in work. This generation of new parents are also digital natives, arguably often more attuned to the online world and the connections this provides than the physical structures and services in the local neighbourhood.





All these factors contribute to our vision of the **experiential community**. If local places are to thrive as they did three decades ago, then local institutions and government have a role to facilitate opportunities to bring people together. In doing so they can achieve wider social goals such as encouraging cultural mixing or combatting issues such as loneliness and isolation.

However it is perhaps easy to think of these roles in overly simplistic, or “fluffy” terms. Creating positive experiences which strengthen relationships and wellbeing can be intentionally planned and programmed in different ways.

We have looked at family learning as an effective example of where local institutions can increase their impact by facilitating experiences for people to come together and improve wellbeing at important life stages.

what is family learning?


Family learning is a term that has come to broadly refer to activities where different generations of a family (such as parent and child) are present. NIACE (now the Learning and Work Institute) describes family learning as an “intergenerational teaching and learning approach” rather than a particular curriculum area.² In chapter two we interrogate these definitions and produce a typology of different family learning approaches.

Family learning is sometimes described as a subset of lifelong learning, that is, “purposeful” learning activity that improves the knowledge and skills of people on an ongoing basis, at any life stage. While the family is a structure in which learning happens for a lifetime, framing it in this way this is perhaps misleading in two ways. Often lifelong learning focuses on the educational and skills journey and achievements of the individual, more likely than not in a formal setting, rather than locating the individual in the networks and relationships in which most people live their lives and assessing the impact on both the individual and their family members and wider communities.

Our working definition for this project, was **“activities outside of a formal education setting, undertaken by members of two or more generations who have a family, guardianship or caring relationship.”** Rather than specific activities which were labelled “family learning”, we set out to find whether there are distinctive characteristics to a family learning *approach* to delivering activities and services, and what family learning *outcomes* look like.

As a concept, family learning was used as a term from the 1990s onwards.³ It enjoyed a period of increased focus by government and policy makers in the 2000s. This attention culminated in the Family Learning Impact Programme, a joint venture delivered by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now DfE), the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (now BEIS), the Learning and Skills





Council (now the Skills Funding Agency), the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (now the Learning and Work Institute). Involving 136 providers, the programme ran from 2008-2011, and aimed to strengthen the effectiveness of family learning programmes by increasing opportunities and access to schemes, and improving progression, particularly for disadvantaged families.

family learning in libraries and other local spaces

Family learning encompasses a range of activities which are complementary with the aims of local, place-based “anchor” institutions such as libraries and schools. The sorts of agents who deliver family learning activities include:

- Libraries
- Schools
- Museums, and other arts and cultural organisations
- Formal learning and skills providers such as community colleges
- Digital and maker spaces
- Sports and leisure facilities and groups
- Faith institutions

We have examined family learning activities using libraries as our primary source of case studies. Libraries have long done certain types of family learning. Even if they

don’t specifically refer to activities as “family learning” (sometimes deliberately so), many libraries demonstrate effective family learning approaches and there are opportunities, particularly as libraries continue to consider their purpose and offer to local communities, to shape and frame many more activities so that they contribute to family learning outcomes.

methodology

This is a scoping study which reviews the definitions of and approaches to family learning, and provides an analysis of its current application in local communities today, making recommendations for ways to increase the impact of family learning in the future. When commencing the work we set out the following questions:

- How is family learning defined by different stakeholders at a policy and delivery level?
- How are family learning approaches applied to specific opportunities and challenges in local communities?
- What types of planned family learning activities exist, within libraries and other local hubs?
- What best practice exists amongst community anchors and local groups who deliver family learning?
- Specific to libraries, are there opportunities to develop family learning provision in conjunction with wider strategic development?



Our research methodology comprised four stages.

The **background literature and policy review** drew on existing research into family learning, including a review of government policy and evaluation of schemes such as the Family Learning Impact Fund Programme (2008-2011) a joint venture between government departments and skills agencies. We also looked at a range of recent literature on the purpose, direction and perceptions of the role of libraries in local communities, to define where family learning overlaps with the direction of travel on that basis. A full bibliography can be found in the Annex.

We then conducted **a survey of library authorities and librarians** about their views and experiences of family learning. This survey was shared via the Society for Chief Librarians, CILIP, ASCEL and the Libraries Taskforce and through social media channels. The survey received thirty responses from librarians. Survey questions are available in the Annex. We also **engaged with other stakeholders from outside the library sector** on their views of family learning and what role libraries play in this.

From these responses, five library authorities were selected across the variables of **geographic diversity**, including covering five different NUTS 1 statistical regions of England; diverse **socioeconomic make-up**, including covering regions with significantly different average wages and numbers of 16-and-17 year olds not in

education, employment and training; and covering authorities who self-reported undertaking **lots or some family learning activities**. These were: Lambeth, Kirklees, Coventry, Norfolk and Bournemouth.

We conducted **semi-structured interviews** by telephone with librarians at each of the five local authorities. These interviews covered the themes of development of activities, their delivery, partnerships, marketing, evaluation and lessons learned.

Important caveats to this research methodology are that the findings cannot be taken to be representative of all libraries and library authorities in England, but rather a demonstrative sample of some of the activities that are being undertaken. It is also worth noting that there is a limited amount of evidence about family learning in general, particularly by way of detailed longitudinal studies or analysis of impact beyond individual child or adult attainment. When it comes to family learning in libraries in particular, the existing literature is very limited. It is hoped that this report will contribute towards the development of this important and interesting field of work.

The scope of the case studies in this project was limited to England. However, the background and policy review draws on work from around the world. Likewise, many of the findings will be relevant for the other nations of the United Kingdom and indeed internationally.





summary of case studies

Kirklees aim to integrate a family element to all their activities, and programme family learning around national dates and key messages. Activities often evolve from partnerships with schools or family groups, specific interest groups such as code clubs or maker spaces, or community initiatives such as Kirklees Dementia Action Alliance. Some sessions are run by professionals, others are programmed and delivered by volunteers or staff.

+ Kirklees

A primary focus of family learning activities is to ensure early years and pre-school aged children develop key skills. This is done in a range of ways, from using tablets for toddler learning to storytelling sessions focused on promoting social cohesion and cultural diversity. Librarians plan the activity and the outcomes, and use an evaluation process.

+ Norfolk

Coventry makes use of the library's space to bring people together for open events and activities. Family learning is a key part of this and a way to signpost families to local groups, societies and activities.

+ Coventry

The goal of family learning activities is to encourage children into a lifelong library habit, and engaging the parents to make this happen. All children's activities will welcome parents and provide tips for how adults can recreate the activities at home. Early years activities are successfully co-ordinated by a dedicated staff member, and other partners such as health visitors, physiotherapists and local cultural organisations also contribute to the design and development of specific activities.

+ Lambeth

Lambeth libraries developed their family learning offer largely through their early years team, as many activities for young children intended to model parenting skills and behaviours. They have since expanded to including other activities such as coding, and tailored approaches to address cultural and social integration. Most activities in Lambeth libraries tend to be informally programmed.

+ Bournemouth





2. Defining family learning

There have been several definitions set by academics, government departments and non-governmental organisations since the appearance of family learning on the policy agenda towards the end of the last century. Most definitions of family learning include a nod to the intergenerational nature and require that participants of all ages achieve learning outcomes of some description. The differences tend to come down to how tight the definition is both in terms of process and the learning outcomes.

In terms of process, some government definitions such as that of Ofsted have required that by definition the activities must be planned, while others have been much broader, to the extent of including any learning that takes place within any important kinship or friendship relationship.

In terms of outcomes, some analysts have reviewed family learning when the skills that are learned relate to parenting or have implications for familial relations, whereas others encompass a range of learning outcomes as long as they stem from a situation where the family was together.



How family learning has been defined...

Titus Alexander and Peter Clyne in their 1995 piece *Riches beyond price* identify five different aspects of family learning: informal learning within the family; family members learning together; learning about family roles, relationships and responsibilities (including parenting education); learning how to understand, take responsibility and make decisions in relation to wider society, in which the family is a foundation for citizenship; and learning how to deal with agencies that serve families.⁵

1995

1997

Titus Alexander in 1997 report for Demos defined family learning more succinctly as “the vast amount of learning that takes place in and around families, from personal development, language acquisition and hobbies to the process of becoming a teenager, parent, stepparent or grandparent, or taking other family responsibilities.”⁶

Buffton (1999) defined family learning is that which “supports efforts to raise children’s achievement levels, raises expectations and aspirations of both children and adults, promotes active citizenship and, as the family group is the microcosm of the community, is community capacity building at its best.” Buffton suggests that family learning should incorporate tackling individual learning needs, parental learning about issues pertinent to the family, two or more family members learning about the same topic independently, two or more family members learning together, and, two or more family members learning together with progression routes.⁷

1999

2000

The **Campaign for Learning**’s 2000 manifesto takes this definition and adds to it slightly, saying that family learning might involve any combination of: informal and formal learning within the family; family members learning together; learning about the roles, relationships and responsibilities in relation to the stages of family life, including parenting education; learning how to understand, take responsibility and make decisions in relation to wider society, in which the family is a foundation for citizenship; and learning how to deal with agencies that serve families.⁸

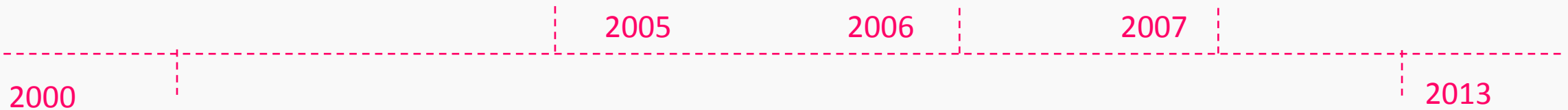


...in literature and research studies

In their study (2005) of the experience of young parents in family learning, **Linda Smith, Jeanne Haggart and Yanina Dutton** defined family learning as “of learning where young parents learned jointly with their children through everyday activities, as well as through planned and purposeful programmes.”¹¹

Rachel Spacey (2006) describes family learning as “differentiated by the fact that it allows adults and children to learn together and involves explicit learning outcomes for both”.¹²

In 2007, **Briony Train** defined family learning as “parents and other adults having the opportunity to develop their own learning alongside that of young people, as a family”.¹³



Ofsted (2000) uses the definition “learning which brings together different family members to work on a common theme for some, if not for the whole, of a planned programme.”⁹

Jeanne Haggart (2000) describes family learning as: “what people outside the family do to enable and facilitate the learning that goes on within families.”¹⁰

In 2012 and 2013, **NIACE** (now the Learning and Work Institute) undertook an inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales. In the resulting report, “Family Learning Works”, family learning is described as “any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family”. The report also notes that family includes any intergenerational relationship based on parental responsibility or kinship, including foster parents, carers and grandparents.¹⁴



+ In practice, the phrase “family learning” has become shorthand for certain types of planned activities or programmes, that are designed by those outside the family in order to encourage family learning within it.

When we commenced this project, our initial working definition was “activities outside of a formal education setting, undertaken by members of two or more generations who have a family, guardianship or caring relationship.”

This definition was useful because of its broad, encompassing nature which allowed interviewees and participants to identify existing activities which they perhaps had not considered to be family learning. However it is also important to differentiate family learning in terms of how activities are planned and delivered.

family learning delivery models

Historically, the most common planned family learning activities have had basic skills such as literacy and numeracy and these are still the most often encountered in formal literature.¹⁵ There are also a significant number of activities focused on a wider curriculum including digital skills, arts and crafts, cookery, music and dance. These are typically distinguished as Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) and Wider Family Learning (WFL) respectively.¹⁶

Topic	Structure	Audience
Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN)		
Improving the basic skills of literacy, language and numeracy.	Usually a planned programme of multiple weeks.	Families where both adults and children have low levels of skills attainment.
Wider Family Learning (WFL)		
Learning about topics other than language, literacy or numeracy. (e.g. languages, sciences, history, geography, or learning about different cultures and faiths) and “wider skills”: such as sports, arts and crafts, digital making and coding, music, gardening, and cooking.	Either a planned or regular activity, or standalone activities/ community events or festivals which encourage family members to learn or try something new.	All families and wider kinship and friendship relationships beyond direct caregiving.



Many *Wider Family Learning* activities may not be exclusively structured as family learning activities. Furthermore, some learning objectives may be embedded in other activities. Providers of the 2008-2011 Family Learning Impact Programme noted literacy, language and numeracy objectives in other practical activities, such as finance, health, sport, science and technology, ICT and creative crafts. Projects and courses such as 'New Techno Families', 'Rowdy Robots' and 'Money, Money, Money' were proven to engage families more successfully than standard literacy and numeracy courses.¹⁷ NIACE acknowledged in its 2013 report that learning in the family can take place almost anywhere including informal gatherings, watching television, parent and toddler groups and even through children supporting their parents with new technology. Yet there is something more specific about "family learning programmes" which draw on adult literacy, community development, school improvement and parental engagement traditions.¹⁸ *A Manifesto for Family Learning*¹⁹ separates the support for family learning into three categories: "Formal initiatives" such as Family Literacy and Parenting Education programmes; "Broader Initiatives" such as Books for Babies and Sure Start; and "informal family learning opportunities" such as through television, the Internet and the media, at museums, libraries, sports and leisure facilities. Whilst it is useful to attempt to categorise different approaches to planned family learning activities, this specific typology is not particularly helpful for our purposes. By putting libraries, museums and other community activities in the same category as television and the internet, this doesn't allow for "broader initiatives" or even "formal initiatives" that are carried out in by these local anchors.

Another distinction that practitioners seem to make is between family learning for **early years children (aged 0-3) and their parents**, and learning within **families with older children and teenagers**. Particularly prevalent in the literature on early years family learning is the idea that learning outcomes stem from *what the children learn* and *what the parents learn about supporting their children to learn*.

There is a wealth of evidence on how parental involvement during the early years affects the cognitive development and other capacities of the child, impacts on their happiness and wellbeing, and has implications for development and socio-economic achievement in later life. Anand and Roope (2016) list a number of examples of active parenting activities and their impacts. Reading, telling stories, and singing songs have a positive impact on talking capabilities. Singing (with hand actions), painting, and arts and crafts have a positive impact on the development of movement skills.²⁰ For this reason, many activities defined or recognised as family learning have a focus on young children either in early years or in primary school. However, given that families are lifelong relationships, family learning methods which apply to older children and other life stages are just as important.

It is therefore perhaps unhelpful to categorise learning activities by content. Instead, using the interviews, secondary case studies and wider literature we have identified a spectrum into which different definitions of "family learning" fall according to the balance of tailored support and learning objectives for participants of different ages.



typology of family learning

Type	Description	Examples	Objectives
Adult learning which impacts on family wellbeing	Formal educational or skills activities for adults, not suitable for children, such as financial capability, IT, or specific parenting skills such as antenatal classes	Classes run by/ in schools, colleges, community facilities	The learning outcomes for the parent lead to wider family wellbeing and resilience
“Family friendly” adult learning	Skills development for parents, with provisions for their children in a crèche facility	Classes run by/ in Schools, colleges, community facilities	The parent gains independent benefit and is supported with parental duties while doing so. Leads to wider family wellbeing and resilience
“Family friendly” learning spaces	Family groups use the same space or resources to do separate activities, without involvement from facilitators/ programmers	An open facility such as libraries, museums, sporting and leisure facilities	Adults and children have different learning outcomes, but may have improved relationships and communication with each other as a result
Families learning together: “children welcome”	Community activities which are aimed at adults or children, but which others could also partake	Arts and craft classes with no minimum age limit, or where adults are welcome to bring their children or grandchildren	Specific learning objectives for the adult, and non-planned learning outcomes for younger family members
Families learning together: “parents welcome”	Community activities which are aimed at children, but which encourage adults to be present in the learning experience of the child	A class designed to improve literacy, language and numeracy amongst children, with parents in attendance to their can oversee and assist child’s learning	Specific learning objectives for children; may be new knowledge, skills or behaviours for parents; may encourage intra-generational learning ie. children to learn from one another and parents to learn from one another
Families learning together and from each other	Community activities targeted at, and with apportioned learning outcomes for, both adults and children	Workshops facilitating direct and targeted skills improvement across generations	Encourage family members to interact with and learn from each other, both at the activity and beyond at home



The impact of family learning

Many of the definitions we have examined make explicit that family learning should be assessed on an interactive, inter-encouraging basis rather than simply individuals learning separately but in the same place.²¹

In other words, if a child and an adult attend a class about cookery together, they should be helping and encouraging each other to learn rather than independently gaining skills.

However, in practice this element is often lost, possibly because it is harder to both plan for and evaluate. Thus measures of the outcomes of family learning tend to focus on the individual improvements in children's or parent's attainment, and possibly non-cognitive traits.

The 2009 Ofsted report on family learning found that in "almost all" of the providers surveyed, adults were improving skills, behaviours and parenting attitudes or were achieving success in gaining qualifications. Wider benefits for adults included increased involvement in school life, gaining employment, and an increased social network. For children, improved behaviours included participating better in the classroom, improved relationships with peers and teachers, and improved communication, interpersonal skills and self-confidence.²²

Many family learning interventions, even if nominally targeted at children, aim to change the behaviours of the adults present, by modelling parenting behaviours such as how to communicate with children, or encouraging increased engagement with the delivery organisation, such as taking more of an active interest in the children's homework, or visiting the library more.

We have viewed learning outcomes through three lenses – the knowledge and skills that are taught through the learning process, the behaviours and changes in attitudes that result from the learning interactions, and the additional benefits to the learning outcomes that are delivered by virtue of being held in a community setting.

outcomes framework: for children and adults

knowledge transfer

- Improving basic literacy, language and numeracy
- Improving other subject knowledge including languages, sciences, history, geography, or learning about different cultures and faiths
 - Language development/ English language
- Social and life skills such as sports, arts and crafts, digital making and coding, music, gardening, and cooking



for children

soft skills development

- Improved communication, interpersonal skills and creativity.
 - Children learn soft skills from their parents/ older relatives
- Improved learning confidence outside of a formal education setting
 - Improved early years/ childhood development
 - Improved self-confidence and wellbeing
- Relate better to teachers/ other authority figures

situational outcomes

- Increased parental involvement in children's school lives supports attainment
 - Progression to other learning, training or community based activities

- Improving the basic skills of literacy, language and numeracy.
- Improving other subject knowledge including languages, sciences, history, geography, or learning about different cultures and faiths
 - English language
- Social and life skills such as sports, arts and crafts, digital making and coding, music, gardening, and cooking



for adults

- Develop communication and self-confidence.
 - Improved employability skills
- Relate better to teachers/ other professionals who might be perceived as authority figures
- Sharing experiences and discussion around specific issues e.g. foster carers, parents of children with autism

- Reduced loneliness and isolation amongst parents, carers and grandparents
 - Progression to other learning or community based activities

outcomes framework: for the whole family and the wider community

knowledge transfer

- Learn parenting techniques and knowledge of child's early years' development and health
- Families learn activities which can be replicated elsewhere including at home together



for family life

soft skills development

- Adults improve parenting techniques and observe "modelled behaviour" from other parents
- Adults provide bespoke support to help children learn and support their development and confidence

situational outcomes

- More active relationship between family members in the home environment
 - Progression as a family to other learning or community based activities
- Progression within family i.e. Parent may do same activity with a younger sibling

- Learning opportunities for people of all ages
- New and increased delivery partnerships between community groups, facilities and local anchors
- Increased visibility of other community activities amongst user groups
 - People get to know each other and build relationships



for the wider community

- More people involved in learning, training or community based activities
- Volunteering opportunities for family learning activities

- More active relationship between family members outside the home
 - Improved intergenerational mixing
 - Community integration and cohesion
- Reduced isolation of different ethnic groups/ migrants and refugees



In terms of the third, “situational”, lens, a key measure of success that came through in both the interviews and the secondary case studies we looked at is where family learning activities lead to the adult or child’s progression to another activity or service. Some “follow on” activities are signposted, such as an adult learning course on child development that displays a poster outside the weekly meeting place for the parent and toddler “stay and play” session. A new activity may be especially attractive if delivered in a known and trusted environment.

Beyond the individual impact on children and adults, and the impact on family life, we also considered the benefits to the wider community of these types of activities. It is clear there are many aspects of family learning which encourage people to get to know each other, share common experiences, build relationships, and develop greater community ownership of local facilities and services.



Family learning in local libraries

“I think that libraries have probably been doing family learning for a really long time but not calling it and perhaps not recognising it as family learning.”

– Abibat Olulode, Development Librarian, Lambeth Council

Libraries have long done certain types of family learning. They often do not refer to activities as “family learning”, either deliberately because the phrase does not appeal to the intended audience, or because the shared impact on both adults and children is a “by-product” rather than a planned outcome.





The NIACE description (2011) of family learning as an “intergenerational teaching and learning approach” rather than a curriculum area²³ is one which is echoed in the findings of our research. When the library practitioners we spoke to considered what made the activities they put on family learning activities, it wasn’t necessarily easy to define exactly what a family learning activity was and wasn’t. Instead, family learning was described in terms of the *approach* to given activities, or even to the running of a service as a whole.

As libraries continue to consider their role in, and offer to, local communities, there is the potential to more purposefully shape and frame many more activities so that they contribute to family learning outcomes.

In his speech launching the Society of Chief Librarians’ Universal Learning offer in November 2015, Ed Vaizey MP (then Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries) said “Libraries can make an important contribution to bridging the skills gap particularly in a growing and changing economy. Their historic role as centres for lifelong learning - alongside the fact that they are seen as safe, trusted, free and open spaces for everyone to use across the country - offers a huge opportunity to provide new skills and learning to people who may not access other education and training and to contribute significantly to us become a learning nation.”

As we have discussed above, family learning is not only one element of the unique ‘cradle-to-grave’ service for lifelong learning which local libraries provide²⁴, it is an approach which can underpin other library aims and outcomes.


The Libraries Taskforce, comprised of representatives from local authorities, Arts Council England, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, BBC, Public Health England, British Library, CILIP, SCL and the Reading Agency amongst others, was set up in 2015 to produce a national strategy for public libraries in England. Published in December 2016, the taskforce's final report on the *Ambition* strategy sets out a vision for libraries as a ‘national network that delivers transformation and progress for people, communities and nation’. The *Ambition* report describes the seven outcomes which libraries support as reading and literacy, digital inclusion, cultural and creative enrichment, helping everyone achieve their full potential, healthier and happier lives, greater prosperity, and stronger, more resilient communities. We found examples of family learning initiatives contributing to all these outcomes.





Increased reading and literacy

In **Bournemouth**, the goal of family activities are to get the children into a lifelong library habit. Involving the parents in forming these habits have clear benefits. Flouri and Buchanan found that parental involvement in their child's literacy practices is more important than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education. Furthermore, the earlier parents become involved in children's literacy practices, the greater and the longer lasting the effects.²⁵ Parents are key in determining whether or not their children will be library users.²⁶



improved digital skills and access

Norfolk ran a Family Digital Literacy course for children aged 3-4 years and accompanying adults, using learning resources available on the CBeebies website. The aim of the course was to support parents and carers to encourage early digital literacy and use apps and screens as a learning tool rather than solely for entertainment purposes. Each adult brought their own iPad or Android or borrowed one from the library to use with the child, and were signposted to digital resources on early learning parenting, and child development, and given advice about how to use digital sources safely.

healthier and happier lives

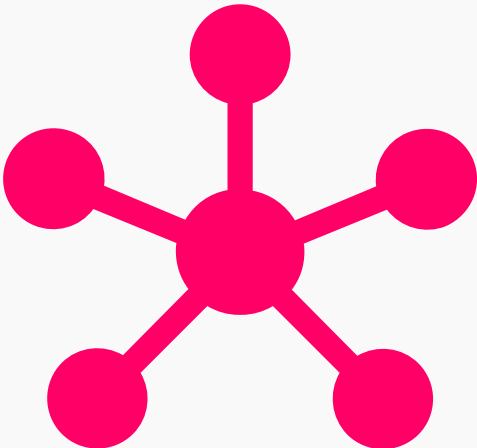
Bournemouth wanted to address the issue that children are not as physical as they used to be – they are often taken from the buggy or car seat straight into the house then sit down. In response, the library worked with physiotherapists to create Storycise sessions, where parents and children do movements and actions to a story. Health Visitors help advertise the sessions.



Cultural and creative enrichment

The libraries service in **Kirklees** worked with local artist Fabric Lenny to run drawing workshops for families as part of the Big Draw programme. Across seven workshops held at different library and community centre locations, over 50 adults and children learned new drawing techniques together.

In **Lambeth**, the library made a connection with a local Polish community group to address isolation and improve access to council services. They set up a Polish-speaking Storytime in one of the libraries in an area of the borough with a high Polish population. This led to them extending and improving other offers and activities targeted at the Polish community. As well as extra shelving and books in Polish within the library, they have held events and activities, including an Eastern European cultural day in one of the libraries which included a craft fair, food tasting, bands and author talks.



stronger, more resilient communities

Norfolk held a session focused on promoting social cohesion and cultural diversity. This involved a puppet show and storymaking workshop for children and their families. This was a one-off session in partnership with New Roots, a local charity that promotes social inclusion and developing capacity. Women told traditional stories in their mother tongue and the children translated them and wrote them down.

The libraries with the most successful family learning programmes make use of partnerships with other local community organisations in order to achieve their goals, from working with an active autism parent group in Norfolk to a collaboration between libraries, local shops and Kirklees Dementia Action Alliance around dementia-friendly activities for families.





helping everyone achieve their full potential

Generally, when family learning is explicit in library service provision, the reference is to early years learning activities for parents with children under five years. Across a number of activities, a key objective for the activities themselves is encouraging parents to interact with their children. Through “Rhyme time” activities for example, the library staff are modelling to parents how to engage with their children and different ways of engaging.

We have discussed the benefits of early years interventions in chapter two. This is supported by learning from libraries. An evaluation one of the libraries in **Norfolk**’s Bounce and Rhyme sessions found that 90% of parents indicated that their child’s communications skills – babbling, talking and singing and expressing themselves, paying attention – are supported by these sessions.

greater prosperity

Whilst all families can benefit from planned family learning activities, Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) activities in particular tend to be targeted at families who live on low incomes and where adults have poor academic attainment.²⁷ Often the adults in these families have negative experiences and perceptions of learning associated with unhappy memories of formal education, negative attitudes towards particular subjects, or don’t associate learning with leisure but with work.²⁸

For many parents, wanting to help their children can be the motivation to overcome these psychological barriers to learning²⁹ and in doing so they may improve their own education and employability skills. Many of the libraries we surveyed focus their family learning activities on areas of deprivation for this reason and because lower income families are also those who may need more early years support.





Doing something with families is always a good way to get people involved in the service more generally. Clark and Hawkins (2011) found that the most common reason for not using public libraries given by 8 to 16 year olds was that their family did not go to the library. Libraries add a family learning element to their activities so that parents will be motivated to bring their children to the library.³⁰ Sometimes activities will be framed as an activity for children, when there are planned learning outcomes for adults that are more “covert”.

We also know that children can be a driver of increased library usage among adults. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)’s regular Taking Part survey reveals that adults who live with children are significantly more likely to have used public library services at least once a year.³¹ When asked, those adults whose use of libraries had recently increased, were most likely to give “encouraging a child to read” as their answer.³²



Designing family learning for the next generation

“If you say ‘learning’ to people, some people will go ‘oh yeah that’s great, I love learning’. Other people will think ‘Oh god that sounds hard work, I don’t want to do that on my day off.’”

– Sorrelle Clements, Coventry City Council Libraries

There were a number of similarities between the library case studies we examined, providing insights into best practice in libraries in terms of programming and planning activities, developing delivery partnerships, promoting activities, and monitoring and evaluating impact.





To have a broader understanding of innovative approaches to family learning, and how they are organised and publicised, we also reviewed family learning approaches in other learning environments such as museums and schools, and for-profit activities and services. We found a number of models that are as yet seen as niche or under-explored. This may be due to resource constraints, but may equally be due to assumptions of what family learning is and should entail. Here we take a “blue skies” approach, outlining key opportunities to develop and broaden the scope of family learning could consider.

opportunities to target different audiences

Past research has found that men are much less likely to participate in family learning than women.³³ This may well be because outreach to men has sought to integrate fathers and other male family members into existing activities, rather than more effectively tailoring programme design with activities and language that appeal to men.³⁴ The BIS report on the Family Learning Impact Fund found a number of ways to engage male family members including: designing creative, adventurous marketing of courses such as ‘The Great Outdoors’; developing male-only courses such as ‘Man and Boy’, ‘Dads and Kids Photography’; using male teachers; and offering practical learning, for example about football, sport, the outdoors, science and technology.³⁵ A 2009 Ofsted report covered an event series aimed at men called “Rowdy Robots”. Each event typically involved over 50 fathers, grandfathers, uncles and older brothers, with children, in a technology project that

was delivered in the early evening at primary schools. One father commented, “I thought I’d come to a robot-building session, but it’s not building robots, it’s building families”.³⁶

These sorts of descriptions of “male” activities may seem clichéd or stereotyped – but with increasingly shared parenting responsibilities between “millennial” mothers and fathers, there may be a new “market” for dad-friendly family learning activities.

Furthermore, the family changing and increasingly differs from the traditional concept of the “nuclear family” – a mother, father and 2-3 children. Not all families will consist of traditional “mother” and “father” roles. Grandparents are now living longer and healthier and often take on caring responsibilities for grandchildren whilst the parents are in work. When designing family learning activities we should bear in mind that grandparents, guardians, childminders, foster parents, older siblings, uncles, aunts and even neighbours or family friends may be the most relevant adults to which they’re targeted.

The Campaign for Learning’s 2000 “Manifesto for Family Learning”, which was developed in conjunction with NIACE, Scottish Council Federation, Community Education Development Centre and Education Extra, takes a “broad and inclusive” definition of both family and family learning. It includes the “broader caring and friendship networks that people rely on” as well as “the diverse forms of modern kinship relationships”.³⁷





It is also clear from a review of both the existing literature and current practice that it is not only the adult in the family who is subject to assumptions. Certainly within the libraries we surveyed, family learning is often seen as synonymous with activities designed for early years children (aged 0-3). This is perhaps because of the obvious issue that children of this age will often need to be accompanied by a parent or carer – but also because many librarians are confident working with early years families. In a 2015 ASCEL survey the majority of respondents felt that the main interaction libraries should have with children is at pre-school age. Support at this life stage was seen as particularly useful in order to support child development, support parents and the whole family, and create reading habits.³⁸

Therefore early years family learning may be an opportunity for a “core offer” which all libraries could subscribe to.

However, there is clear potential to extend the provision of family learning beyond that scope, to other age groups and life stages, including children at primary and secondary school ages, and indeed teenagers and young adults.

opportunities for intergenerational learning

As discussed in chapter two, many family learning practitioners and researchers alike focus on activities which support early years development and parents of young children. However, there are other activities which have productive learning opportunities for both adults and children in different ways. A creative approach in this regard could look at developing programmes around:

- **The sorts of skills and knowledge which children may have which adults don’t**, for example confidence using some forms of technology, or English language skills which their parents lack (as the with Norfolk and New Roots project described in chapter four);
- **Activities which both adults and children have no prior knowledge of** and so both learn new knowledge at the same time, in subjects such as coding, gardening or informal science;
- **Skills and learning which could be helpful for multiple generations**, such as CV building sessions for young people and their adult relatives.






opportunities for gamification

In the case studies we reviewed we found three broad types of family learning activity:

- Facilitated workshops, led by a practitioner or subject expert;
- Open events encouraging family members to experience new activities together;
- Gamification experiences, such as worksheets or “treasure hunts” which families could undertake either on a specific day or in their own time.

The latter approach is vastly under-utilised, and could be a much more focused (and often lighter-touch) form of family learning. Increasingly popular as a leisure pursuit (for example Pokemon Go-type apps and locked room games) gamification techniques have been applied to town centres and for tourism purposes. For example, an experiential company called Casebook Events designed a “live adventure mystery” aiming to increase footfall within town centres. The trail lead participants to over a dozen secret locations including local businesses, museums and attractions. Staff and locations can contribute to the game by giving clues and simple



 information to players. The game was piloted in Norwich last year and is being rolled out in Leamington Spa, Lincoln, Mansfield, Rugby and Stratford-upon-Avon in 2017. A children's mini game was also provided to be played alongside the mystery.³⁹

Another organisation, Global Treasure apps, has designed location based trails and interactive guided tours around visitor attractions and tourist destinations in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, London, Oxford, and Cambridge.

Gamification generally serves four purposes:



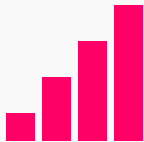
To reward loyalty

Location-based apps can be used to encourage repeat visits by using rewards like badges, points, rankings, and statuses. An example is the Librarygame app, which syncs to the library software so that whenever a user borrows or returns an item the app is updated and generates points and badges.



To encourage peer marketing

By encouraging users to check into spaces and activities via social media, online platforms and apps make use of social networks and peer-to-peer referrals around activities.



To raise awareness of services

This entails "treasure hunt" style introductions to products and services on offer. An example is where trails are used for student orientation session in libraries in the United States.⁴⁰



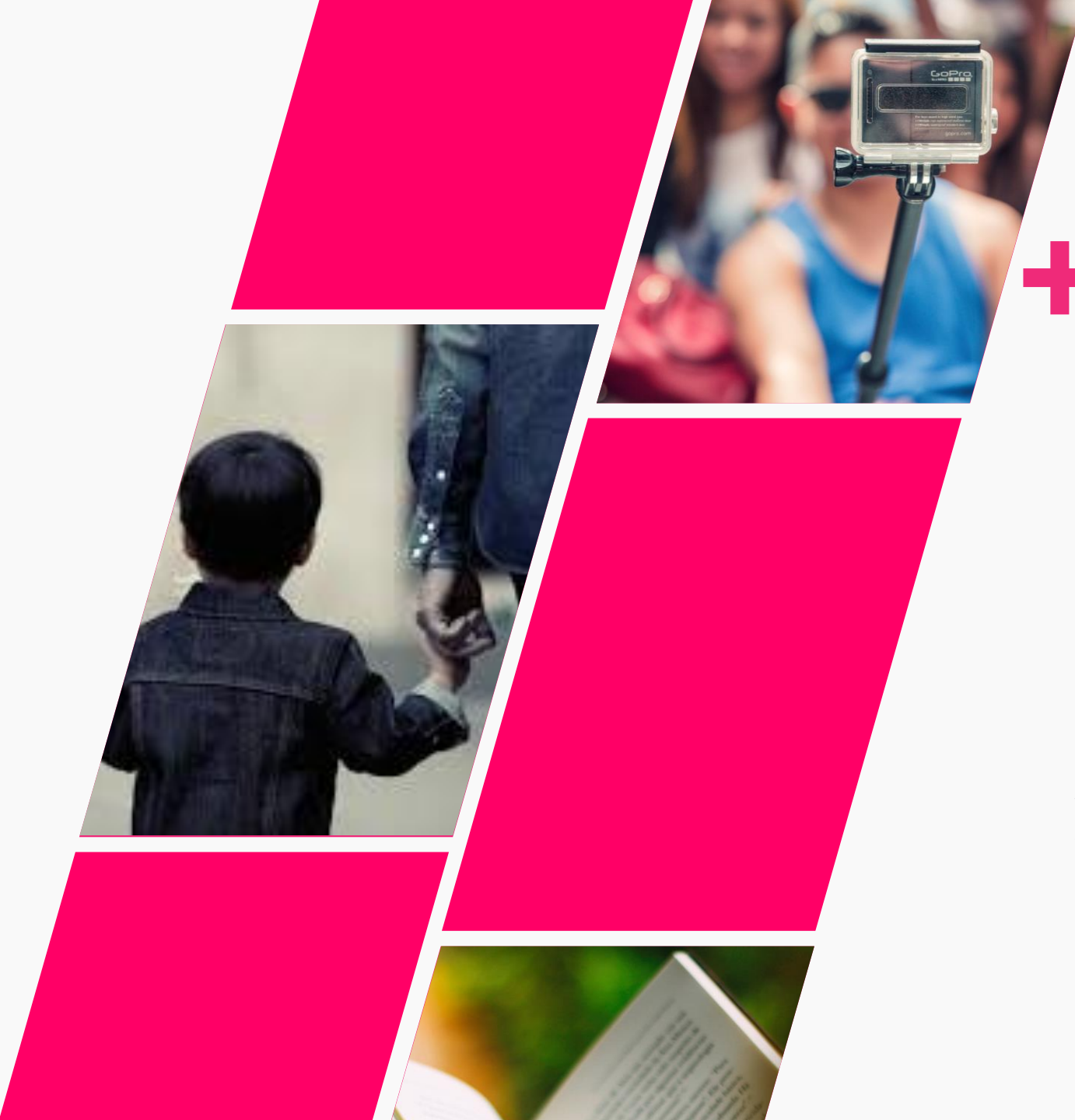
To integrate with a specific learning activity

Finally, specific tasks can be overlaid with game techniques, for example by integrating a point-scoring framework into learning to make activities more fun.

This approach actually been used in libraries for decades – many of us will have fond memories of participating in the summer library reading challenge as children.

Game dynamics can increase library users' engagement with library resources and services, by making the process enjoyable and interactive.⁴¹ These approaches may also help with resource constraints, as in its simplest form, activities can make use of available space and do not need significant facilitation. In other forms there is potential to integrate technology into the physical spaces.





+ Summary and six steps for family learning practitioners

In this report we have highlighted some of the social outcomes which can be achieved by applying a family learning *approach* to the design and delivery of existing and activities. As discussed, this can encompass a range of different workshops, classes and community events – many of which will be seen as social, fun opportunities for families to come together rather than formal educational processes. Whilst that is a benefit for those who deliver and promote family learning, it may also mean that formally monitoring impact and building the evidence base is a challenge.





In this scoping study we have not sought to curate and define a rigorous case for family learning in terms of national and local government policy – rather we hope to have inspired practitioners and people with the capacity to lead family learning initiatives within local institutions and spaces.

In the case of libraries, operating in the age of the internet where books, reference materials and software are all readily available online, fostering learning and skills development in a shared environment is a unique and vital aspect of what libraries do. Other local facilities and services provide learning opportunities, but few have the unique blend of access to knowledge and information, physical spaces to facilitate learning, and community outreach that libraries offer.

As local libraries respond to the *Ambition* strategy, and other frameworks for service delivery, there is a clear opportunity to position themselves at the heart of thinking about learning, not just in the traditional sense, but how it intersects with place making and family wellbeing in the current context. For the Society of Chief Librarians, our partners on this research, we recommend that family learning is seen as an approach which not only underpins their Learning Offer but underpins the other universal offers of Information, Health, Reading, Digital, and Culture.

For library practitioners and other individuals and organisations involved with the design and delivery of community activities, we have developed a six step approach

to thinking about family learning. This is intended to be an initial provocation as opposed to a comprehensive guide or toolkit.

1) identify the need

Impact can be increased by being responsive to local needs and working with partners to identify these. For example in **Bournemouth**, the council had identified a goal of improving communication between parents and young children. Bournemouth libraries now have specific activities to develop these skills, as well as a “tip of the month” such as “get down the child’s level when you’re speaking to them” or “take the child’s dummy out”.

As we have seen from the case studies, family learning approaches are relevant to culture exchange and social integration, digital inclusion, health and wellbeing objectives and employability skills, amongst others. These often intersect. An example profiled in the 2008-2011 Family Impact Fund evaluation was a financial capability course and ‘Cake Stall’ whereby families made and sold cakes. By shopping and budgeting for ingredients, working out costs and selling cakes to teachers, families and friends at school, the learning outcomes cut across numeracy, soft skills and social engagement.





2) adopt a family learning approach to existing activities

Libraries already provide many activities that could be part of a family learning offer. A more conventional learning activity for children or adults can at its most simplest adopt a family learning approach by planning outcomes for other family members, who may already be present during the activities but only engaging passively.

Family learning doesn't have to be *about* the family just because it is experienced *by* the family. Family learning approaches are often integrated with community events and "hooks" already taking place such as Science Week, the Big Draw, or the Summer Reading Challenge for example.

Activities do not need to be labelled as "family learning" as this isn't always the most effective promotional technique! Instead using phrases like "families welcome" or "for all the family" indicate where adults and children can have a shared experience.

In some cases, some family members may not need to be physically present. Lancashire County Council Library Services put on a "Dads and Lads Programme" which was devised to encourage fathers to read with their pre-school sons. The

designers knew from research that men favour active learning and competition so boys were sent home with books and sports equipment to practice with their Dads which ended in a competition based on games and answering questions about the books.⁴²

3) define the outcomes

As described in chapter three, family learning need not be a specific set of activities, but rather an approach that is taken to plan the outcomes of existing or future activities. Although family learning does not have to be used as a promotional term, it presents a way to evaluate impact on adults, children, the family as a unit, and the wider community.

Outcomes may be a blend of the taught knowledge and skills, the behaviours developed through learning activities, the effect on the relationships between adult and child participants, progression to other activities, and the wider impact on the community. We also would encourage practitioners to gather evidence on family learning where possible and within reason, as the evidence base particularly in recent years has been fairly light.





4) tailor activities to the audience

There is still a risk of targeting a narrow audience based on unconscious assumptions about who makes up “the family”. Specific activities may be best refined and tailored to suit the audience.

Although men are vastly less likely to take part in planned family learning activities than women⁴³, successful schemes have engaged male relatives through targeted activities and topics. In its summary paper of the Family Learning Impact Fund 2008-2011, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) found that many providers found ways to engage “hard to reach” families in family learning including teenage parents, traveller families, homeless families, young lone parents, parents in prison, newly arrived families and parents of children with special needs. Approaches included introducing more flexibility in the times and locations of courses; creating partnerships with organisations already working with target groups; including employability skills in adult sessions; and training teachers and other staff to think creatively about new approaches.⁴⁴

Designing activities will undoubtedly depend on the age of the child participants also. ASCEL’s insights into children’s library journeys (pre-natal to birth, pre-school,


primary school entry transition, transition to secondary school) are helpful here. At each stage it would be useful to think about how parent and carer journey can dovetail with this. We would also advocate the addition of a stage where young people are transitioning out of school⁴⁵ and therefore may benefit from similar employability skills development to their parents.

5) take an asset based approach to programme delivery

Programming and planning family learning will inevitably vary and require different resources depending on the nature of the activity, the audience and the partners involved amongst other factors. We would emphasise that while some activities require dedicated space or professional facilitation, there are many outcomes that can be achieved by “lighter touch” methods.

In **Kirklees**, when running activities, there’s a three tier approach. First, a small number of sessions are commissioned to and run by a professional, or by the Librarian Outreach Team. Those sessions tend to be hosted by libraries in deprived areas where the sessions are going to be the most beneficial. Off the back of this, the programme lead will then produce a plan for that activity that anyone else can run. This can be taken on by volunteers, Friends of the Library, or frontline staff if





they have the capacity. A worksheet or trial will be produced – either within the library or even in surrounding spaces such as shop windows - which can be used by families without any involvement from volunteers or staff. This is a way of having something going on in each library in school holidays, even when resources are constrained.

In this sense, it is important to avoid the “deficit model” that characterises some aspects of service provision or work with disadvantaged families.⁴⁶ Rather than focusing on problems and how to eradicate them, an “asset based” model looks at how to enhance or make the most of what already exists. Families already learn together in many different settings – and a planned family learning need not seek to replace what families already do together – but provide tools to enhance what already happens. What can members of communities teach each other, whether this entails formal delivery partnerships with local organisations, or learning through a more “open space” approach? Treasure trails which encourage families to talk to and learn from each other, for example, may be a way to encourage community generated exchange.

Finally, in most of this report we have looked at activities with outcomes for both adult and child *participants*. In reviewing the literature we have not found much which considers the impact on parents if they volunteer with the delivery of a

programme for children. Parent volunteers benefit from learning outcomes and we would encourage service delivery organisations to think of volunteer run or supported activities as family learning opportunities.

6) use technology

When thinking about the experiences which local institutions such as libraries and museums offer, it would be simple to view these as an alternative to, or “trade off” with online activities. Many commentators have expressed concerns about the way in which television and radio subsumed reading as a means of gathering information.⁴⁷ But these challenges also give way to opportunities, to use smartphone and general internet use to add value to and improve the experience of face-to-face learning.

There is an obvious role for technology to help promote and increase awareness of activities. **Coventry** put together a video of RhymeTime to show parents people what the activities are like rather than simply telling them. There are opportunities to make more use of online marketing channels to promote family learning events, whether on sites such as Meetup or Eventbrite, or social networking platforms such as Facebook.



More importantly,, family learning can be used to address digital divides – not only the divide between those who have access to digital technologies and the internet and those who don't, but the divide between *how* people use technology. Studies have suggested that many people, particularly those on lower incomes, are not using the technology in their palms to expand their skills but as a form of entertainment or distraction. In their report on digital infrastructure for public libraries in England, BiblioCommons referred to another digital divide as being between those who can *effectively use* technologies and those who can't. This divide was typified as covering cognition, focus, social-capital and participation. Put simply, some people are empowered by the wealth of information they have access to, connected to numerous people and confident to contribute to the digital space. Others, however, feel intimidated by the “superabundance” of information available at the touch of a finger and are unable or insufficiently confident to contribute content.⁴⁸

In this sense, learning which is integrated with the use of technology, can be responsive to how people are increasingly living their lives, enhance learning outcomes, *and* increase wider confidence and social inclusion.



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