Partners in Literacy Survey 2009: A snapshot on local support for literacy

by
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Executive Summary

Partners in Literacy Survey 2009 provides a baseline of the types of partners that support literacy locally and how they do this. It also gives a snapshot of the barriers and opportunities to supporting families, the reasons why some partners signpost families to support for literacy and an outline of opportunities for extending partnerships.

Key findings for service providers and local authority workers include:

- 60% of respondents support local families by offering a universal service, 40% offer targeted services.
- Respondents did not identify any differences in approach between engaging all families and those who could be defined as disadvantaged.
- Across both universal and targeted services, the most successful approaches were identified as those where services took time to build relationships with local families.
- Respondents identified a lack of parental confidence as the most significant factor as to why local parents or carers are not engaging in services.
- 75% of respondents said they frequently or occasionally met parents with difficulties in reading, writing or communication
- 65% of respondents indicated that they frequently signposted parents to support for their children. The most important reasons for this were that it is a formal part of their work, and informal reasons such as personal motivation or previous experience.
- Of those who never or rarely signpost parents, the biggest explanation for this was because it is not part of their job description.

- The survey findings highlights valuable new opportunities to extend reach and support to local families by working with partners who are not currently being identified as useful links to families.

Key recommendations include:

- Work is needed locally to ensure that services provided to support literacy are effectively supported by good outreach practice.
- There are opportunities to improve services themselves by working across partner agencies to extend the reach of literacy support.
- There is a need to assess what the most effective and sustainable ways will be to support partners to take a more proactive role.
- The findings suggest that responsibility for addressing literacy needs to be embedded in the systems which support staff.

The context

In 2009, (and over a six week period) the National Literacy Trust (NLT) hosted a survey that was offered to the 21 local authorities making up the Partners in Literacy network at that time.

Partners in Literacy (PiL) is a pilot project, funded from 2009 by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families and delivered by the NLT in partnership with local authorities. In April 2010, the pilot entered its second and final year. The aim of the project is to support more families to create language rich homes, promoting speaking and listening, reading and writing. The project is working with local authorities to build strategic and multi-agency commitments to literacy with a particular focus on using partnerships to extend reach to local families. It has a focus on the audiences for whom improved literacy can make the biggest difference: disadvantaged families and families with children aged from birth to five.

The survey was drafted in consultation with the local authorities and 13 authorities sent it out to a range of local partners. Response rates ranged from two to 252 responses in each authority with 553 responses nationally.

The 13 local authorities that sent out the survey adopted a variety of techniques to ensure that it was answered by as broad a range of partners as possible. Details of partners contacted and the range of approaches used to highlight the survey to partners locally can be found in **Appendix A**.

The full survey is listed in **Appendix B**.

Purpose

Partners in Literacy is working with local authorities to develop a flexible model to support the development of multi-agency and strategic partnerships. Through the pilot, the local authorities are developing and testing the Partners in Literacy Framework. A core part of the framework is to map:
- Local provision which supports literacy in the home. This will enable provision to be joined up, improve referrals, signpost and identify gaps and duplication in provision.
- Partners who work closest? with local families, particularly the target families for the project. This will enable partners to be engaged and to explore how they might support local families with literacy needs.
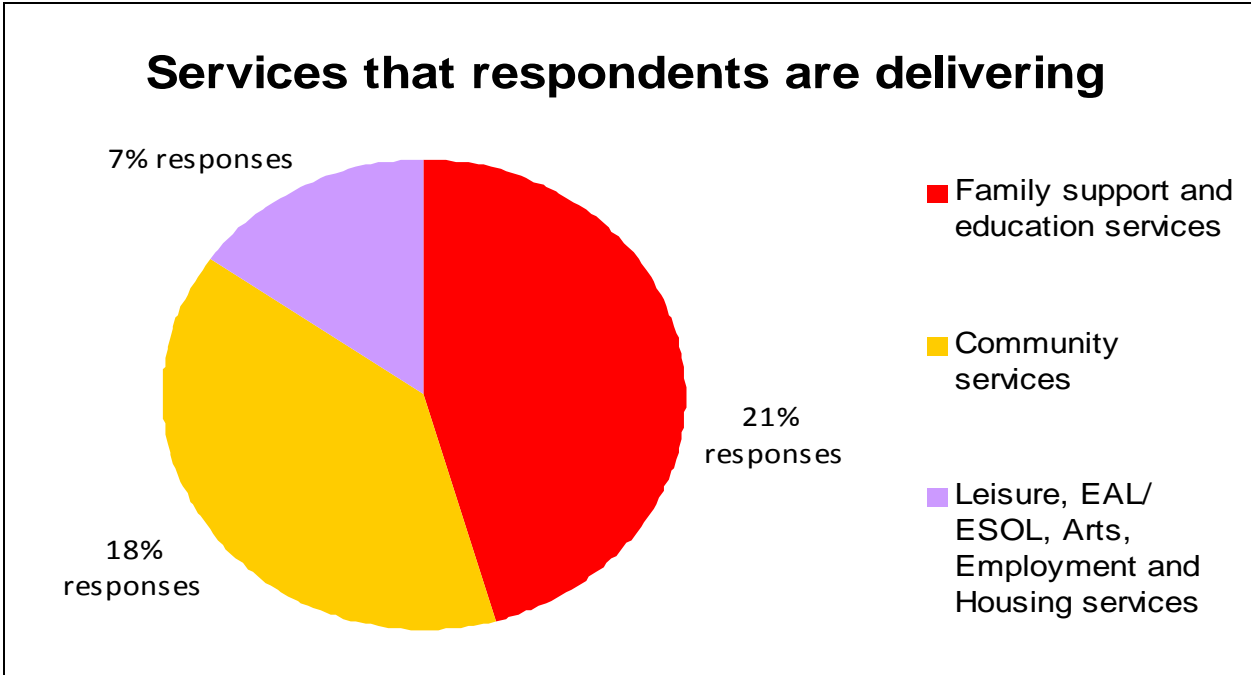
The survey was designed to be part of a range of mapping and baselining activities (services, initiatives and events) which support literacy locally. Wider activity included consultation with families, face-to-face meetings with partners and identifying a range of data sources (for

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example MOSAIC data and Indices of Social Deprivation) to identify priority families and key partners.

In addition, it was hoped that the survey would help to baseline which partners support literacy locally and how, and would be one way of tracking the impact of the PiL model locally.

Whose views does it represent?

The survey asked respondents where they worked and how they (or the service they managed) supported local families. The following graph shows that most respondents provide family support and education services.

Services that respondents are delivering

- 7% responses
- 21% responses
- 18% responses

Legend:
- Family support and education services
- Community services
- Leisure, EAL/ESOL, Arts, Employment and Housing services

Analysis: The survey gives a snapshot of the partners who are engaged with literacy locally either by delivering services that support literacy or by seeing literacy as relevant to the families they support and therefore taking time to answer the survey. As a result, the survey could be seen as a baseline for the PiL partnership approach. We would expect responses from a greater range of services in future surveys demonstrating the success of the approach locally.

In addition, the survey highlights opportunities to extend links with particular non-traditional services such as Leisure, EAL/ESOL, Arts, Employment and Housing services.

How do respondents work with local families?

Respondents were asked a variety of questions to understand how they work with and support local families. The following graph shows that most of the respondents offer a universal service to support local families.

How respondents support local families
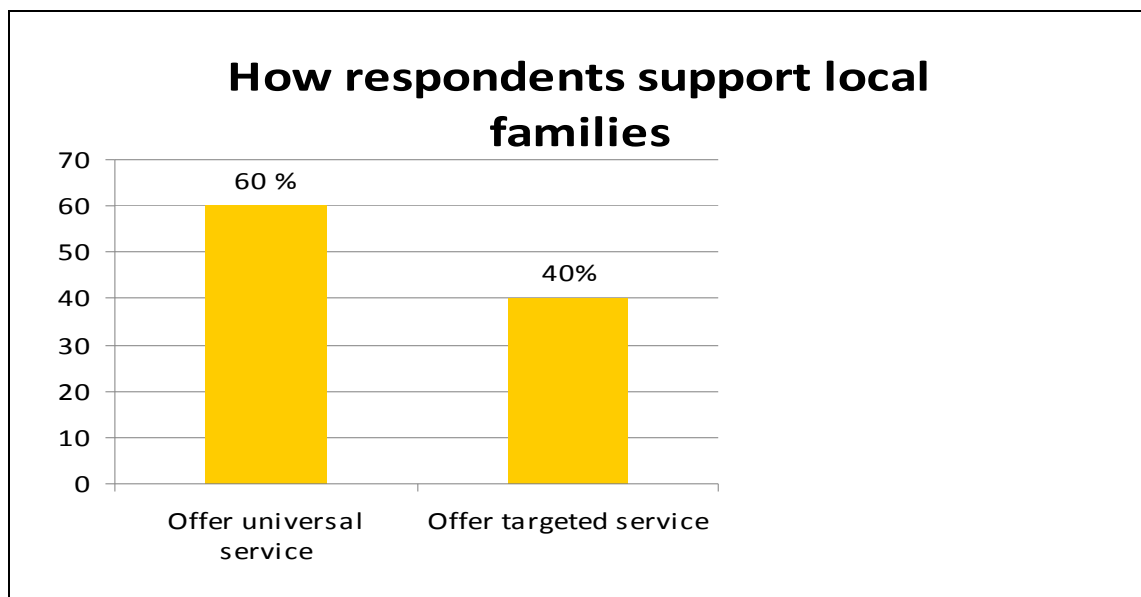
The following graph shows that of the 40% of respondents that reported offering a targeted service, this was mainly focused on supporting disadvantaged families locally or was targeted to a particular area or locality.

What targeted support focuses on.
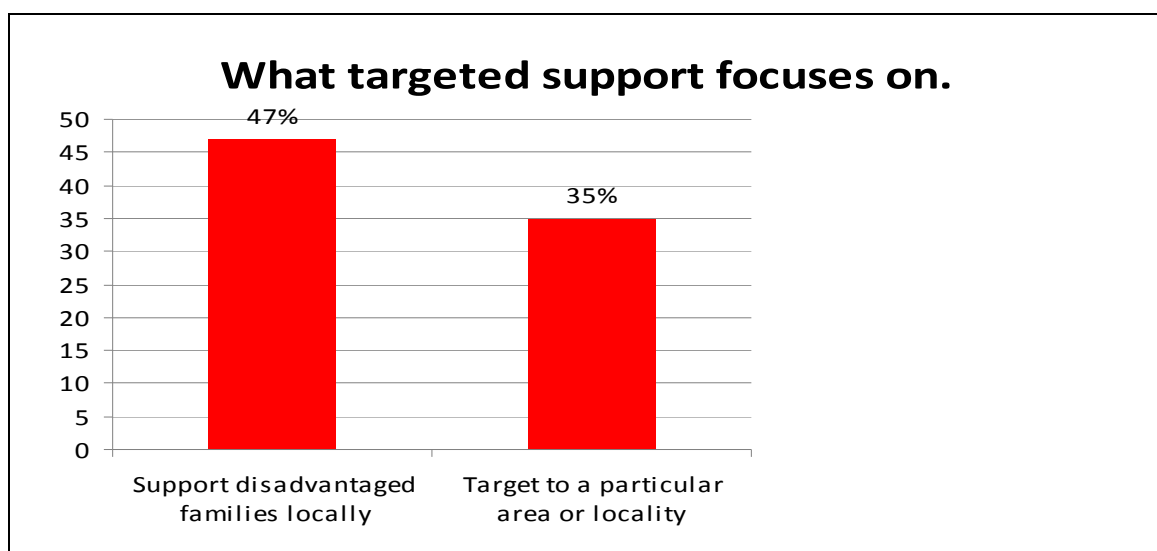
Partners targeting disadvantaged families defined these families as those living in deprived areas. However, very few answered this question (only 3% of the total number of respondents). This could reflect a lack of awareness among respondents about the detail of how, and why, the services they deliver are targeted.

The survey asked a range of questions to understand if local partners work differently, or offer different support, for disadvantaged families versus the support offered universally.

Overwhelmingly, respondents to the survey did not identify any differences in the support they offer to families from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, there were far fewer responses to questions asking for details about the kind of support offered to disadvantaged families. For example, 90 respondents indicated that they offer targeted support to local families. However, only five answers were given to questions about what kind of support this was. This compares to over 130 responses to questions relating to universal support for families.

Barriers and opportunities to supporting families

The survey asked respondents for their views on what helps to successfully engage local families in services. They were asked the question twice, once in relation to all families and once in relation to disadvantaged families.

Respondents did not identify any differences in approach between all families and those who could be defined as disadvantaged. Across both universal and targeted services, the most successful approaches were identified as those where services took time to build relationships with local families. Ensuring that staff members represent the local community and parents or carers was identified as the least important factor.

Respondents identified lack of parental confidence as the most significant factor in local parents or carers not engaging in services. Again, ensuring staff represent local community and parents was voted as the least significant factor.

Analysis*:* In order to extend the reach of literacy support to priority families, PiL coordinators seek to identify partners who have access to these families. The partners that responded to this survey did not, in the main, identify themselves as having reach to these families although, by offering a universal service, it is likely that many of them will have regular contact with the Partners in Literacy priority audiences.

It is interesting that respondents did not generally see the need for different approaches when targeting disadvantaged families in their area. This is at odds with the NLT's experience of the need for dedicated and tailored outreach and engagement activities in order to ensure that the families with the greatest need access services. Increasingly local services are being realigned to reflect the need to resource outreach and the growth of posts such as Parent Support Advisers, Family Support Workers and Children Centre Outreach Workers recognise this. Successful family learning and community literacy projects also dedicate significant resources and time to building trust with local families, acting as a bridge between families and more formal provision.

NLT research and local consultation undertaken as part of PiL suggests a disconnection between those who deliver local services and the communities accessing them. This can represent a real barrier to engagement and uptake. The survey shows that further work could be needed locally to ensure that services provided to support literacy are effectively supported by good outreach practice. It also highlights opportunities to improve services themselves, for example by supporting partners to consider opportunities such as commissioning community groups to deliver services and working across partner agencies to extend the reach of literacy support. There could also be opportunities to improve local support for literacy by ensuring local services are informed by consultation with priority audiences.

Supporting and signposting families with/to support for literacy

The main purpose of the survey was to understand how local partners support parents and carers to support the literacy of their children and how partners respond when they meet parents and carers who, themselves, have a literacy difficulty.

The survey highlighted that many people working locally often encounter people with literacy needs. 75% of respondents said they frequently or occasionally met parents with difficulties in reading, writing or communication.

Respondents were asked two sets of questions, one relating to action taken to help parents with their own skills and one relating to support given in relation to parents or carers to engage with their children's literacy.

65% of respondents indicated that they frequently signposted parents to support for their children. The following chart demonstrates that the reasons for this: because it is either a formal part of their work, for example in their job description, or for informal reasons, for example they personally think literacy is important or because they have knowledge relating to literacy such as from a previous role.

Reasons given for signposting parents to support for their children

46%

54%

■ It is a formal part of their work

■ Informal reasons - e.g belief that literacy is
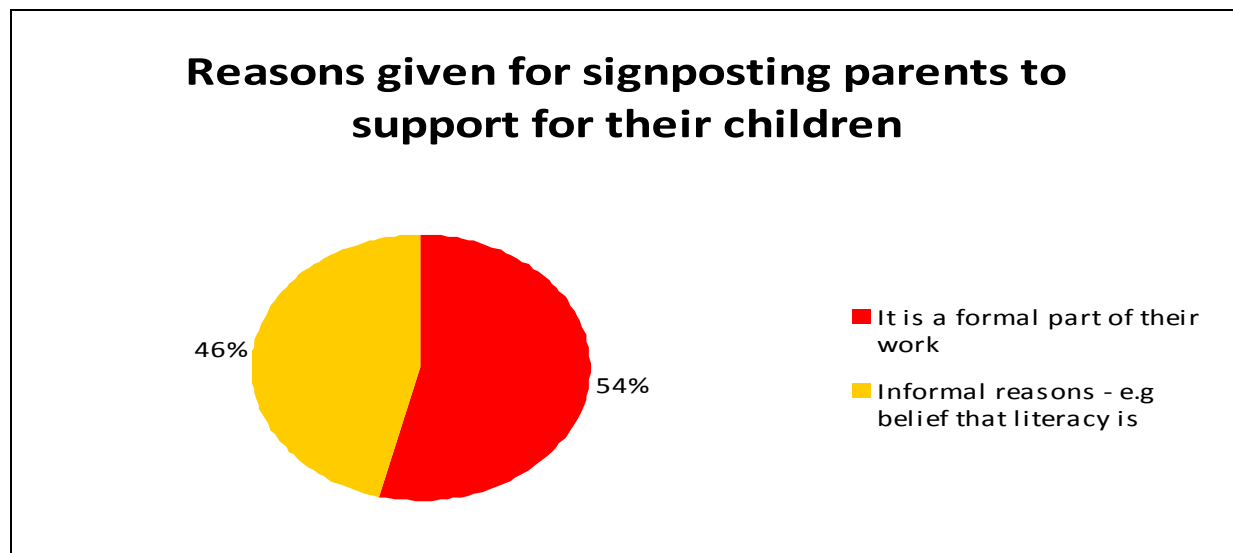
Of the 35% of respondents who never or rarely signpost parents or carers to support for their children's literacy, the single biggest explanation for this was reported as because this activity is not part of their job description (77%). However, when partners were asked what they would need to help them to signpost to support they generally identified that more information on what support was available would be helpful (58%).

When asked about offering parents support for their own skills, only half of respondents said they signposted parents they identified as having literacy difficulties to support. Again, partners offered similar reasons for why they signpost (formal and informal reasons) and for why they do not (not a formal part of their role).

Partners were asked to rank reasons for what would motivate them to signpost families to support for literacy.

Top 3 reasons which would motivate partners to signpost families to support for literacy:

• Identify there is a literacy need.
• Its part of the service they deliver.
• The parents ask for support.

The reasons ranked least important were that signposting is a formal part of the way they work for example, offering information to parents or carers.

Analysis: The survey showed that there is a substantial gap between the need for literacy support locally (with 75% of respondents reporting that they frequently or occasionally meet parents with literacy needs) and a corresponding response (with 35% of partners never or rarely signposting to support).

In addition, positive action to meet a perceived literacy need seems reliant on informal reasons with personal motivation or previous experience ranking highly as reasons prompting action. Respondents who did not signpost to support identified that they did not do so because it was not part of their job description.

The survey has clearly identified a need for PiL Coordinators to assess what the most effective and sustainable ways will be to support partners to take a more proactive role. The findings indicate that responsibility for addressing literacy needs to be embedded in the systems which support staff, for example job descriptions and professional development plans. In addition, the findings point to opportunities to embed literacy awareness and support into partner practice (and therefore planning) so that it becomes integrated into the normal business of partners. Coordinators will need to balance these approaches with the support which respondents identify they need i.e. information (leaflets and toolkits) about what support available locally.

Existing partnerships

The survey asked respondents if they worked with partners who were particularly helpful in reaching or working with all families and also with disadvantaged families.

Social workers were identified as a useful partner to reach or work with disadvantaged families. Otherwise, useful partners for engaging all families were identified as (in order of popularity):

Useful partners for engaging all families

Partners who do not provide useful links to families
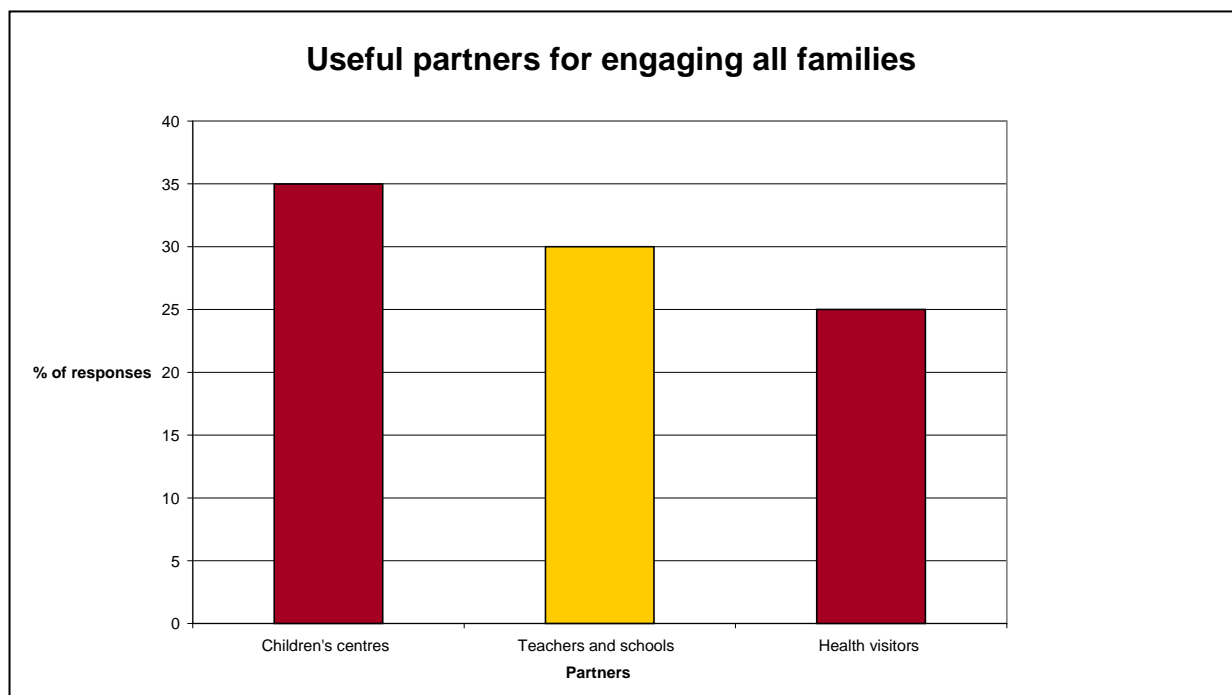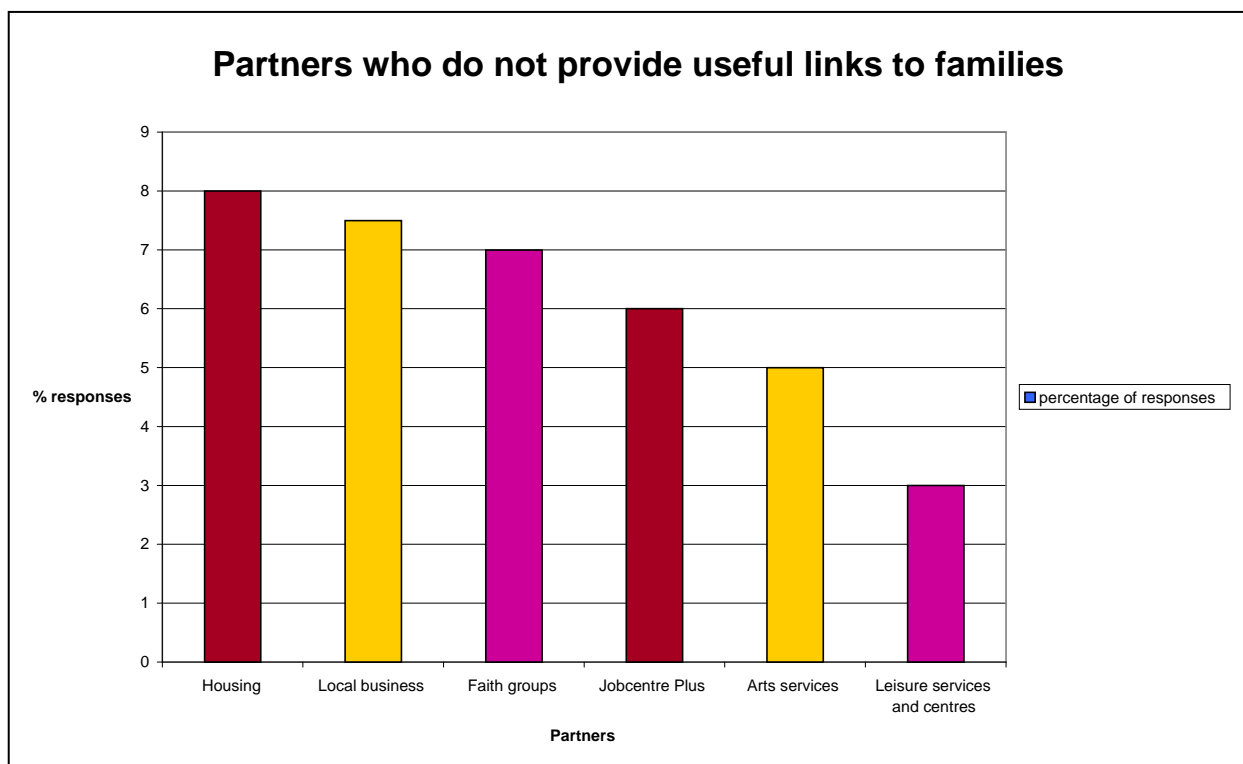
Analysis: The survey findings show that there are valuable new opportunities to extend reach and support to local families by working with partners who are not currently being identified as useful links to families e.g. Housing and Faith Groups. PiL Coordinators will need to take time to map which partners have contact with the priority families and plan to engage them directly if they are not already part of established literacy networks locally.

Data

The survey sought to identify the kinds of data that partners collect in order to see where this could be shared effectively.

76% of respondents reported that they evaluate their services for local families. In terms of data, respondents stated that they most commonly collected postcode, age of children and ethnicity. The least likely data to be collected related to the eligibility of children for Free School Meals and parental income levels. Middle-ranking data included highest educational level and employment status.

Analysis: PiL coordinators might use these survey findings to discuss new, or additional, opportunities for partners to evaluate their services.

Next steps

The survey findings were discussed within the PiL local authority network at a workshop. As a result, it was clear that supporting local partners around literacy awareness and signposting needed to be addressed as part of planned PiL activity. A number of pilot authorities are now developing and sharing training models.

Local authorities which participated in the survey, have also used their local results to consider with partners how to improve the coordination of provision to support easier signposting.

Findings have also helped to identify gaps in partnerships or opportunities to refresh existing links.

The NLT intends to run the survey again in the autumn of 2010, providing the survey as a voluntary resource for local authorities in the PiL network. The aim will be to offer the survey on an annual basis to local authorities in the network, providing an opportunity to benchmark progress made to widen the number of partners engaged in supporting literacy and any changes to practice.

Appendix A: Examples of how the survey was circulated by local authorities

The NLT provided local authorities with their own copy of the national online survey. Local authorities were also provided with a template email which could be sent out to local partners, introducing the survey and including a link to it. Local authorities varied in their approaches, utilising existing contacts and network to circulate the survey and asking partners to also forward it on via their contacts.

The following represent some examples of how local authorities approached this.

In Sheffield the survey was sent out via the School Point System, emailed to private and voluntary early years settings and was sent out to partners via a number of steering groups across Sheffield. In addition it was put on the council intranet. In total Sheffield received 49 responses.

In Wiltshire the survey went out to the following partners Schools Library Service, Wiltshire Pathways, via the Book Start Coordinator's Mailing List, through Early Years colleagues, Adult and Community Learning, Heritage Services and Arts colleagues, Wiltshire Activity and Sports Partnership, various community organisations (for example, Ask, Home Start, Family Mediation, Rural Needs Initiative), Primary Strategy Manager, Family Learning contacts, direct mail to each Children's Centre and on the intranet with particular partners name checked as the survey being relevant to them, for example Health and Housing. Wiltshire received 59 responses.

In Kent the survey was promoted via colleagues in Children, Families and Education Directorate, via Children's Trust website, out to partners on Local Strategic Partnership, Public Health Board, Community Safety Group, Public Service Board, Economic Board, District Community Development Managers, Parish and Town Councils and Library Managers. Kent had 252 responses.

In Knowsley the survey went out to partners in Play Service, LAC Service, Portage, Volunteer Reading Service, Foster and Adoption Service, EAL Service, Local Neighbourhood Managers, Speech and Language Service, Family Centres, Childminder Coordinator, Knowsley Community and Voluntary Service, Adult Education Services. The coordinator also tried to utilise mailing lists where possible, for example EY Consultants sent survey to all PVI settings. She endeavoured to speak to all staff personally beforehand to talk over survey and recommends admin staff as a helpful partner as they sent out memos asking for responses. Knowsley received 42 responses.

In Derbyshire a similar approach was taken to the above authorities but the survey was also sent to PCT locality managers. They received 57 responses.

Appendix B: The survey

Suggested introduction to the survey

In <mark><X department/service area of council></mark> we are looking at how different areas of the council can better work together to support families to promote literacy within their homes. We are also looking at how the council can work better with external organisations and groups in order to reach local families and better support them with their literacy.

Sharing your knowledge and expertise through this survey can help us to improve our reach to disadvantaged families and support them to improve their literacy. We really appreciate your help.

This survey should take no longer than 20 minutes. If you have any questions about this survey or about local work to support families with their literacy then please email <mark><insert Coordinator's email address>.</mark>

We would like to follow up on your answers and to know where you work so we can understand your answers better. Only one piece of information is mandatory and it is marked with an asterix "*" All other contact details are optional so you can keep your answers anonymous if you prefer.

- What is the name of your organisation/team/department/service area?*
- What is your job title?
- Name
- Contact details

Definition of terms used in the survey:
Families – in this survey "families" is understood to include foster and adoptive families, single parent families and families where the primary carer is not the child's parent.
Parent – this refers to anyone who has responsibility for caring for a child and could include other family members.
Disadvantaged families – families living in deprived ward areas and local priority groups, for example BME and EAL families, young/teen parents, single parents, foster families, unemployed parents, disadvantaged families.
Literacy – early language development, speaking and listening, reading and writing.
Service – is taken to include projects, activities and programmes which support families and parents

How do you work with parents?

1) What service(s) do you deliver to local families? (please tick all that apply):
- Adult education
- Family learning, for example family literacy
- Services in Children's Centres, for example Baby Song Time
- Family play sessions
- Parenting support
- Family health and wellbeing, for example cookery, child fitness
- Health services, for example GP, midwife, health visitor, counselling
- Community safety
- Housing
- English as an additional language/ESOL
- Family support, for example in Family Centres
- Child education, for example in schools
- Early years services, for example childminding
- Library services, for example Rhyme Time
- Arts services, for example theatre groups
- Community services
- Leisure services

- Employment (for parents)
- Other (please specify)

2) What is the predominant age group of the children in families you deliver service(s) to? (please tick all that apply):
- Pre-natal care
- 0-4
- 5-7
- 8-10
- 11-15
- 16+

3) If you deliver services direct to children, what is the predominant age group your service focuses on? (please tick all that apply):
- 0-4
- 5-7
- 8-10
- 11-15
- 16+

3) a] Are your services generally for all families or are they targeted to particular families? (Please tick one)
  - o For all families - move to Q4
  - o Targeted to particular families - move Q3b
  - o Don't know - move to Q4

3b] If your services are targeted to particular families are they generally targeted to:
  - Disadvantaged families locally (based on earlier definition)
  - Particular family members, e.g. Dads
  - Families in a particular geographic area
  - Other (please specify)
  - Don't know

3c] If targeted to disadvantaged families locally, which ones?
- Families with parent(s) in prison
- Families living in deprived areas
- Black Minority Ethnic (BME) families
- Single parent families
- Unemployed parents
- Homeless families
- Foster families
- Refugee & asylum seeking families
- Teen parents
- English as an Additional Language (EAL or ESOL) families

Move to Q4e-h

4) a] In your opinion, what are the three things that make a successful approach when reaching and working with families? (Please rank in order of priority)
  - Having an emphasis on fun family activities
  - Materials and resources used are welcoming and accessible
  - Taking time to build relationships and trust with families
  - Parents take an active role within service and act as role models
  - Working with partners that families trust
  - Having flexibility around service location

- Having flexibility around service timings
- Staff are supported and confidence in engaging with parents
- Staff reflect local community and parents
- Other, please specify [free text]

4 b] In your opinion, what are the key things that hinder a successful approach when reaching and/or working with families? (Please rank in order of priority)

- Perceived parental lack of interest
- Parents lack confidence
- Parents have had bad experience with services previously
- Parents don't think they have a need for literacy support
- Parents don't think the service is aimed at them
- Service timings are inconvenient for parents due to work hours/lack of childcare
- Service location is inconvenient/problematic for parents
- Families for whom English is an additional language
- Staff are not representative of local community
- Practitioners lack confidence to engage with families
- Other, please specify [free text]

4 c] Do you work with any partners who are particularly helpful in reaching and working with families?
- Yes - move to Q4d
- No or don't know - move to Q5

4 d] If yes, who are they? (please tick all that apply)
- Family learning
- Faith groups
- Teachers and schools
- Local community groups
- Local businesses and employers
- Jobcentre plus
- Health services, e.g. health visitors/doctors/midwives
- Midwives
- Library service
- Local leisure centres
- Social services
- Housing sector
- Children's centres
- Family centres
- Adult education
- Community safety
- Early years services, for example childminding
- Arts services, for example theatre groups
- Leisure services
- Other (please specify)

[4e-h qs for those who answered 2a targeted to disadvantaged families]

4 e] In your opinion, what are the key things that make a successful approach when reaching and working with disadvantaged families? (Please rank in order of priority)

- Having an emphasis on fun family activities
- Materials and resources used are welcoming and accessible
- Taking time to build relationships and trust with families

- Parents take an active role within service and act as role models
- Working with partners that families trust
- Having flexibility around service location
- Having flexibility around service timings
- Staff are supported and confidence in engaging with parents
- Staff represent/reflect local community
- Other, please specify [free text]

f] In your opinion, what are the key things that hinder a successful approach when reaching and working with disadvantaged families? (Please rank in order of priority)

- Perceived parental lack of interest
- Parents lack confidence
- Parents have had bad experience with services previously
- Parents don't think they have a need for literacy support
- Parents think that the service is not for them
- Service timings are inconvenient for parents due to work hours/lack of childcare
- Service location is inconvenient/problematic for parents
- Families for whom English is an additional language
- Staff are not representative of local community
- Practitioners lack confidence to engage with families
- Other, please specify [free text]

g] Do you work with any partners who are particularly helpful in reaching and working with disadvantaged families?
- Yes - move to Q4h
- No/Don't Know - move to Q5

h] If yes, who are they? Please tick all that apply in the box below and indicate how these partners have been helpful.

Please tick all that apply	How have these partners been helpful?
Family Learning Service	
Faith groups	
Teachers and schools	
Community Safety Unit	
Local community groups	
Jobcentre Plus	
Health services, e.g. health visitors/doctors/midwives	
Library service	
Local leisure centres	
Social Services	
Housing	
Children's centres	
Family centres	
Adult Education/Learning Service	
Early years services, for example childminding	
Arts services, for example theatre groups	
Leisure services	
Other (please specify)	

5) Are your services for families and/or parents evaluated by the families and parents that use them?

Yes/No/Don't know

6) In your services do you collect any of the following information from the families and/or parents that use your services (please tick all that apply):
- Home postcode
- Highest education level of parents
- Household income
- Employment status
- Ethnicity
- First language spoken in home
- Eligibility for Free School Meals
- Age of children in family
- How service has changed attitudes
- How service has changed behaviour

Signposting and working together to support families

7) a] As part of your current role, have you ever met parents who you think have difficulties with reading, writing or communication? E.g. not understanding written material you provide/ have difficulties completing forms.
Note: this question refers to those who have a skills issue, not those for whom English is an additional language.
- Yes, frequently
- Yes, occasionally
- Rarely
- No, not to my knowledge
- Don't know

7 b] As part of your current role, do you talk to parents about how they can support their children's early language development, speaking and listening, reading or writing? (Please tick one)
- Frequently - move to Q7c
- Occasionally   - move to Q7c
- Rarely – move to Q7c
- Never - move to Q7d
- Don't know - move to Q7d

7 c] If you answered "frequently" or "occasionally", is this because (please tick all that apply):
- It is a formal part of your role/job description
- You feel it is important and informally choose to discuss it with parents
- You have received training to support you to do this
- You have received information to support you to do this
- You have knowledge/understanding to support you to do this from a previous role or previous experience
- Other, please specify

7 d] If you answered "never" or "don't know", is this because (please tick all that apply):
- It is not part of your role/job description to do this
- You don't feel confident talking to parents about their literacy needs
- You don't have the information which would support you to do this
- You don't have the training which would support you to do this
- Other, please specify

8) a] As part of your current role, do you signpost parents to support for reading, writing or communication **for themselves**?
- Frequently - move to Q8b
- Occasionally - move to Q8b
- Rarely – move to Q8b
- Never - move to Q8c
- Don't Know - move to Q8c

8 b] If you answered "frequently", "occasionally" or "rarely", can you let us know why you signpost people to support (please tick all that apply):
- They ask for support
- You identify that they have a literacy need (either informally or formally)
- It's part of the process when people come to your service
- It's part of the service you deliver
- It's part of the end stage/onward transition of your service

Move to Q8e

8 c] If you answered "never" or "don't know" can you tell us what would be helpful to you so that you could feel able to signpost parents to literacy support (please tick all that apply):
- Support/approval from your line manager
- Incorporated into your job description/your team's work
- Access to information for the families – leaflets, website etc
- Access to information for you e.g. leaflets, seminar/event
- Formal training
- Other, please specify

8 d) If you ticked "access to information for you" can you tell us what kind of training and/or information you would find helpful? [free text]

8 e) Can you let us know where you signpost parents to for literacy support? [Free text]

9) a] As part of your current role, do you ever signpost parents to support for reading, writing or communication **for their children**?
- Frequently- move to Q9b
- Occasionally - move to Q9b
- Rarely – move to Q9b
- Never - move to Q9c
- Don't Know- move to Q9c

9 b] If you answered "frequently", "occasionally" or "rarely", can you let us know why you signpost parents to literacy support for their children (please tick all that apply):
- They ask for support
- You identify that their children have a literacy need (either informally or formally)
- It's part of the process when people come to your service
- It's part of the service you deliver
- It's part of the end stage/onward transition of your service

Move to 9e

9 c) If you answered "never" or "don't know", can you tell us what would be helpful to you so that you could feel able to signpost parents to literacy support for their children (please tick all that apply):
- Support/approval from your line manager

- Incorporated into your job description/your team's work
- Access to information for the families – leaflets, website etc
- Access to information for you e.g. leaflets, seminar/training day
- Formal training
- Other, please specify

d) If you ticked "access to information for you" can you tell us what kind of training and/or information you would find helpful? [free text]

e) Can you let us know where you signpost parents to for literacy support for their children? [free text]

10) Can you see any specific opportunities in your role/work when you could signpost families to informal or formal literacy support? Please give us details, for example you might feel that when people sign up for a service it would be helpful to give them some information about literacy support. [Free text]

11) Can you see any specific barriers or obstacles in your role/work which would prevent you signposting families to literacy support? Please give us as many details as possible. [Free text]

12) How do you think council departments could work together to better support local families with their literacy? [Open-ended]

13) How do you think council departments could work together with external organisations in the local community to better support local families with their literacy? [Open-ended]