**Dundee Fairness and Local Child Poverty Report 2023/2024: Case studies supplement**

**Theme A) WORK AND WAGES**

* **Child Poverty Pathfinder: Employability Case Study**

Lesley is a single mother, with three children, including a one-year-old, and a primary school aged child with additional support needs, living in the Linlathen area of Dundee. Lesley was unemployed and keen to go to work but concerned that it was “not worthwhile” due to childcare costs.

At the initial outreach visit mother was keen to return to work but was concerned about the cost of childcare and was worried that if she went to work her smallest child would not receive the free childcare place upon turning 2 years old.

Key worker offered Lesley support to prepare a CV for when she felt ready to return to work. Lesley was linked to the School Aged Childcare pilot at Rowantree Primary School in Linlathen and her primary aged child was offered a place.

Lesley was also invited into the weekly Linlathen Works drop in to have a ‘better off’ calculation carried out to inform her if she would be better off working and how much support she could potentially receive from universal credit for childcare costs. Lesley was able to see that if she worked 20 hours a week, this would allow her to put the youngest child in nursery and she would be slightly better off.

Lesley began to apply for positions. At the same time, DWP were offering employers the opportunity to apply for funding to recruit staff via the Long-Term Unemployed Programme. Lesley was successful in securing a post working 20 hours a week. Lesley started work and the little one started nursery. Lesley was concerned about her child with additional support needs particularly around her medication and how she was getting on at school. Her key worker reached out to her contact within the Children and Families asking for advice and a meeting was arranged with the school, Lesley and the key worker, this also led to subsequent team around the child meetings that put support in place for her child.

After 6 months Lesley was offered a promoted post, again Lesley was provided with a better off calculation to ensure she wasn’t worse off taking the promoted post. The calculation showed for Lesley dropping 4 hours would be her best option. This was negotiated by the employer. Lesley was also given support to have her child disability payment reviewed which resulted in higher rate being awarded for her child. When the time comes Lesley will also be supported to make a placing request for her child to go to high school.

* **School Aged Childcare/Early Adopter Communities Childcare Project Employability Support**

Families, whose children attend the School Aged Childcare project at Rowantree Primary School in Linlathen are supported by the project Key Worker to access and engage with a variety of support services, depending on their needs. Close links have been established between the childcare project, the Child Poverty Pathfinder, and the Local Fairness Initiative in Linlathen.

*Family 1 case study:*

This family has four children and they live on low income. Two of the children receive five sessions per week during term time at the School Aged Childcare/Early Adopter Communities Childcare Project. The children don’t access the holiday sessions as one of the parents is at home. The father had been engaging with the Child Poverty Pathfinder employability support and has managed to take up employment and has sustained it since he started. The mother has also been attending the weekly Linlathen Works drop-in with regards to employability support and has accessed training. Positive links made between the Local Fairness Initiative and Abertay University has given the family an opportunity to attend an information session on the university’s AHEAD program. Following the session, mum has enrolled on the program, which will enable her to move to a full time course at the university upon completion of AHEAD.

*Family 2 case study*

This family has three children and they live on low income. One of the children attend two sessions per week during term time at the Early Adopter Communities Childcare Project.

The mother accessed the Child Poverty Pathfinder weekly drop-in at Linlathen Works to gain support from the Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF). Mum was supported to access employment and has sustained it since she started. The father also is in employment.

**Theme B) BENEFITS AND ADVICE**

* **Financial Inclusion Advice in Schools – Morgan Academy Connect Worker**

*Case Study 1*

Referral from School. Widowed dad working full time, had never claimed benefit before. He was assisted to claim Universal Credit of £61.88 a week (this amount will increase as his award was based on his wages having a lot of overtime) and Scottish child payment of £25 per week. This equates to £376.48 per month. Due to this he advised he will not need to work overtime and will be able to spend more time with his son. Since seeing client in August, the school’s attainment officer has confirmed an upturn in the child’s attendance in school from end September to November.

*Case Study 2*

Referral from cluster school. Father took custody of his son through social work recently. A referral from Family Support worker at Glebelands was made for income and benefit maximisation. Dad is in receipt of Pension Credit, due to having custody of a child, receives an increase of £72.31 per week. Application was made for child benefit of £24.00 a week, Scottish child payment of £25.00 per week, Free School Meals and the School Clothing Grant. Due to being on Pension Credit his full rent is covered but due to a recent rent increase client had a shortfall of £60/month. This was resolved through the Housing Benefit team. The client is now better off to the amount of £633.31 a month. His son goes to summer club at the school twice a week. He is struggling to keep him occupied the other 3 days. So, I suggested going to boomerang between 1-3pm. He advised that his son loves this and actually prefers it to school club.

*Case Study 3*

Cold calling exercise was carried out for the Stobswell West. The family has two children, the father is a carer and his wife works. She is currently on maternity leave. An applications was made for Maternity Allowance through the DWP. This resulted in additional income of £127.26 a week. Scottish Child Payment application was also made for this family, meaning they received additional £50 a week, and a best start grant was also awarded - a one-off payment of £707.25 and food vouchers of £9.90 a week. The family was also supported in applying for Free School Meals and School Clothing Grant. Client received 2 one off payments totalling £857.25 and is now £815.36 a month better off.

*Case Study 4*

Client self-referred to the service. She has come out of an abusive relationship and her ex-partner was sent to prison. Client relied on her partner for everything and didn’t know what to do or what she was entitled to. Client was entitled to and was assisted to apply for Universal credit, Scottish Child payment and Free School Meals totalling £336.01 a week. She received one-off clothing grant of £390.00 and reduced the Council tax bill by £1532.87, through Council Tax reduction and Single person discount. Client was signposted to Women’s Aid and the Dundee International Women’s Centre for support which she has taken up.

**Theme C) ATTAINMENT AND CHILD POVERTY**

* **Cost of the School Day Case Study: St Paul’s Academy**

The school started a Breakfast Club in May 2023 and it has proved really successful as we are now providing breakfast for over 100 young people every day. We are based in the school snack bar which isn’t being used by catering at that point in the day, and we are staffed by a rota of volunteers (teachers and some support staff). Breakfast Club is open to all pupils, and we have had the occasional parent access it too.

We wanted to ensure that the breakfast could be provided completely free of charge so have applied for substantial amount of grand funding. In addition to utilising the school’s PEF money, so far we have been able to secure:

£1000 from Kellogg’s

£500 from Scotmid

£1500 from Tesco

£1000 from the Rotary Club

£200 from Dundee Heritage Trust

£300 from St Paul’s Parent Council

We provide: Toast and bagels with a variety of toppings, Porridge pots, Fresh Fruit. Tea and Coffee.

We carried out a small, informal survey after the first term and gathered some feedback from pupils about the reasons they come to breakfast club. Top 3 were, ‘It’s fun’, ‘The food is free’ and ‘It helps me feel ready to learn.’

* **Bairns at Home – a new project by Dundee Bairns**

Bairns at Home commenced on the 21st of September 2023, delivering home goods and vital home essentials which help children and families to thrive at home. Referrals are made by referral partners who have signed up to the project, who can select items from a weekly inventory made available by partner project, Big Hoose in Fife. The goods then arrive on a weekly basis by articulated lorry to the Dundee Bairns warehouse and are delivered out to referrers by Dundee Bairns staff in their electric vans, one of which was purchased with funding from the DCC Climate Fund. Goods delivered include things like bedding, nappies, toilet roll, cleaning materials, shoes and various other things which help make a house into a home.

Between September ’23 and April ’24 over 60,000 items have been delivered, supporting approximately 6,000 children across around 650 families in the city. Feedback from referrers supporting families presenting with varied issues, ranging from support to school workers dealing with school refusing students, to helping kit out community groups for family fun days, to holistically supporting a family in crisis very quickly with vital items to see them through a difficult period, suggests that Bairns from Home is a game-changing project for the city of Dundee, providing quick and flexible access to goods not usually on the table for those people working with children and families.

Feedback from some of the current referrers states:

*“Our families are all single parent families. Each family has its own struggles but most are affected by money and mental health concerns. It's obvious why this project is helping our families financially but emotionally it's been a great help also. Some of our parents are too anxious to go somewhere that they have not been before so wouldn't be able to access these donations any other way.”*

*“The family I am supporting at the moment are at risk of eviction, struggling financially, and have suffered previous domestic violence. Through Bairns at Home I have been able to access food, household items, towels, hot-water bottles, air bed, toiletries, cleaning products, and even cat litter. It has taken a huge burden off Mum, the family have been able to eat and be more comfortable. Children have been able to get warm clothes through the Cosy Bairns project too. Bairns at Home is a fabulous project and certainly needed for many families and it makes such a positive difference. It promotes positive mental health by alleviating stress. It provides basic items that make a huge difference to families who are struggling.”*

Bairns at Home continues to grow and develop – the hope is that more referrers will be able to onboard to the project in due course, as Dundee Bairns is working hard to extend the resource required in order to achieve this.

* **Care Experienced Children and Young People fund: Pupil Support Worker Team**

The team of Pupil Support Workers (PSW) are focussed on improving our young people's presence, participation and progress. This may take the form of 1:1s or group work.

With the introduction of MCR Pathways and the Young Scottish Talent programme in our schools they have formed close links with the school Pathways Coordinators.

What follows is a snapshot of some of the individual pieces of work undertaken in the last school year.

· An S5 pupil who had a challenging childhood before finding stability with her grandmother as her primary caregiver and who additionally took on the responsibility of being a young carer for her younger siblings, as her grandmother dealt with multiple health issues was supported to secure a volunteering opportunity at Dundee Disabled Children’s Centre. The pupil is keen to pursue a career in community education and saw this as a valuable addition to her CV. She has gone on to share her experience with others in school and encouraged them to look for opportunities. Subsequently this young person gained a Saltire Award and the local press ‘Gold Star Award’.

As a result of strong, trusting relationship with PSW, an S4 pupil who struggled with the rigours of a school day and continually avoided classes was supported to attend an alternative programme run by Fast Forward in conjunction with ScotKart, the local go-karting rink. He fully engaged and gained SVQ qualification in motor mechanics and was able to apply for a full time course at college.

The PSW met weekly with a pupil who felt that no-one in school understood them. They worked on a series of well-being activities, building relationships, improving confidence and tackling wider issue associated with late-coming, appearance and so forth. Again, having a trusted adult who listened resulted in a disclosure from the pupil which was able to be addressed accordingly and that young person now is happier in school and making good progress.

· In one school two care experienced young people experienced significant bereavements resulting in one now living with grandparents and the other with an older sister. Both pupils were coping well but it was clear that they struggled at certain, significant times – birthdays, Christmas., Mother’s Day and heavily relied on PSW support in school at these times. The PSW offered them the opportunity to work together in a ‘Seasons for Growth’ group. Both agreed and appreciated the opportunity to work together and explore the impact of change and loss on everyday life. Both pupils state that they now feel less upset in school and more able to concentrate in class. This is backed up by the fact that they are using their ‘out of class’ passes far less.

In another school one pupil sporadically attended the Champions Board. Her attendance was poor and she often avoided classes. Each time she attended the Champions Board she didn’t speak, rarely participated in activities or engage with other pupils but each time she arrived she was welcomed like the others, allowed to sit and observe and over a period she began to participate in chat and activities. She was invited to have 1:1 meetings with the PSW and began to engage more regularly in school. At the start of the year her attendance was 37% which rose to almost 80% by the end of the 3rd term.

* **Kinship Team**

Dundee City Council supports 429 children (as of March 2024) who live with kinship carers. This number includes sibling groups and is known as formal kinship care. For these children, kinship care is an alternative to being looked after by foster carers or being in residential care (and for some being adopted). All the above kinship carers receive a kinship allowance as introduced by the Scottish Government and paid by Dundee City Council in recognition of the valuable role kinship carers have in keeping children looked after within their families and community. Such financial support plays a crucial part in supporting the care that is provided by kinship carers and reducing the impact of financial stress and poverty.

In recognition of the increasing numbers of children in kinship rather than foster and residential care and in keeping with one of the key elements of Scotland’s Promise – that children should be able to stay with their families when they can – there is now a kinship team within DCC’s Children’s Services. The team has been in place since June 2022 and undertakes assessments of kinship carers (as required by legislation for looked after children) and has a key role, with the help of other agencies, to support kinship families.

The ethos of the team is to be responsive to the needs of kinship families. This requires identifying those needs by listening to what kinship carers, children and young people are telling us and responding to these unique needs. There are however some significant themes such as financial / practical help, housing, education and meeting the emotional / therapeutic needs of the child being cared for. The kinship team works closely with DCC welfare rights service to provide income maximisation assessments and advice. There are links with DCC’s housing department whereby additional social needs points are awarded to kinship carers whose housing does not meet the family’s needs (usually overcrowding). Relationships between the team and other agencies and services are developing with a focus on barriers to education, children and young people being active, and therapeutic services for carers / children and young people.

It is important to balance the need for help and support with a non-stigmatising approach, being mindful that kinship carers are part of the child’s family and friends network. This involves ensuring that not only are specialist resources available but that universal services are more accessible and responsive to the needs of kinship carers and the children and young people in their care.

**Theme D) SOCIAL INCLUSION AND STIGMA**

* **Dundee International Women’s Centre – Supporting BAME Women In the City**

This case study demonstrates the holistic nature of DIWC’s work and how staff support learners to achieve their goals.

K is a refugee and had only attended primary school for education prior to attending the centre. She moved to Dundee in March 2022. In August 2022 she started coming to our Beginners Everyday English classes. K had no family or friends within Dundee.

At first, she had trouble studying and remembering information because, as she told us, of the trauma she went through as child, but after a few months her teacher could see that her ability to learn was improving and she began to feel more confident. K started to attend our cooking class and would showcase recipes from her country and show the other women how to cook this. Along with this K attended our Friendship class and attended trips to local Dundee landmarks and learnt more about Dundee’s history and culture.

In March 2023 she decided she started to think she could study ESOL full-time and applied for the Transitional Pathways programme to move onto college. This is life-changing for her, and it further increased her confidence and desire to learn new skills.

She needed help to apply for a bursary, so her teacher checked what information and evidence she needed to provide and together they made a list. We supported K to access her universal credit account and use online banking to provide bank statements.

K was supported to access housing advice from Dundee City Council due to experiencing domestic abuse from her husband, this was disclosed following a bitesize learning session from our Respected and Equally Safe worker. At the centre we have a housing advice worker come in monthly from Dundee City Council to give information and advice to women seeking Social Housing along with helping complete forms therefore we made an appointment for K to come and discuss her housing options. For women where English is not their first language navigating forms, making telephone calls, and accessing help online can be extremely challenging.

The worker assisted K to complete housing forms to be added to the housing register and discussed options with her such as temporary housing and refuge. We supported K to report to the domestic abuse to Police Scotland. K had no trust in the Police due to the country she had come from, and she thought Police were not there to help. We explained how things work within Scotland and supported and advocated for K to the Police that she would require a translator to give a statement to Police due to her limited understanding of English. We showed K how to call Police, as she did not know you can call 999 in an emergency. K felt safe coming to our centre and it was here Police and other agencies would meet with her in a quiet confidential space to give advice and support.

K is now at college full time, has moved into a safe accommodation and has reported feeling safe and has noticed an improvement in her anxiety and low mood. K now has more control over her finances, which she never experienced when she was with her husband, has a safe space she can call home and is now independent, flourishing and has a support network of friends around her that she has met through the centre. She is also now aware of the laws regarding domestic abuse within Scotland along with her rights and how to report any concerns to statutory agencies. K still pops into the centre to use our free Wi-Fi to study and complete assignments, have a coffee and update us how she is doing.

* **Dundee Women’s Hub Case Study**

S is a 31-year-old woman who has experienced significant trauma in her life – including domestic abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, grief, substance and alcohol use and homelessness. S also has a very limited support network.

S was liberated from prison in August 2023 after a 10-month custodial sentence. She had received support from the Vice Versa service in the past but had not been in touch with the service since her release from prison.

Prior to her custodial sentence S was in a controlling relationship, and it was thought she had returned to this relationship. Historically, she was not allowed to spend much time out of her partner’s company, and her substance use was known to increase when in a relation with this person.

S had irregular attendance at her community pharmacy and no other agencies had heard from her. Upon further investigation, the Dundee Women’s Hub (DWH) coordinator established that she had recently been served a seven-day eviction notice as DCC Housing believed she was not staying at her flat. The DWH coordinator left a message with S’s community pharmacy asking her to contact the DWH, and she attended the hub on the same day.

Within DWH, S received substantial multi-agency support that would not have been possible without the collaboration of organisations in DWH. The following support was provided within 2 hours:

* DCC Housing support to withdraw eviction notice and ensure housing application up to date – this meant she was now no longer at risk of immediate homelessness.
* Brooksbank Centre support to access emergency gas and electricity funds, support to apply for Adult Disability Payment and arrangements made to help to complete the application form, also support to liaise with Universal Credit to avoid getting a sanction
* Vice Versa support to contact GP re physical and mental health and plan in place to support to attend.
* DWH provided emergency food and clothing for that day, foodbank referral submitted for following day.
* DDARS (Dundee Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service) transferred her prescription to a pharmacy closer to her accommodation as person S was having difficulty attending the current pharmacy because of the location.

*Present Time*

Person S is still supported by Vice Versa and DWH, and a support plan is in place. S has been provided with a one-month bus pass via Victim Surcharge Fund as she had disclosed she was relying on partner to fund travel, sometimes restricting her movements. She has been offered a permanent tenancy – she is being supported to view tenancy by vice versa staff.

*Observations*

The wraparound support would not have been available if the Dundee Women’s Hub didn’t exist. Multi agency support and collaboration at the women’s hub have been instrumental in engaging and supporting S.

**Theme E) HEALTH INEQUALITIES**

* **Midwives and Health Visitor Referral Pathway to Council Advice Services**

Council Advice Services receive direct referrals from Midwives and Health Visitors. This project is part of NHS Tayside with DCC, Angus Council and Perth and Kinross taking part. The referrals come in through their system, Badgernet and our team make contact with the patients offering advice and assistance with matters relating to welfare benefits, making any relevant claims. In the 2023/24 year, we received 293 referrals, resulting in £696,166.15 of financial gains. Below is a case study of one of the maternity cases referred to us.

35-year-old woman was referred by her midwife to see if she would be entitled to any benefits as she was pregnant with her 4th child and was concerned about finances. She worked around 8hrs per week, self- employed, earning a maximum gross income of £100.00 per week and her husband was also self- employed earning a maximum gross income of £500.00 per week. They live in a private let tenancy costing £650 per calendar month. She was claiming £55.80 per week in child benefit.

We completed a benefit check based on her current circumstances and they are entitled to approximately £168.43 per week in Universal Credits. Because they have UC entitlement this means they also qualify for £25.00 per week, per child, Scottish Child payment and have entitlement to Best Start Grant one-off payment of £353.65 and Best Start Food payment of £4.95 per week.

Prior to the referral, they were receiving only £55.80 Child Benefit along with their wages. Following the advice and assistance, they are now receiving £168.43 per week Universal Credit, £75 per week Scottish Child Payment in addition to the Best Start Foods weekly. This equates to a financial gain of £299.23 per week.

Once their new child is born this will increase further to £340.13 per week as they will have entitlement to Child Benefit and Scottish Child Payment for a 4th child.

* **NHS Health and Work Programme**

The NHS Health and Work Programme (formerly Healthy Working Lives) has broadened its offering to local businesses, which has led to better partnership working and increased capacity within workplaces through implementing fair work practices and promoting work as a route to good health and reduced financial hardship.

Through the engagement work with employers, it has been identified that current economic pressures, effects on wages, staffing levels, morale, workload and the cost-of-living crisis in general are all contributing to increased levels of stress and anxiety for employees and businesses. Other issues causing concern are the effects of in-work poverty, menopause and menstrual health, physical health conditions and bereavement.

Priorities reflected in the training programme in 2023/24 included:

* The key reasons for absence from work (Mental Health and Musculoskeletal disorders)
* Payment of Real Living Wage & progression for low paid workers
* Flexible working
* Inclusive & healthy workplaces
* Supporting key groups & sectors experiencing greatest health inequalities to improve access to and retention in work.

Over the year, a total of 27 training courses and workshops to 341 individuals were delivered which is almost double that of the previous financial year. Post course evaluations indicate the value of the training for participants, with many stating that they have increased confidence, knowledge, and skills to address the topic in their area of work. They are also more likely to raise relevant health and wellbeing issues and to have supportive conversations with employees, initiate relevant workplace adjustments, and have greater awareness of existing tools and sources of support.

**Theme F) HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES**

* **Housing Support Case Study**

Peter (66) was referred to housing support by rent recovery team, he was in substantial rent arrears and had presented at Dundee House late on a Friday afternoon appearing dishevelled and advising he had no food.  Peter explained to me that he had decided to give up,, that he could not see any way out of his situation. He said that he had no money or food and his electric had run out around a week prior. He had also not been paying his phone bill so his phone has been disconnected. He explained to me that he had worked as a taxi driver all his life but since covid his work has been reducing and in the last year his health has been deteriorating so he has not been able to pay his bills. Peter has never been involved with any support services and was not aware of what help was out there for him. He said he went to Dundee House as he did not know of any other option and an officer from rent recovery team for a food parcel. As this was late afternoon on a Friday it was too late for a food bank referral, but an emergency foodbank is run by council staff, so Peter was given a few things to keep him over the weekend.

When I visited Peter, he was in a bad way and told me he was having a diabetic emergency, the only food he had in the house was brown sugar and he was eating that but it was not helping. He also had no power in the house having run out of electric.  I arranged for an emergency food parcel and arranged to return the next working day when he was feeling better. At this time I contacted Dundee Energy Efficiency Advice Project to arrange a fuel voucher.

I visited Peter the following Monday. We completed a support assessment and support plan and some of his issues and how these were resolved are noted below:

* No income, stopped working mid January and had no savings or benefits. Discussed case with welfare rights and was advised to claim state pension. Application submitted online. Was awarded small payment of around £50 on 04/03/24 and receiving his full pension payment from 02/04/24. Application also submitted for pension credit to top up Peter’s State Pension.
* Application completed for Adult Disability Payment. Awaiting decision.
* While his applications for social security are pending, Peter was awarded £136 fuelbank vouchers, received 4 food parcels and £310 from the Scottish Welfare Fund
* Peter had no working phone. Worked with him to find an old phone that he was able to charge and provided a free pay as you go sim. He is able to receive calls on this and phone 999 in case of an emergency.
* Rent arrears of around £4300 and had a court date for mid February. Contact made with rent recovery and Dundee Law Centre for a 12-week moratorium to hold off court action while Peter is being assisted with his benefit applications. Application for Housing Benefit done and a Discretionary Housing Payment hardship payment completed for arrears. From 04/03/24 Peter was awarded weekly Housing Benefit to cover his full rent and received £4200 hardship payment for his rent arrears.
* Gas on a credit meter and Peter had around £2700 arrears. Application sent to DEEAP for assistance to pay off the arrears. Peter was awarded the full £2700 debt balance which would be credited directly to his provider.
* Peter had a letter from HMRC explaining he has not submitted his tax return for the last 2 years and has around £1000-£2000 of penalties. Phoned HMRC and arranged for the special assistance team to help him with his accounts as he kept no records. Assisted to complete the returns to date and given information on how to appeal.
* Condition of home quite poor, had no working cooker, sofa was broken and mattress soiled. Community Care Grant application submitted to the Scottish Welfare Fund and Peter was awarded new cooker, 3 seater sofa and mattress. He was also awarded £900 towards a house clean.
* **National Literacy Trust Dundee Hub**

National Literacy Trust set up a literacy hub in Dundee, known as Read Dundee, with the aim ofimproving family confidence and skills through literacy. The Hub has been set up for a period of 10 years to ensure long term impact on literacy and attainment for children and young people. National Literacy Trust, Dundee was fortunate in securing funding last year from the Dundee Carers’ participatory budgeting process. Our programme ‘Family Read, Talk and Play’ was delivered to 27 families in the East End and Maryfield areas of the city. The programmes’ aims were: to reduce isolation through meeting others in similar circumstances; encourage families to enjoy time together at home when it was difficult to get out and about; to increase parental confidence in supporting children’s literacy and general communication skills.

One of the parents asked to be a volunteer Literacy Champion. A busy mum with a keen interest in reading, she wanted to spread her love of reading beyond her family home. She is now helping to keep community bookshelves stocked, initiating book clubs in a variety of different settings in the city and helping gift books at community events. Below is a case study interview that National Literacy Trust carried out with this volunteer.

What did you think about the Resources offered through Family Read Talk and Play?

*“We got lots of books… a fun thing that the kids like to use is the magnifying glasses about the house, so it’s not just reading resources. There’s pens, colouring, there’s paper. It’s all about making books a good thing. I really like the card game book – I think a torch might be good to include, because then you can do the whole ‘read at night’ thing…”*

How did you find the weekly meetings?

*“It’s good to meet new people, I actually didn’t know anyone that’s there so it’s nice to make these new connections. Sausages game is a favourite. So having the conversations about things that we can do. Also, the play sessions. My participants have really engaged well with the play sessions. J still playing with his little keyboard men that he made. I think it’s good and K really enjoyed being able to do what she wanted to do and engage that way.”*

In terms of literacy gains – do you think the programme has benefitted your family?

*“I think it has and I think it has made me think about junk you can turn into a story, My dad made up a story called the spaghetti tree, so we’ve been talking about that again and drawing pictures about it and J sat and made a presentation last week. So I think just the general conversation about words and talking. And I’ve been really mindful to change a little bit as a parent, in the past I wouldn’t read a bedtime story if they were not in bed by 9.30pm whereas now – last night it was 10 o’clock but I read a story because I think it’s important. K still struggles to engage but there’s a huge difference in her writing at school. She’s writing a full sheet whereas before it would be one or two answers. General chit chat – K likes to read cook books, I think that’s more her niche and it’s just good to know that it’s ok not to read a novel. That was news to me that you don’t have to finish a book. I would still stick with a book once I’d started it.”*

Would you recommend the Family Read, Talk and Play programme to other families?

*“I have been recommending it to people. I have been telling them about the programme because you get books and the sessions have been great. There’s a girl I know who is a carer, although she doesn’t identify as a carer, and she’s come along to one of the play sessions. The session are not just about carers getting engaged into an activity, it’s about recognising their caring role and I think that’s supported in the conversation. You build your peer support.”*