



Giving Warwickshire's children the best start in life



Closing the Gap...

A Voluntary and Community Sector Response

July 2017



Warwickshire County Council and its partner agencies have a nationally and internationally recognised reputation for delivering excellent, innovative and evidence-based provision for babies, young children and their families.

Smart start is a three-year programme run by Warwickshire County Council and partners, looking at how families and children aged 0 to 5 are currently supported and how we can work together to ensure all young children in Warwickshire get the best start in life.

Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA) was approached to be part of the ‘Closing the Gap in Early Years’ project in order to extend the reach of the project into some of the smallest, community-based early years settings, with the aim of improving access to high quality provision and supporting the most vulnerable Warwickshire communities.

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68 Organisations contacted across Warwickshire

34 Groups worked with

Project Context

The measurable outcome was identified as: The confidence and capacity of community groups and organisations is increased by 20% as a result of tailored support and networking opportunities.

It was agreed with the project lead that WCAVA would identify community development workers to be trained to develop understanding, confidence and skill in using strategies which help to close the gap in school readiness. This was to be built on the intelligence gained from the earlier Smart Start asset mapping commissioned by Warwickshire County Council.

Early years community groups that operate within the voluntary, community and faith sectors would be targeted, with a focus on groups serving those areas where they 'feed into' schools that have the largest gaps in school readiness. Development workers would *establish positive relationships* with groups, *raise awareness of school readiness*, *offer in-house training* and mentoring to improve the practice of work with children and parents/carers.

Based on WCAVA's core specialisms around supporting the effectiveness of the voluntary and community sector, workers would undertake appropriate 'audits' of the governance and working practices of the groups, then supporting as appropriate around governance and funding support advice as required for the sustainability and future growth of the groups. *Specialist expertise* was also to be brought in from the 'Time 2 Talk' team to raise awareness and enable community group leaders to identify children's needs and thus support parents and carers more effectively.

Localities of focus were agreed to be community 'feeder' settings in those areas identified via the main Closing the Gap project, around Lillington in Warwick district & Brownsover in Rugby borough (schools with the biggest gap and highest numbers of pupils who were eligible for pupil premium in top 20% disadvantaged), plus areas within the top 10% of multiply deprived in Nuneaton, Bedworth and North Warwickshire.

The project scope was however varied, in agreement with the project lead. Capacity amongst community workers was stretched, so WCAVA went out to recruit for a part-time development worker, whose responsibility it would be to offer direct 1:1 support, develop and promote training opportunities and evaluate the project. Whilst a worker was initially recruited, unfortunately in August 2016 the successful candidate had a change of heart. Within WCAVA we sought to secure some internal capacity to deliver the project, and the project lead identified some capacity from an early years specialist.

It was agreed that these two post-holders would share responsibility for delivery and training with a notional *northern Warwickshire and Rugby/South split*. Services and support were able to start to be delivered by January 2017.

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There has been so much change here with our old Minister leaving and new Minister about to start. This has given us a chance to think about the changes we want to make to the way we run our sessions

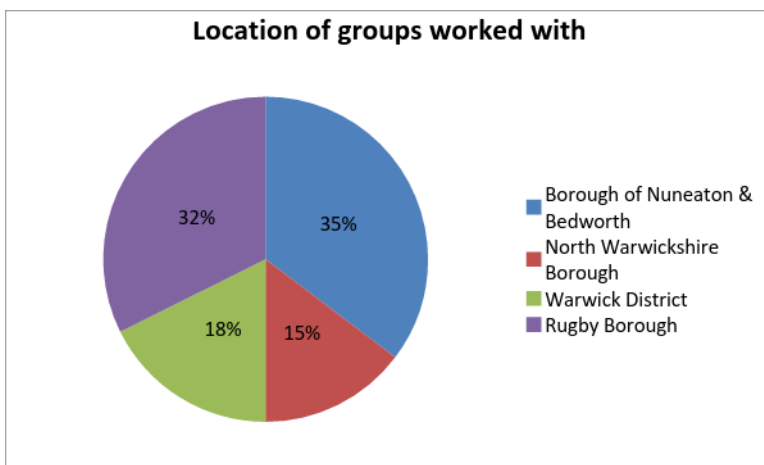
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Introduction

Sixty-eight community based, voluntary sector early years' groups were contacted across North Warwickshire Borough, The Borough of Nuneaton & Bedworth, Rugby Borough and Warwick District and of these thirty-four chose to engage with the program. Of these groups twenty-six were church based groups and eight operated out of village halls or community centres.

In order to openly and honestly understand the way these groups are setup and run it was agreed to anonymise the data so that they cannot be individually identified.



All groups had a face to face visit and communication followed by email/ telephone offering additional visits, advice and guidance. Responses to emails/ telephone calls were minimal resulting in only nine groups taking up the offer of an additional visit and two further groups requiring support beyond the end date of the project.

A health check document (Appendix 1) was created as a starting point for helping us better understand and identify the support needs of the groups. The health check was split into sections and enabled us to have focussed conversations on the structure, governance and funding of the organisation, who they exist to support, their policies, procedures, documentation and record keeping and training and development opportunities.

The organisational set-up

Of the groups visited only *two had no formal governance arrangements* in place. The majority of groups relied heavily on the governing documents of the church or the building they were operating within. This meant that many of the leaders didn't have in-depth knowledge or understanding of what the arrangements were, but knew they existed and could identify somebody they could speak to if there was a problem.

A significant majority of the groups were *run entirely by volunteers* however five had paid leaders funded through either the Parish Council or the Borough Council or were *working in partnership* with ASDA Community Engagement or Barnardo's who were providing staff and resources for the sessions. Other partnerships that exist include relationships with children centres, although some of these were lost in the latest round of early years funding cuts. These have been replaced by information *updates from the Families Information Service* which enables leaflets to be displayed for parents at these sessions. Links also existed with Warwickshire County Council and the District or Borough council. This was particularly prominent in Rugby where a 0-5 network currently exists to support these groups across priority areas.

A regular newsletter and an annual training event helps to keep them updated and engaged.

In addition to this several groups from across Warwickshire had been approached regarding *smart start funding that has been successfully gained* and used predominantly for the provision of training or to buy new resources and toys including puppets and soft play equipment.

The group leaders initially felt confident in their knowledge but by completing the health check it became clear that there were areas that hadn't previously been considered.

Most of the church groups were *unaware of their local advisory services* and where to access appropriate information for themselves as well as for signposting parents / children to. This was different for the groups that operated out of community centres and village halls as some links with external services were already in place and promoted within the buildings which enabled them to find out information that was needed.

All of the groups were *reliant on parents sharing information* regarding what was going on in the community and the services they accessed. This enabled support for parents attending the group to be provided through their peers as well as from the group leaders.

The experience of those in positions as leaders comes through their roles as parents/grandparents/Ministers/Youth Workers rather than any specific early years training, with the exception of *six groups that had someone with an early years' qualification*.

Planning for sessions comes from;

- previous experience of what the children enjoy doing
- available equipment/toys
- utilising faith based resources
- traditional activities and songs
- events throughout the year e.g. Easter, Christmas, Chinese New Year.

Structured craft activities that focussed on an end product were offered without emphasis on the age appropriate creative process. When Ideas for new activities were required these were sourced from a combination of books and the internet.

It was evident that groups with multiple leaders were communicating about session planning and evaluation although this was often nothing more than a conversation and *nothing was formally recorded*. This was also true for the roles and responsibilities of the volunteers at the group, people knew of their role within the group however this wasn't necessarily documented anywhere.

None of the groups had a responsibility for fundraising as this was taken care of by the church or community centre. With the exception of one group the focus of fundraising was on building maintenance as opposed to specific early years related funding.

All but one group charged a donation per child to attend and in all of these groups this donation was waived for families facing times of hardship. Most groups charged for tea and coffee during the session as a way to help cover basic costs and these funds were paid into the church/community centre bank account. Only *very small amounts of money move through the setting* and in most cases this just covers the session expenditure. Only one group had no bank account at all and only one group had a specific bank account for their mother and toddler group which was separate from their main setting.

A small number of groups had received funding from parish or district/borough councils for training or resources as well as having been approached regarding smart start funding. None would have been aware of this opportunity without being directly approached.

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A weekly messy/sensory play experience has been introduced at all three settings which the children are enjoying

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Safer Recruitment

All groups had some *basic knowledge and awareness of DBS checks* with the majority of group leaders and volunteers having been checked. There was a lack of understanding of who can and can't be DBS checked with most applying a blanket approach of checking all leaders. This might not meet the criteria of the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Several groups identified that the safeguarding procedures within the church are being reviewed with the hope of new updated policies and procedures being in place by the end of 2017.

There is *very informal recruitment in place*.

Volunteers are often involved in several of the church groups/activities and are approached internally when additional volunteers are required. No groups had experience of formal/externally advertised recruitment.

“

I appreciate your time, it has really made me think about how we might do things differently from September

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The majority of groups had no documented roles and responsibilities for volunteers however one group has since implemented a volunteer agreement that includes roles and responsibilities, completing a DBS check and attendance at child protection training. The additional support of *a template volunteer agreement will encourage more groups to include this* as part of their recruitment process.

When it comes to induction this is very informal and based on the new member not being left on their own and learning on the job. There is no documentation that exists around this.

The people they help

The vast majority of groups are *open to all parents/carers/grandparents/guardians of 0-5-year-old children*, with the actual age of children attending being more like 0-3 due to nursery/child care arrangements. On occasions when older siblings might need to attend they were made to feel welcome.

There were only a small number of groups identified that have more specific criteria for attendance and these were based on age and disability. The *geographic location of families was not relevant*. Numbers attending the groups remained fairly consistent and as older children transitioned they were naturally replaced with new younger families. There were however a minority of smaller groups that had to operate waiting lists when they reached maximum capacity.

Leaders and volunteers networked with parents throughout the sessions and were able to *provide informal advice* based on their own knowledge and experiences. The groups provided a *warm and welcoming environment* encouraging parents to network with their own children and other parents. Linking parents together with a buddy was a popular method for those attending on their own.

Groups grow most significantly through word of mouth. In addition to this a small number of groups interacted with parents and promoted their sessions through Facebook, Mumsnet, local magazines or the church's own website.

One group prioritised the sharing of activity ideas and engaging parents. They did this by arranging trips and a newsletter containing a range of activities and signposting to useful resources and websites.

Most do not do this and instead hope that by role modelling different activities and ideas of ways to interact and engage with children that the parents and children will be learning.

The provision of messy activities, new songs and stories and different toys to those that they have at home also aids the development of the child.



“ *Smart Start funding has enabled the group to purchase: child sized tables/chairs, activity tables, safety mats. Children are now able to sit comfortably for snacks and activities, the risk to children’s safety when using equipment has been reduced* ”

Policies and Procedures

The majority of groups relied on the policies and procedures of their church / community centre. Leaders were not clear on how they related to practice but were aware that they existed. Risk assessments were in place for the buildings but *activity risk assessments are not formally documented*. All leaders and volunteers were risk aware and want to ensure they are operating in a safe environment, however they had not got the written evidence to back up their careful thinking.

In the majority of settings the *parents were not made aware of the policies or procedures*, in part due to the lack of emphasis on policy within the setting. Although the majority of groups had a safeguarding policy they seemed unclear on the actual procedures and only three organisations were aware of the Warwickshire Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

There was a general uncertainty about what to do/not to do with regards to policies and procedures with most groups requiring a basic template to adapt as opposed to trying to write their own. It was clear that there is a *lack of understanding of the significance of policies* in backing up rules and decisions. This was particularly evident with media and photography where a lot of groups relied on undocumented agreements around use of phones and taking photos rather than having an official policy in place. Several groups insist on a total ban of phones and cameras in the session but further conversation unpicked that this was due to being unsure how best to manage it.

There was very little evidence of any formalised behaviour management policy, with parents seen to be responsible for their own children. Unacceptable behaviour had not been highlighted as a problem.

Documentation and Record Keeping

Each of the settings had public liability insurance through their venue and all but one group kept attendance records. Initial *registration forms ranged from detailed to very basic* but all of them were lacking as an all-encompassing document.

It was highlighted to groups that it was important to capture the full range of information in order to safeguard both the child and the parent.

One of the groups had no register at all and didn't ask for any details about the families or children attending the session. They felt that it could be off putting to more vulnerable families to have to disclose their personal details and that in the case of an emergency evacuation the room was so small everyone would be able to get out.

“ Thank you for thinking of little groups like ours ”

All of the settings had and used an accident book but they didn't see recording incidents in the same way due to the emphasis on parental responsibility to care for their children whilst attending the session.

There was *no formal or documented planning and evaluation* or channels for parents to formally feedback although lots of casual conversations took place. The success of the groups is evidenced through repeated and ongoing attendance.





“ *The children enjoyed bathing dolls so we have given time for them to do this and also provided different ways such as using a paddling pool with blue ball pool balls as well as using water* ”

Training and Development

Very few of the groups had paid workers and were reliant solely on volunteers to operate. There were six groups who already had staff/volunteers with an early years qualification. The majority of *volunteers have multiple other commitments* therefore had no desire to train or develop their early years skills.

These groups very clearly provide somewhere to go and something to do for children and perhaps more importantly new mums, who are the first to admit that getting out to these sessions is as much for their benefit as it is for their child's.

The external expectations of these groups contributing to school readiness does not fit with the groups own identity. The groups see themselves as *informal community assets* rather than as early years providers improving outcomes for children.

The additional training we have been able to offer through this project was selected based on perceived significance and meeting best practice requirements. This included the option to access training in paediatric first aid, food hygiene, safeguarding, time to talk and learning through play.

There was no take up for the safeguarding training with this being *managed internally* within organisations. One group carried out two days of safeguarding training in May 2017 which is annual training for all volunteers and provides an opportunity to revisit policies and plan for their implementation. Two additional groups have previously attended external safeguarding training, although this is not specific to early years. Three groups have provided information to parents about safeguarding through the provision of leaflets at the session or by sharing information verbally with parents/carers about the reporting of safeguarding concerns, including the name of the safeguarding lead.

At the time of writing 7 places have been confirmed on formal training provided through our partners Warwickshire Early Years.

This training included the offer of Child Protection Level 1, Food Hygiene Level 2 Award in Food Safety and Paediatric First Aid Level 3. These training courses will upskill and accredit the settings according to the details below:

Child Protection Level 1

This safeguarding course will enable participants to recognise the signs and symptoms of child abuse and know what to do in the case of suspected or actual abuse. By the end of the session participants will be able to identify signs and symptoms that may lead to child abuse, make appropriate referrals using expertise and support as required, know the basic child protection processes and know their responsibilities in safeguarding children.

Food Hygiene Level 2 Award in Food Safety

This course is designed to give an understanding of food safety and how to reduce the risk of food poisoning and maintain a Duty of Care. Participants will receive training on safe food handling, hygiene & storage, allergen awareness as well as guidance to enable them to complete legally required risk assessments. By the end of the course participants will know how to comply with the law and Best Practice and how to achieve and keep a Food Hygiene Rating of 5.

Paediatric First Aid Level 3 Award

This 2 day (12 hour) course provides successful participants with a 3 year nationally recognised certificate. This course meets and exceeds the requirements laid down by Ofsted and Early Years Foundation Stage (2017) for people needing a 2 day 12 contact hour first aid course for adults, infants and children, this group includes childminders and child care providers.

Upon completion of the health check it became apparent that the majority of groups do not currently have a trained first aider or up to date food hygiene certificate so it is not

surprising that these courses have proved the most popular with the groups. The cost and time commitments of training are ordinarily a barrier to leaders accessing them.



14 training seats were taken on our informal learning offer which provided 1.5 hour training sessions on Learning through Play and Time 2 Talk (see Appendix 2).

"Lots of wonderful ideas"

'Learning Through Play' Training

The Learning through play training is designed specifically to support play group leaders across Warwickshire. It provides ideas about how to develop creative sessions for young children through greater understanding of child development and how to better engage with parents and carers. The sessions delivered through this Smart Start project have been adapted based on our conversations and observations with groups to best meet their needs including age appropriate play, heuristic play and stories.

The sessions delivered aim to explore the importance of;

how children learn through play

the value of heuristic play within an enabling environment

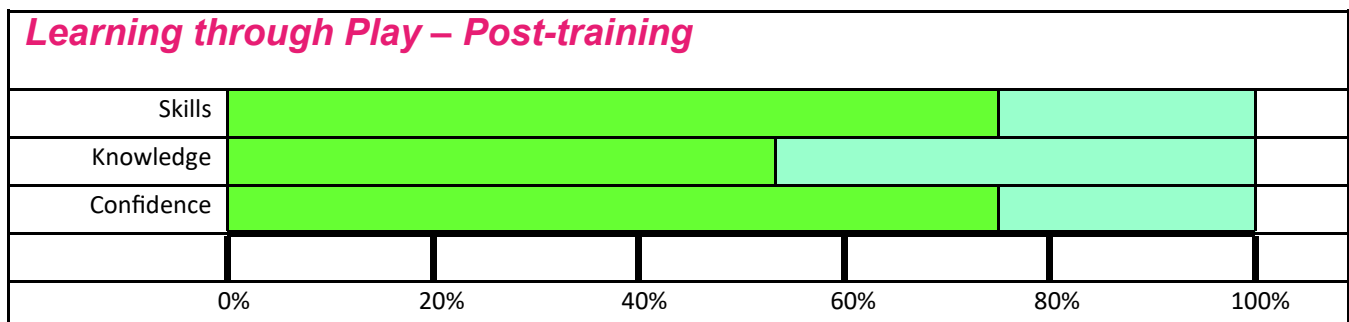
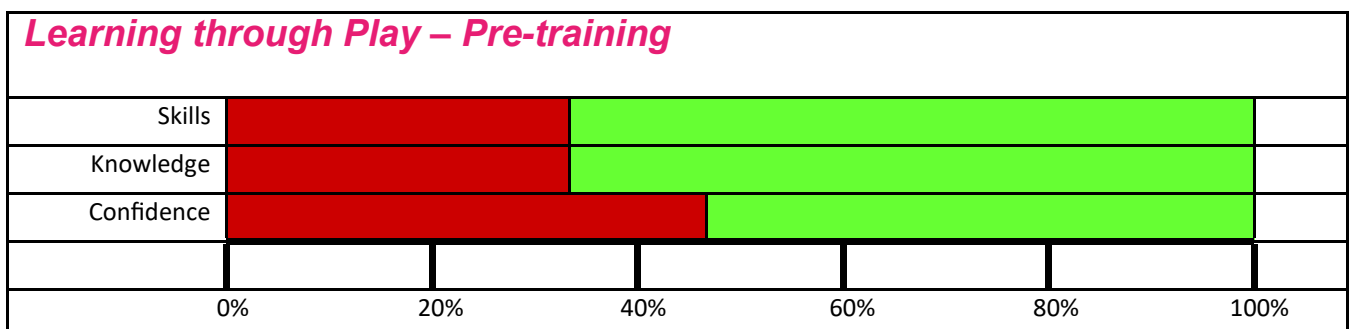
the development of schemas in children's play and learning

"It was a good, helpful course. Thanks!"

"Carol went above & beyond delivering this training"

"I loved this course & can't wait to try some of the ideas"

None	Slight	Modest	Substantial
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When asked about the value of the training, the knowledge of the information & the trainer, 10% felt it was 'good' and 90% stated it was 'excellent'.

"The trainer had fantastic knowledge"

'Time To Talk' Training

Warwickshire County Council and NHS Speech and Language Therapy Service work in partnership as the Time to Talk team. As part of this project a 1.5 hour session especially developed for playgroup leaders across Warwickshire was offered to help them better understand children's speech, language and communication skills and to help build confidence in how they respond to the needs of children and their families.

"Lots of Information & brilliant selection of handouts"

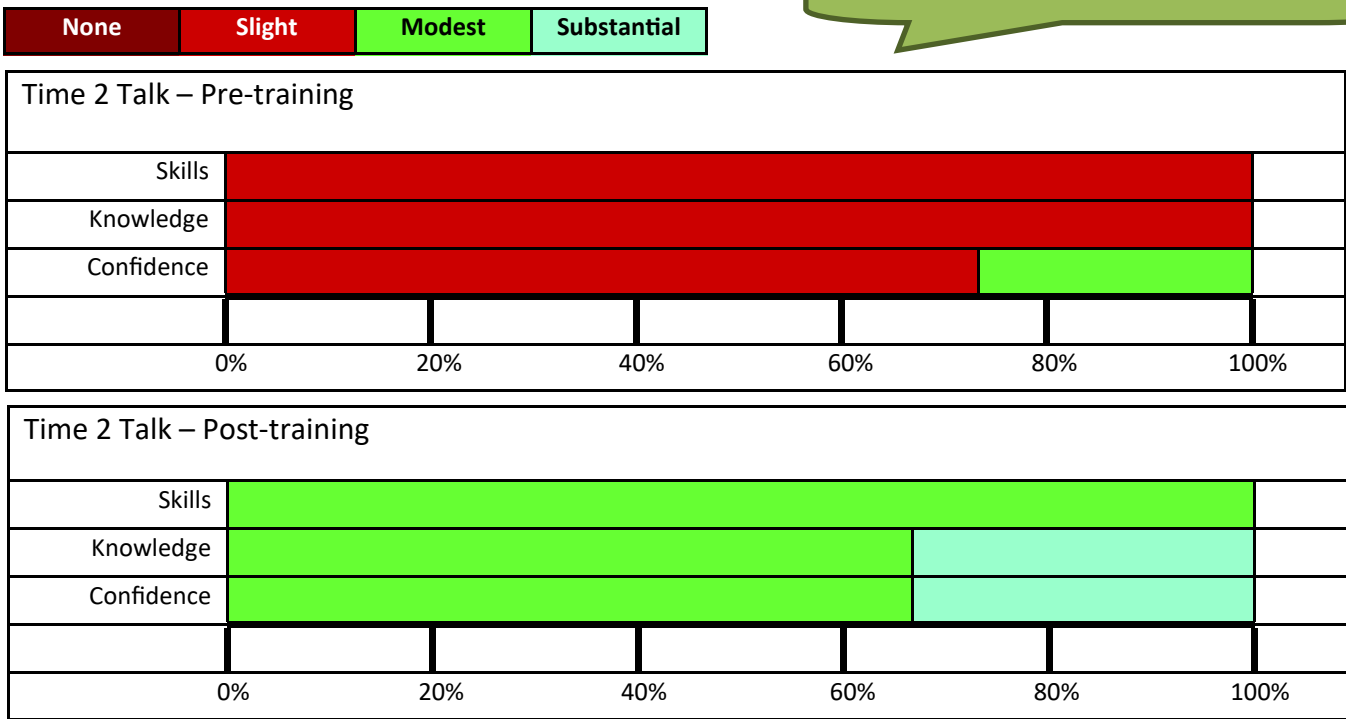
"Will help me to develop personally & professionally"

The session aimed to support leaders to;

- understand the importance of developing good early speech, language and communication skills in babies and young children
- recognise the key barriers to babies and children developing good speech, language and communication
- understand what the 5 aspects of speech language and communication are.

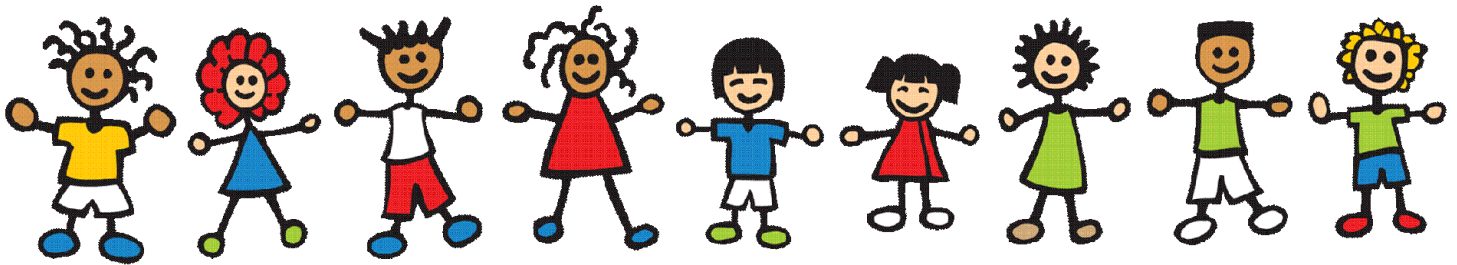
The Charts below show the change in agreement with statements from the beginning of the training session to the end from all of the participants.

"Thank you for the goodies in the bag!"



When asked about the value of the training, the knowledge of the information & the trainer, 5% felt it was 'good' and 95% stated it was 'excellent'.

"I feel much more confident now"



Smart Start development programme - Case Study 1

St Mary's stay and play group operates as part of a church organisation with a clear leadership structure in place and follows the church's policies and procedures including finance systems. The session is open to all parents/carers/grandparents/guardians of 0-5 year old children, with the actual age of children attending being more like 0-3 due to nursery / pre-school / child care arrangements beyond this age. The session limits places to 20 adults for safety reasons and operates a waiting list due to high demand.

Childminders previously attended the group but were asked not to attend as the groups focus is on reaching parents who may have limited networking opportunities. The childminders have since set up their own group.

The leader and volunteers were aware of what was expected of them during the session including networking with parents giving informal advice based on experiences; however there was no formal volunteer agreement in place.

Policy includes DBS checks for the leader and all volunteers expected to attend child protection training.

The group leader and volunteers are aware of how to report a child protection concern to the church designated lead for safeguarding. However they are not aware of Warwickshire's multi agency safeguarding hub procedures. Safeguarding information was not shared with parent/carers.

Parents/carers details and attendance was documented in a book, information was limited and included permission for the group to take photographs. The leader verbally shared expectations of the session with regards to parent/carers taking photographs and managing the risks associated with hot drinks.

The group has been supported by WCAVA to access funding for the refurbishment of the building, the work included disabled access/toilets.

Funding had also been secured from the Borough/town council which would enable the group to purchase additional resources.

The leader and volunteers have used their experience to establish a routine that includes free play from a range of plastic resources, craft activity, snack, story and music/singing.

Key points identified for development

- Develop a volunteer agreement including roles and responsibilities.
- Update leaders/volunteers knowledge of external procedures for making child protection referrals through Warwickshire's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Develop information documented at registration to include parent/carers emergency contact details/medical conditions/allergies for parent/carer and child.
- Develop documentation that evidences parent/carers agreement to follow the procedures expectations of the group.
- Consider supporting children's natural curiosity and exploratory play through introducing more natural materials/collections and household objects rather than plastic toys.

Support and Guidance

Visit 1 - Completed health check document advising on areas identified for development
Identifying training and development
Signposting to website/guidance documents

Visit 2 - Monitoring progress
Email/telephone support was offered between visits.

Training

A program of free training was available to leaders and volunteers. Paediatric First Aid, Food Hygiene, Time 2 Talk, Child Protection, Learning Through Play.

A lack of transport to the training venues was a barrier to the volunteers attending. It was therefore arranged that the Learning Through Play training be delivered at the groups venue resulting in 8 attendees.

Improvements following Smart Start programme input

Safeguarding notice/display boards have been developed inside and outside the church. There are plans in place to have an additional board in the stay and play room.

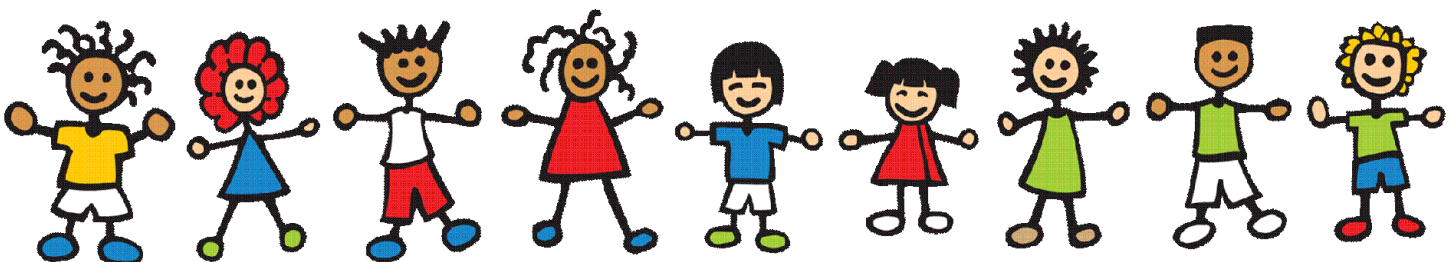
Parent/carers now receive documents welcoming them to the stay and play session which includes:

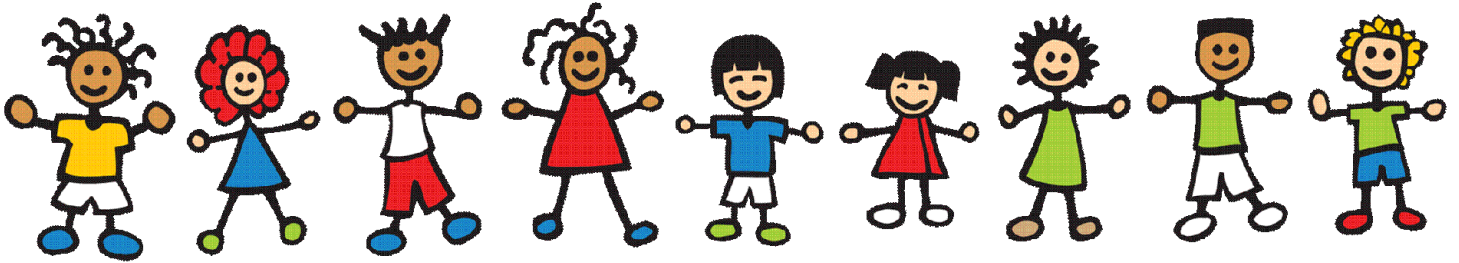
- a registration form that includes emergency contact information, medical and allergy information about the parent/carer and the children
- a vision statement
- safety information
- a safeguarding statement including the names of the designated persons.

Leaders and volunteers who attended the Learning Through Play training felt their knowledge had improved and were stimulated to provide some of the experiences promoted through the training.

Plans include:

- Auditing resources for quality learning potential
- Introducing more sensory experiences
- Including more natural, open ended and house hold resources
- Re organising the room to include a messy play area
- Developing a cosy quiet area





Smart Start development programme - Case Study 2

Rugby Young Parents Group is for parents (and parents to be) aged 23 and under. The group meets every Wednesday between 10.30 am and 12:00pm at The Bradby Club, East Union Street. They are a welcoming and friendly group and have new parents joining regularly. Their main focus is to offer Rugby's young parents a chance to meet and get to know new people, exchange and gain advice as well as providing a place for children to play and learn together. They try and provide a different theme or activity for the children to do each week.

The group is run by the Bradby Clubs Safer Relationships and Youth Worker. Rebecca has a degree in psychology and training in sexual health and consent as well as training in child protection, domestic violence and youth mental health first aid.

The group also has a partnership with Barnardo's who provide expertise in early years and support the planning of activities and delivery of programmes e.g. 4 week play and learn – taking photos and documenting how the children are learning through play.

All leaders are aware of what is expected of them during the sessions and the group has clear policies and procedures in place. Staff/volunteers are appropriately DBS checked and recruited through the Bradby Club in line with safer recruitment best practice.

Leaders are aware of Safeguarding procedures and feel confident raising concerns when necessary and there are Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board posters on display.

The group is free of charge for those eligible to attend and does not require its own bank account, instead utilising that of the Bradby Club to hold funds raised for the continued existence and development of the group.

They were previously successful in gaining smart start funding and have since purchased new resources and art and craft materials for the group with some of this money.

The group has a photography and image policy and confidentiality and information sharing policy as well as an online safety and bullying policy. These are made particularly relevant as the group utilise Facebook to share information about the sessions.

The group also have the most comprehensive registration form of all of the groups visited and keep up to date attendance records at each session.

Key points identified for development

- Ensure that information regarding child protection referrals through Warwickshire's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are shared with parents.
- Develop documentation that evidences parent/carers agreement to follow the procedures and expectations of the group.
- Consider supporting children's natural curiosity and exploratory play through introducing more natural materials/collections and household objects rather than plastic toys.
- Support with planning and evaluation of sessions and formalising current engagement with parents.
- Advice required on where to access reliable, specialist early years resources and support.

Support and Guidance

Session 1 - Completed health check document advising on areas identified for development. These include early year's specific training opportunities and ideas for planning and evaluating sessions

Session 2 - Monitoring progress and follow up post both informal training sessions.

Session 3 - Specific session focussing on age appropriate activity planning.

Email/telephone support was offered when required.

Training

A program of free training was available to leaders and volunteers. Paediatric First Aid, Food Hygiene, Time 2 Talk, Child Protection, Learning Through Play.

Rebecca was able to make the most of the free training offered through this project. She attended the learning through play session which became the foundation of the session planning meeting as well as the time 2 talk training which resulted in her taking and being responsible for a box of early year's speech, language and communication themed leaflets and resources for groups across Rugby to access.

She has also attended the 2 day paediatric first aid course.

Improvements following Smart Start programme input

Information about relevant websites and books has been given to the group to support with future ideas and development opportunities.

Documents related to child development and ages and stages have also been given to support the leaders understanding and ability to offer appropriate activities and guidance.

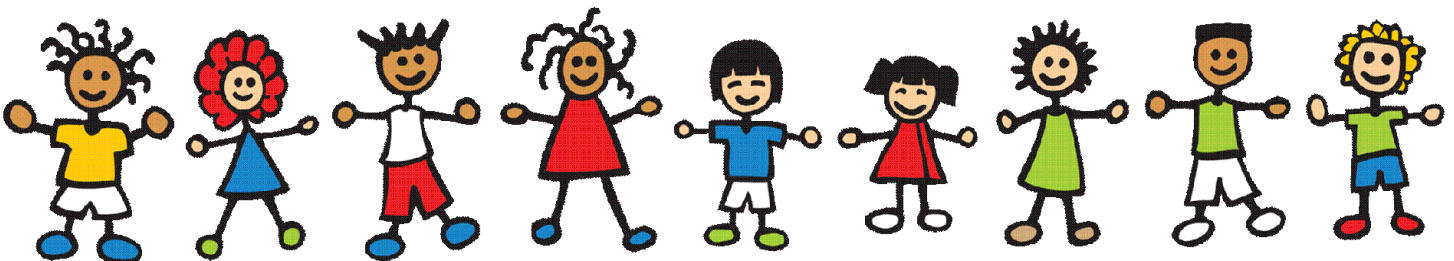
Following the Learning through Play training the group feel confident to provide some of the experiences and activity ideas promoted through the training. This includes messy play activities that children are not necessarily able to undertake in their own home, opportunities for mark making, the inclusion of more natural materials and heuristic play.

Following the time 2 talk training the group was supported to include books, songs and games to enhance children's speech, language and communication at the sessions.

The leaders have been supported to develop a procedure for parents to evaluate and feedback on sessions and this is reviewed and used to inform future planning.

The next month's session planning has been done to embed the new learning and try out some new activities.

Leaders feel reassured that they are doing a good job and have increased confidence in their ability to plan and deliver excellent learning and play opportunities.



Key Outcomes

This project was aimed at the smaller voluntary and community sector early years activities with the emphasis on building confidence and capacity. Through the implementation of the Early Years Health Check we have proactively engaged with 34 groups and established trusted relationships to identify the quality of their practice whilst championing the need to raise the quality of Early Years Provision in Warwickshire.

In the absence of any specific infrastructure support for the early years sector, the groups are now aware of the work of Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA) and the support that can be provided around governance arrangements, group development, funding and volunteering.

In eleven groups the documentation completed at initial registration has been adapted or developed and now includes emergency contact details for both the child and parent/carer, medical and allergy information and permission for photographs. These groups now utilise the registration forms to inform the parents of data protection, confidentiality agreements and other relevant policies or codes of conduct. Additional groups are keen to develop their registration process but would benefit from a template document to adapt in order to do this.

One group had no recorded documentation at all, not even the names of those attending the sessions. Following the completion of the health check and further conversations about this they agreed that they will implement a complete registration form when the group re-starts in September. Further support with additional policies is scheduled for August.

One group has had a discussion with childminders who attend the sessions and have offered them an opportunity to be involved in the planning of the sessions in order to support them with their children's next steps. This has resulted in the identification of the specific interests of the children and the purchase of appropriate new resources to support this.

The majority of groups had a focussed craft activity that is not matched to the stage of development of the children attending. Only two groups recognised that some children did not yet have the skills to complete the activity and enabled children to explore the materials. In six groups the craft activities are now more open ended and less structured and include some age appropriate new experiences for the children.

Two groups have been signposted to funding opportunities and notified of their local WCAVA funding and group development officer for further support if they require it.



*Thank you for
thinking of little
groups like ours*



One group has developed a parents welcome pack which includes a vision statement, safety information, who to contact in order to give feedback and a safeguarding statement including the names of the designated persons. Further groups are keen to develop this and with the implementation of some template documents will embed this in their settings.

A meeting has taken place in Rugby to look at how early years groups from the priority neighbourhoods are supported through the Warwickshire County Council Community Development Team and how WCAVA can support this and expand this support to additional Rugby based groups.

Early Years groups in Rugby Borough were invited to attend a children and youth showcase event in Dunchurch in June 2017. Three groups were involved in this and several others are keen to attend future networking opportunities.

One group is looking into funding to externally recruit a qualified/experienced worker to oversee their sessions. Advice on safer recruitment and advertising has been provided with follow up support available from WCAVA when it is required.

Two groups have been added to the WCAVA e-grapevine mailing list and all groups have been made aware that this is a way for them to find out about things going on in their local area as well as to promote their own activities and volunteering/job opportunities.

A box of time to talk resources and leaflets has been provided for groups in Rugby Borough. This is stored at The Bradby Club and other Rugby groups have been notified of how they can access these leaflets to provide at their settings.

Further work continues to be undertaken with one group around the planning of appropriate and varied activities and experiences for the children and parents attending the session. This will be recorded along with any feedback and evaluation in order to influence and shape the following terms session planning.

A meeting has been set up between WCAVA and the Diocesan Safeguarding Lead to fully understand the safeguarding changes taking place within the church and to explore ways that they can work together moving forward.

One group has successfully gained funding to develop an outdoor play area. Follow up discussions have taken place to ensure that the fences are constructed and erected in accordance with the appropriate part of BS 1722, that risk assessments are completed including the safe management of activities and zoning physical areas and sun safety. They have also reflected on the provision of appropriate storage and the use of natural and open ended resources and materials.

Further Work Identified

The majority of challenges facing voluntary sector, community based stay and play sessions was consistent across the County. In order to most effectively utilise time and expertise and to ensure sustainability of support to groups beyond the end of this project, it was agreed that further work needs to be undertaken. This work predominantly involves the creation of template documents which will be uploaded to the WCAVA website and therefore freely available to all groups.

- A fact sheet highlighting clear and concise information is required about the criteria for DBS checking staff and volunteers in community based stay and play sessions.
- The documentation that is currently completed by parents/carers when registering needs to be further developed in all groups. A template welcome letter and registration form needs to be produced.
- Information shared with parents/carers needs developing to include information on safeguarding procedures and local services.
- Awareness raising of The Warwickshire MASH and external safeguarding procedures is required.
- Template policies and procedures are required including but not limited to safeguarding, whistle-blowing, behaviour management and data protection.
- Template risk assessments for key stay and play activities that can be customised by groups.
- Information required for groups to better understand the ages and stages of child development.
- Links to useful websites and books that provide ideas for appropriate activities and resources to support and encourage age related learning through play.
- A fact sheet is required about heuristic play and treasure baskets to enable groups to further develop opportunities that support children's curiosity and exploratory play through natural materials/household objects rather than plastic toys.
- A fact sheet is required providing advice on planning and evaluation, including input and feedback from parents/carers.





Conclusion

It would be fair to say that the journey and direction of the Warwickshire CAVA project was somewhat different to that which had initially been scoped.

Initially it had been thought that by empowering and building the capacity of a number of in-post development workers, you could then support and build the capacity and confidence of community groups. The capacity and resource within those development posts was not available, so the project delivery responsibility was then down to just two development workers who came from very different, specialist backgrounds, one in early years support, one in community group support. Coming from different backgrounds gave them different skills to offer the groups, however the issues, barriers and successes they found throughout the process were very similar.

‘Community groups’ come in all different shapes and sizes, operating in different venues, but the acknowledged definition is that they are:

- Organised: with a structure with rules about how the group is organised and run
- Self-governing and independent from any other organisation
- Not for Profit
- Voluntary: governed by and run with the support of volunteers to carry out their activities
- Run for public/community benefit

The groups we worked with in this project had some of these characteristics, but few had them all. The range of capacity within those groups differed greatly, as did the ambitions for their groups and the support they felt was appropriate to give their parents and carers.

The priority for most groups was clearly community value not school readiness. This was displayed throughout the project in the following ways:

- ⇒ The take-up for all training was lower than expected: most groups did not identify training as a need during the 'health check' process but were offered it as it was part of the plan. This is why we identified the need for more 'formal' opportunities, and extended the offer to Food Hygiene, Safeguarding and Paediatric First Aid.
- ⇒ The staff identified that the volunteers involved in running sessions undertook very informal, relationship building approaches with parents, and that they were very unlikely to feel capable or willing to "fill in forms", make referrals or "assess" the families in any way so they did not lose confidence and trust.

Whilst we had a vision for enhancing 'leadership' within community-based early year's settings, and improving access to 'high quality provision', it is clear that we did not achieve this in the ways expected. We highly value the time and dedication that so many volunteers put in to running these services for local families, who highly value these community-based settings. The economic value of formal volunteering in the UK was estimated to be £22.6bn in 2015.

We are well aware of the changes on the horizon as Warwickshire County Council look to reshape the services for children and families. There is absolutely a future and need for groups like this, and we will continue to offer those engaged in the project ongoing support through WCAVA's infrastructure provision, however we must acknowledge that specialist and specific early years support and advice is no longer available in the same way as it may have previously, and via this project.





Early Years Groups Health Check



Name of Organisation		
Contact Details		
Staff / Volunteer name		
		Notes
Your organisation		
What type of organisation are you? (Charity, social enterprise etc)		
Do you have a governing document/ constitution?		
Do you have any partnerships with other organisations or are you interested in forming partnerships?		
Do you feel confident in your knowledge of other local services?		
Where do you currently access ideas for planning your session?		
The governance of your organisation		
Do you currently have enough committee members/ trustees or are there vacancies?		

Early Years Groups Health Check

<p>Are your committee members/ trustees aware of their roles and responsibilities? Do they carry out their duties in line with these?</p>		
<p>Do you have regular committee meetings? Who else is in attendance?</p>		
About the people you help		
<p>Where do you operate? What's the catchment area?</p>		
<p>Who do you help? Age, gender etc. or perhaps members of society who meet specific criteria – low income etc</p>		
<p>How do you engage and support parents? resources signposting activity ideas</p>		
Finances and Funding		
<p>Do you have a bank account?</p>		
<p>Do you have any agreements with your local or county council?</p>		

Early Years Groups Health Check

Are you currently in search of funding?		
Do you have a fundraising plan or strategy?		
Safer Recruitment		
Staff / volunteers are checked in accordance with DBS regulations		
Clear role descriptions		
Recruitment procedures		
How / where do you advertise for staff/volunteers		
Do you use application forms		
Do you have a fair selection / interview process		
Do you take up references		
Evidence of identity and qualifications		
Evidence of right to work in the UK		
Undergo appropriate induction		
Policies and Procedures		
Equal opportunities policy		
Health and safety policy		

Early Years Groups Health Check

risk assessments fire safety infection control		
Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy whistle blowing – concerns about a colleague allegations against staff MASH procedure designated lead		
Behaviour management		
Complaints procedure		
Safer Recruitment policy		
Photography and images policy		
Confidentiality and Information Sharing policy		
Any other policies or procedures?		
Documentation / Record Keeping		
Attendance record		
Registration forms Including: Medical conditions/allergy records/consent to treatment Media consent Emergency contact		

Early Years Groups Health Check

Accident Records		
Incident Records		
Risk Assessment		
Building Activities		
Transport		
Hot drinks and food		
Insurance		
Public liability Employee		
Session Planning		
Evaluation and Feedback		
Training and Development		
Safeguarding		
First Aid		
Food Hygiene		
Early Years qualification		
Other relevant qualifications		

Early Years Groups Health Check

Please use this space to add any further information or identify any support or advice that you may need:



FREE Training

Warwickshire CAVA in partnership with Bedworth Heath and Atherstone Nursery Schools, supported by Warwickshire County Council's Smart Start fund, is pleased to offer this exciting development programme for groups whose focus is early years provision. You have told us these are the sort of courses you would appreciate to support your voluntary roles, so they have been developed specifically with you in mind!

Learning Through Play

An interactive session, designed specifically to support playgroup leaders across Warwickshire. You will get ideas about how to develop creative sessions for young children, increase your understanding of child development and how to better engage with parents and carers. All participants will be encouraged to share best practice and experiences, so it promises to be a fun and informal event.

- Tuesday 20th June, 1:15pm-2:45pm at the Inspirational Learning Space (ILS) at Bedworth Heath Old Library, corner of Smarts Road and Heath Road, Bedworth CV12 0BN OR
- Tuesday 4th July, 1pm-2:30pm at Dunchurch Village Hall, Dunchurch Road, Rugby CV22 6PN
- Tuesday 11th July, 10am-11:30am at St Mary's Church in the Youth Headquarters building, The Market Place, Atherstone CV9 1EX

Time 2 Talk

A session especially developed for playgroup leaders across Warwickshire to help them better understand children's speech, language and communication skills, helping to build confidence in how they respond to the needs of children and their families. Another informal session, where participants are actively encouraged to share their experiences.

- Bedworth session: 29th June, 1-2.30pm at the ILS
- Rugby session: 6th July, 1-2.30 at Dunchurch Village Hall

Paediatric First Aid (level 3) and Food Hygiene (level 1/2)

In partnership with Warwickshire Early Years we are pleased to offer accredited training in Paediatric First Aid (2 days) and/or Food Hygiene (1 day) for free (usual price £65pp). We can offer up to 20 free spaces on these courses, limited initially to 1 per organisation on a first come first served basis*.

*Eligibility criteria in place for organisations and attendees, we reserve the right to place your name on a waiting list.

First Aid dates:

- 29th & 30th June, 9.00am-3.30pm at Wolston Community Centre, Wolston. CV8 3PD
- 12th & 13th September, 9.00am-3.30pm at the ILS in Bedworth
- 16th & 23rd September, 9.00am-3.30pm at the ILS in Bedworth
- 25th November & Saturday 2nd December, 9.00am-3.30pm at Camp Hill Children's Centre

Food Hygiene:

Various dates tbc. Please express your interest & we will confirm agreed dates as soon as possible.

Spaces are limited so act quickly – talk to Alison at Warwickshire CAVA to find out more or to book your space. Call 024 7638 5765 or email alison@wcava.org.uk.



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