

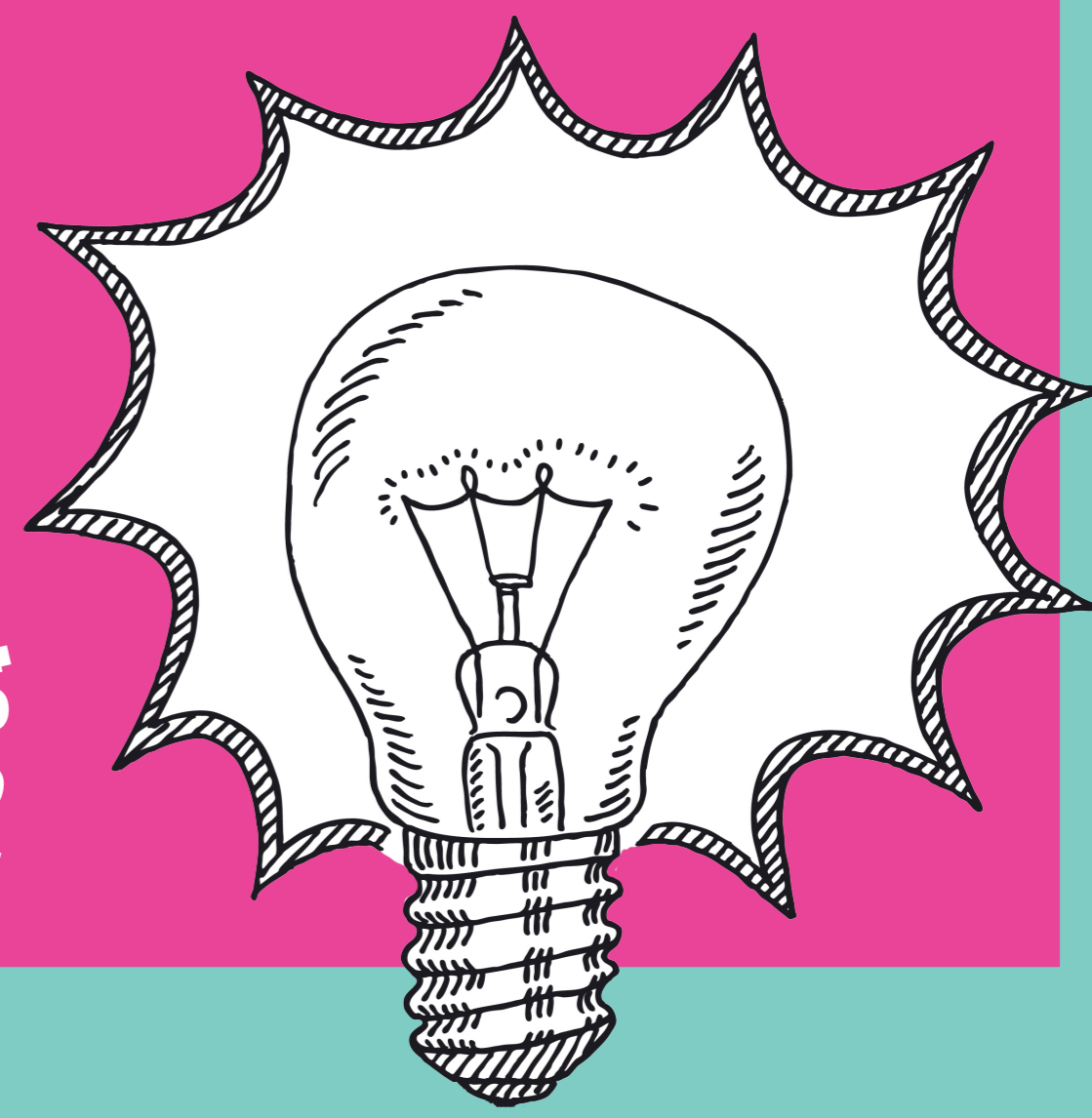
Little Explorer's Nurture Day (LEND)

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effectively use research to improve the situation for children or families or to address issues in personal relationships

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centre for research on families and relationships

What research was used? Why was it appropriate?

The Early Years team and partner services across the CPP* – led by the EYC* Programme Manager, used Growing Up in Scotland research (along with other appropriate research and emerging policies and strategies), to inform the EYC improvement work, and the GUS research has been integral to the success of the EYC in East Dunbartonshire where improvement work has been targeted towards addressing the gap between our least and most deprived communities.

GUS research has given us an insight as to what is happening for children living in areas of deprivation; and crucially – what is not. The 10-year study has been particularly influential in our approaches with children and families and through the use of test of change; this has in turn shaped our strategic plans for prioritising Early Years. GUS has revealed the specific areas we had to target to improve outcomes by tackling inequalities in the early years and build resilience in the face of disadvantage, including:

- Home Learning Environment and the impact on cognitive development - Reading, playing, talking, picture books
- Parental health – including parenting support and advice
- Breastfeeding
- Smoke free homes
- High quality Early Learning and Childcare – improve vocabulary/ cognitive development
- One-to-one style, friendly, appropriate and timely support and advice for our mothers most in need – who are least likely to engage in formal services as they dislike group formats.
- Building on high parental satisfaction with Health Visitors, especially within disadvantaged areas, by expanding access to this support in an accessible way.

This research information and findings sparked the idea of the 'Little Explorer's Nurture Day' (named by parents!) with a vision of using these areas as the basis for test of change to reduce inequalities in the early years in Hillhead, through utilisation of an early intervention and preventative approach.

Who benefitted from the research?

Children and families within the Hillhead area of Kirkintilloch benefitted from this EYC project, where we designated a Thursday as Little Explorer's Nurture Day (LEND) in the new community centre, and we used 'test of change' based on GUS research, to try out many ways to get local families involved in their local community and build self-efficacy.

Our main aims and the actual outcomes are as follows:

- Increase number of services on offer: There was a few test of change required to entice the different services commit to delivering on the Thursday – including getting the right storage; the cost of letting rooms; appropriate room sizes. An average of 10 services/projects took place each week in the 9 week pilot with a high point of 14 on one of the weeks. These included: Men behaving Daddly – family football; Story Stars reading fun project; Toy Lending Library; Baby Drop In; Free Healthy Breakfast; Toddler and buggy walks; Zumba and Waist Winners; Imagination Library (LAC)* project; Cook up a Storm family cooking project.
- Increase number of families attending LEND: There were lots of PDSA's* carried out in the various projects to maximise attendance; these included leaflet drops, meeting parents in local ELCC* centres, publicising through schools, talking to parents and carers at other services and projects; telling parents about it at health visiting appointments. An average of 40 families attended the centre each week over the pilot period; with a high point of 83 families on one of the weeks!
- Place families are reporting feeling more confident: local families are reporting feeling more confident in the centre; borrowing toys from the toy library whilst getting information on breastfeeding and taking part in storytelling sessions with their children. Families are moving between services and making new friends in their community. Some parents and carers are starting to feel confident enough to begin to take ownership of some of the projects/sessions.

How did you get people interested in the research?

There was activity at a strategic level, through the Delivering for Children and Young People Partnership group – where the EYC Programme Manager set out the plans for the LEND improvement project using the GUS data to direct the work and get permission from CPP partners to go ahead; at a manager level – from across multi-services where GUS data was used to inform service plans – and at a practitioner level – where there is an awareness of the GUS findings. Through Scottish Government, there was national 'bootcamps' and 'learning sessions' where improvement projects were shared – and presentations from the findings of GUS are shared to inform the Scottish policy landscape. It is important to have an understanding from across the levels of involved teams, as to the reason behind test of change. Staff at all levels are knowledgeable and interested in the findings of GUS and how we can use these to reflect and improve.

We used a 'family learning' asset based approach to encouraging practitioners to respond to GUS findings by identifying where their own work could address the areas for improvement; and together we created a timetable of interventions that parents could just 'pop in' to the new community centre, and there was lots on offer.

How did you evaluate the impact?

More families are engaging in community based projects, building their confidence and self efficacy and getting timely and appropriate support and advice. The EYC Programme Manager used the model for improvement to collect data from all the projects that were going on to measure success/impact. Data collected included quantitative – the number of people attending the centre; and qualitative – the feedback from the families.

The alignment of Place and the Early Years Collaborative (EYC) improvement methodology, and use of research such as GUS, is resulting in universal services for early years that are meeting the needs of children and families. More effective collaborations are building the core capacity of the services that children and families come into contact with; practitioners are equipped with partnership knowledge and are able to use the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and early intervention. The EYC is providing a systematic, multi-agency approach for planning and evaluating improvement work to close the gap between our most and least deprived children and young people during their crucial early years.

What did the team learn from the project?

We learnt that the GUS findings ring true. By using this easy to understand and accessible information to inform our work, we are making an actual difference to the children and families living in one of the most deprived areas of Scotland.

The LEND project continues to be successful; parents from one of the most deprived areas in Scotland are choosing to attend, make friends and engage in services in safe surroundings, where positive parenting and healthy choices (like breastfeeding, healthy eating, playing, fun, laughter, picture book reading) are all taking place. The GUS research shaped the project from the outset - by pinpointing where to start, and what improvements would have the biggest impact on children's lives. Without the GUS research for guidance, this project may never have happened.

A new Scottish Government research publication 'Tackling inequalities in the Early Years: Key messages from 10 years of the Growing Up in Scotland Study' was released towards the end of the pilot timescale. The research evidence in this report confirms that we are focussing on the right areas for improvement, and sets us new challenges going forward, with key areas for development including a renewed focus on the Home Learning Environment and how we can encourage this better; a continued focus on nursery rhymes, reading, playing and promoting attachment. We also hope to encourage more families to drop-in to the baby clinic, as the 10 year study highlighted that parents from areas of high deprivation are satisfied with Health Visiting practices, but do tend to prefer one-to-one support, rather than groups - and from there, use Family Learning approaches to build confidence and self-efficacy and encourage them to join in groups, like Story Stars.

LEND is a truly preventative project and as such it is difficult to provide evidence as to the future impact. It is hoped that LEND will become self-sufficient and part of community life; where accessing appropriate support and advice is normalised and families feel empowered to access these services at a time when they need it, stopping problems escalating in the future.

"Just speaking to you totally calmed me down and I left feeling 'I can do this'"
Parent

*CPP - Community Planning Partnership

*PDSA - Plan, Do, Study, Act

*EYC - Early Years Collaborative

*ELCC - Early Learning & Child Care

*(LAC) - Looked After Children

*GUS - Growing Up in Scotland