



Local authorities improving life chances

A review of a new approach to
raising literacy levels



Emily McCoy
May 2011

Transforming Lives

Contents

page 1	Foreword
page 3	Executive summary
page 5	Chapter 1 The challenge: building literate homes
page 7	Chapter 2 Our approach to increasing parental involvement in literacy in the home
page 12	Chapter 3 Developing a new local approach to literacy
page 20	Chapter 4 Evidence of impact
page 24	Chapter 5 Why does this approach work? Critical success factors
page 28	Chapter 6 Sustaining and developing the approach
page 31	Our national support
page 31	Thank you
page 32	Appendix A An overview of the pilot at a national level: set-up and national networks
page 34	Appendix B Evaluation framework
page 35	Appendix C Networks and frameworks supporting the pilot

Foreword

The new public service environment means that we have to reinvent our approach to raising literacy standards. Many of the structures, resources and frameworks which have provided the scaffolding for our work over the past decade are gone or have been changed beyond recognition: the end of the National Strategies; the end of the operating framework for local service planning and monitoring; the revision of the Curriculum and, for the National Literacy Trust, the end of national government funding of our programmes. All of these challenge us to redefine how we address the problem of raising literacy standards.

At the same time the challenge of addressing low literacy has never been so vital, as the link between low literacy and poverty is likely to strengthen. The reduction of the public sector workforce, the increasing focus on employment as the solution to poverty and the reduction in welfare support mean that low literacy skills will make individuals and families even more vulnerable.

There is a fundamental commitment from Government to address literacy.

“Education is about freeing people from imposed constraints, liberating them from the accidents of birth, allowing them to acquire the knowledge, skills and qualifications which allow them to choose the satisfying job they have always aspired to and the rich inner life which brings true fulfilment.”

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education.

Public policy continues to grapple with the fact that the most powerful factor determining literacy levels – the home learning environment – lies outside of its control. Tickell's recent review of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum has called for the early years curriculum to be recast as a partnership curriculum jointly owned by settings and parents, allowing it to impact more powerfully on the home learning environment. Frank Field's review of poverty recognised the importance of effectively working with families in breaking inter-generational patterns of poverty which he recognised were closely allied to literacy levels.

Partners in Literacy – the National Literacy Trust's two year project with local authorities to raise literacy standards by improving literacy support for the most vulnerable families – has had a massive impact. We are particularly proud of the difference it has made to the numbers of families accessing literacy support and on the confidence of vulnerable parents and carers in supporting their children's literacy. This report explains how it worked and provides invaluable research to drive the development of a new approach to support literacy standards which will work with the new public service context with a focus on improving the home learning environment.

Three lessons sit at the heart of this report:

1. **The potential of existing services can be unlocked to allow them to reach the most vulnerable families to support their literacy.** This means increasing the reach of services and also increasing their efficiency.
2. **This is achieved through stronger local planning and marketing.** The use of existing data and new research in Partners in Literacy allowed local literacy provision to extend its reach by working
3. **The driving factor in achieving this is partnership.** Local authorities added huge value by working effectively with community partners and by joining up services. The local authorities' partnership with a national charity, the National Literacy Trust, enabled the approach, ensured it was built on research and facilitated local partnerships such as the volunteer community Literacy Champions in Rochdale. This approach allowed communities to address literacy levels using their own capacity and resources.

Partners in Literacy demonstrates that low levels of literacy are not an intractable issue – they can be addressed and that existing resources within local authorities, as well as within communities, can be deployed against them with success. It also demonstrates that families can be supported and the home learning environment boosted through a partnership between the third sector and the public sector.

This report offers a route map to all who are committed to addressing the increasingly urgent issue of low literacy, through the most powerful approach of working with families in a radically new public policy context and in a changing civil society context. I commend it to everyone who is committed to raising literacy standards.

Jonathan Douglas
Director, National Literacy Trust

Executive summary

In 2009, the National Literacy Trust received funding from the then, Department for Children, Schools and Families. The funding was to develop a new and strategic approach to improving literacy levels through partnerships with local authorities. From the start, our work rested on our commitment to ensuring that support for literacy is targeted to the audiences who need it the most. We were determined that any framework developed took account of the singular importance of the home learning environment. In 2008, we undertook a review of research into the role of families and the home environment in developing a child's literacy skills. The following key findings shaped our partnership with local authorities:

Families: parental involvement is a more powerful force for academic success than other family background variables.

Early years: the earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer-lasting the effects.

The home: parents have the greatest influence on the achievement of young people by supporting learning in the home rather than in school.

Role models: even at age 16 parental interest in a child's reading is the single greatest predictor of achievement.

Disadvantage: rates of low literacy are highest in disadvantaged communities and low literacy is a barrier to social mobility.

Our consultation with local services and national partners at a conference for local authority representatives and third sector partners convened by the National Literacy Trust in 2007¹, highlighted that good practice in engaging vulnerable families in literacy support rested on effective partnership practice. Feedback highlighted how good practice often relied upon relationships between individuals in services and agencies and their personal commitment and motivation to engaging families. Rarely was it underpinned by a rigorous and strategic approach to addressing low literacy. The result was some excellent practice targeting vulnerable families but limited to small areas or individuals. Many at the conference felt this good work was vulnerable to cuts and limited in its reach. Delegates agreed what was needed was for local authorities, and their multi-agency partners, to make literacy in the home a strategic priority. Only this could deliver the reach and sustainability needed to shift inter-generational low literacy.

Funding from government enabled us to work with nine local authority pilots, supporting them to develop a new and robust planning process to influence literacy in the home. Evidence from the pilots showed that this approach, which rested on community-wide partnerships, engaged parents and carers, supporting them to undertake literacy activities in the home. Parents reported greater confidence in their role within literacy development. Many families were given access to resources to support literacy services as well as physical resources such as books and family learning bags.

The pilots demonstrated that by adopting a strategic planning approach they were able to extend and enhance local partnerships. These partnerships added value to existing literacy provision and provided the chance to extend the reach of local support, positively

¹The conference was held under the Family Reading Campaign title.



influencing home literacy practices among target families. This report explores in detail how local authorities implemented a rigorous but flexible framework. It explores the themes of the approach, the evidence of impact and critical success factors which include:

- **A framework:** for assessing need and developing strategic planning for literacy.
- **Capacity to develop the approach:** a lead officer to support the development of partnerships.
- **Senior commitment:** when a literacy strategy is not just championed at a strategic level but is owned and driven by it.
- **Partnership with the National Literacy Trust:** in a survey sent out to the local authority network in February 2011, 100 per cent of respondents said they would recommend working with the National Literacy Trust to improve literacy levels.
- **Evidence:** engagement of partners and senior managers relied on strong evidence of need and of the impact of a partnership approach.
- **Evaluation:** partners need to be equals in planning, data collection and evaluation and this could be supported with strong senior engagement.

Throughout all the pilots it was clear that at every level (frontline practice, changes to planning and to strategy) change was driven through collaborative practice. Many of the other critical success factors listed here enabled partnerships to flourish. Local service providers, and other community partners, simply needed the opportunity to reflect on literacy in order to change practice and achieve benefits for local people. It is heartening, in this time of economic constraint that so much can be achieved through a collective effort and willingness to collaborate.

This report explores how local services shifted to better meet the needs of local families, how partnerships were formed and what impact this had on local support for literacy.

The report is therefore not just a review of activity and an evaluation of impact. We hope it will be a resource for local authorities and other partners seeking a new and sustainable approach to improving literacy levels.

Further resources are available via the National Literacy Trust website. We also offer our time to local authorities, working in partnership with them to develop and evaluate a literacy strategy for their local area.

The National Literacy Trust calls on all local authorities to consider the role of low literacy in life chances. We remain committed to the difference a strategic approach to literacy can make. We will continue to work in partnership with local authorities and other local partners to ensure that no child grows up without the literacy skills they need to succeed in life.

For more information see www.literacytrust.org.uk/communities

Chapter 1

The challenge: building literate homes

Poor literacy skills are part of a vicious cycle of factors that lead to disadvantage and poverty of opportunity. Research shows the links between low literacy and crime, poor health choices, low educational attainment and unemployment. Low literacy levels continue to be associated with the poorest pupils and families².



Recent reviews of child poverty³ and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)⁴ have identified early language and literacy as building blocks for children's lives and a vital consideration in narrowing the gap in life chances experienced by children from poorer homes. Parental influence continues to be highlighted as the most significant factor in life chances, including literacy development.

Government policy over the last fifteen years has striven to engage parents in the education of their children. However, the bulk of investment in literacy has been via statutory provision (particularly through the National Strategies). This investment promoted increases in standards but results show that across England improvements have now plateaued⁵. The gap in attainment between children on free school meals and their peers remains an issue and research consistently demonstrates the supreme influence of the home learning environment in educational outcomes. Teachers and early years practitioners continue to wrestle with how to raise standards when they are underpinned by familial, and inter-generational, attitudes and a lack of engagement in literacy activities in the home. Across the United Kingdom one in six people struggle with low literacy skills. These trends in literacy suggest strongly that a new approach to addressing low literacy is required and that this approach must place literacy in the home at its centre.

²Dugdale, G. and Clark, C. (2008) *Literacy changes lives: An advocacy resource*, National Literacy Trust.

³A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives, Department for Education (April 2011).

⁴Dame Clare Tickell, *The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning*, Department for Education (March 2011).

⁵Data suggests national increases in standards in English at Key Stage Two 2000-2007 with standards reaching a static level from 2007 onwards.

Research⁶ consistently indicates that the home learning environment is a crucial factor in predicting, and developing, children's literacy skills and their future life chances. Parents are a child's first educator. A child's family and home environment has a strong impact on his/her language and literacy development and educational achievement. This impact is stronger during the child's early years but continues throughout their school years. Many background variables affect the impact of the family and home environment (such as socio-economic status, level of parental education, family size, etc.) but parental attitudes and behaviour, especially parents' involvement in home learning activities, can be crucial to children's achievement and can overcome the influences of other factors. Several recent studies found that parents with low literacy levels are less likely to help their children with reading and writing, feel less confident to do so, are less likely to have children who read for pleasure and are more likely to have children with lower cognitive and language development levels.

A survey⁷, provided by the National Literacy Trust and sent out across the pilot authorities in 2009, highlighted the level of literacy need and the gap in local response. Over 500 responses were collected across a range of community partners and local service providers. Seventy five per cent of these reported frequently or occasionally meeting parents with literacy difficulties. Of these 48 per cent said they rarely or never signposted these parents to support for themselves and 54 per cent said they rarely or never signposted parents to support for their children. Findings showed that a third of respondents (35 per cent) rarely or never talked to parents about how they could support their children's literacy development.

Any policy aiming to improve literacy standards cannot be limited to formal educational settings, where children spend only a small proportion of their time. It needs to embrace the family as a whole and recognise the opportunities to engage and support families which exist across the whole community and across all services. We must consider how all of these opportunities can be exploited to ensure that parents are partners in their children's education from the very beginning of their children's lives. We must aim to increase parental confidence and increase their access to advice, information and resources which can help them support their children's early language and literacy as recommended in the EYFS review.



⁶All research referred to in this opening section can be found in Bonci, A. (revised 2011) *A Research Review: the importance of families and the home*, National Literacy Trust.

⁷McCoy, E. and Mottram, E. (2010) *Partners in Literacy Survey 2009: A snapshot of local support for literacy*, National Literacy Trust.

Chapter 2

Our approach to increasing parental involvement in literacy in the home

In 2009, the National Literacy Trust was awarded a grant from the then, Department of Children, Schools and Families. The grant was to establish if local authorities could influence home literacy practices through a strategic and partnership approach to literacy. The Government also wanted to understand if common lessons, or approaches, could be identified so that local authorities across England could be encouraged, and supported to, develop this approach in the future. Over two years (April 2009 to March 2011) the National Literacy Trust supported nine pilot local authorities that received a grant. The grant supported coordinator posts to develop the approach locally with the remaining funds supporting a national manager and a support officer. Work took place under the project name Partners in Literacy. We also worked with 12 additional local authorities that received no funding. Further details of the project set up and pilot recruitment are at Appendix A.

The pilot authorities were provided with a framework for activity which aimed to increase parental involvement in literacy in the home through:

- **Needs assessment:** investigating the scale of low literacy, identifying vulnerable families and researching their needs.
- **Auditing local support for literacy:** mapping resources and identifying partners.
- **Improving literacy provision** to meet family needs more effectively.
- **Extending the reach** of support to vulnerable families.

Details of the framework are at Appendix B.

The National Literacy Trust supported the local authorities in this process, providing direct support and resources as well as hosting a learning network which enabled local authorities to learn from each other.

2.1 Needs Assessment

Context

Pilot authorities were asked to begin their work by establishing the local context for literacy and opportunities for influencing parental engagement through partnership working. In most cases there was no local precedent for planning for literacy development outside of statutory provision. Literacy levels, in terms of Foundations Stage and Key Stage data, were available but wider considerations such as literacy levels across the whole community, among the adult population and the full picture of available local resources and literacy support had rarely been considered. Where precedent existed, research was relatively new (for example catalysed as part of the 2008 National Year of Reading in Sheffield) or was piecemeal due to limited capacity.

All local authorities reported that initial research was vital, helping them to make the case for a new approach and underpinning planning and evaluation by establishing local need, available resources and areas for improvement and innovation. Findings shaped the direction of the project, provoked questions, kick-started partnership development and information sharing, gave insight into services, identified training needs and gaps in services, and helped identify key barriers for families and individuals. Crucially, the results also provided the building blocks for a strategic approach, making it possible to coordinate provision and develop a local

“literacy offer”, bringing details of local provision together in one place. This was the first step in supporting signposting and enabling more families to access support.

Authorities developed a variety of different approaches to finding and collecting data and other information. Approaches were influenced by a range of factors, such as the size of the authority, the position of the “Coordinator” (or lead officer) collecting the information within the authority, the presence of existing partnership networks, previous knowledge and the availability and quality of existing data. Authorities concluded that these were not “one-off” activities. They quickly established ways for partners to help keep information up-to-date on an ongoing basis.

Local research: investigate the scale of low literacy, identify vulnerable families and research their needs

In most cases the local authorities were easily able to access data regarding standards in early years and in later Key Stages. This helped to identify localities where poor results clustered as well as particular groups who were underachieving. The pilots also found it helpful to consider this information alongside data sets from outside the education arena, for example considering data related to disadvantage. By using both data sets to plan activity, they ensured a focus on communities, and families, with the greatest need.

Derbyshire focused work in lower Super Output Areas with the highest indices of deprivation, the highest birth rate for children and the highest concentrations of children achieving less than six points in communication, language and literacy at Foundation Stage.

In **Wiltshire**, Mosaic classification data was used to identify the poorest streets and neighbourhoods. Work was targeted to these areas.

In many cases low adult literacy rates had long been suspected but no national or local data was available post 2003⁸. Many local partners spoke to the Partners in Literacy Coordinators about encountering low literacy but there was often little concrete evidence to support this prior to the survey provided by the National Literacy Trust in 2009⁹. The evidence base around inter-generational low skills made this gap in evidence a real concern for some authorities. Coordinators undertook a range of activities to try and establish a local picture of need before planning took place.

Knowsley sought to gain information via partners through a local conference, by sending out the National Literacy Trust survey to local services and through face-to-face meetings. This was reported as a typical response among partners: *“We are seeing more and more children who have to help their parents to read letters and information.”*

The Knowsley Coordinator also accessed data collected elsewhere in the council to build a picture of local families, for example ethnographic research undertaken as part of the Knowsley Young People’s Commission. This added a qualitative layer of data which informed planning: *“Whilst most parents are supporting their children to do their best it is clear that too few have the capacity and reach of more affluent families.”*

Some authorities had already established priority audiences for literacy through previous work. This was usually the case where literacy, in terms of schools standards, was seen as a high priority for the council and where analysis had been done to establish underachieving groups.

⁸Department for Education (2003), *Read Write Plus, Skills for Life Survey*

⁹National Literacy Trust (2009), *Partners in Literacy Survey: A snapshot of local support for literacy*

In **Sheffield**, families with English as an additional language (EAL) and looked-after children were recognised as a priority across council services. An Ofsted inspection highlighted the issue of children cared for by childminders, pointing specifically to needs around childminders accessing training and development. Other initiatives had identified vulnerable families such as the children offered free childcare via Sheffield's Two-Year-Old Pilot, and other child poverty projects. All of these audiences became the focus for targeted work for literacy.

Discussions with local partners demonstrated that although there was often good provision to support literacy it was often not accessed by those who needed support the most. Many pilots undertook consultation with local families to understand what the barriers were. This was done by cooperating with existing research (for example utilising opportunities provided by consultation for the Child Development Grant in Lambeth) and interviewing families in children's centres and libraries (Wiltshire, Suffolk and Coventry).

Consultations undertaken with families accessing services identified that many parents were reading with young children but often did not understand why their involvement was crucial. It raised issues about how existing good practice within homes could be extended and supported further by services.

Authorities were able to access families not engaged with services (Knowsley consulted with 69 families via the play service, baby health clinics and a financial inclusion roadshow). In Derbyshire (consulting with families on children's centre outreach caseloads) they identified some significant issues that framed planning.

These included:

- Many parents were not aware of their influence as role models for their children's learning.

- Parents often felt that support available was not relevant to them: it was seen as too formal, offered in a course format (and therefore unappealing and often intimidating) and was not related to what they felt were their real priorities, for example debt management and family relationships.
- Families were reading a wide range of materials – most usually magazines, websites and text messages – but this literacy practice was not reflected in provision offered.
- Parents shared that they did not feel confident to support their children's learning and this was often due to their own low skills.

Derbyshire felt that these were common responses from parents consulted:

"I can't commit to a course."

"I don't want to do stuff that's got no real meaning."

"As far as I'm concerned it's their job to teach her stuff, not mine." ie. children's centre staff.

These findings shaped local planning for a literacy strategy in Derbyshire. In particular it was felt that to improve literacy levels planning should take account of issues such as:

- **Access** to support (considering issues like cost, time, transport, childcare, confidence in accessing support and support offered in neighbourhoods).
- **Shape** of support (how it is advertised/promoted as well as content) .
- **Purpose** of support (making it more relevant to families).
- **Involvement** of volunteers and a wider group of partners supporting families such as family resource workers (extended services clusters), family intervention project workers and the Family Signposting Service.

2.2 Audit local support for literacy

The pilots were asked to investigate the full range of support and resources available to help local parents and carers in supporting literacy in the home. This activity focused on mapping local literacy provision and identifying new partners who were working with vulnerable families and could become part of a collective local solution to addressing low literacy.

Local provision

In no area had literacy provision been brought together to enable members of the public to easily find support or to help partners signpost individuals or families. The following quote from the Coventry Coordinator represents the picture across most of the pilot areas:

“Although there is a wide variety of provision, we established that there was no one place for parents/carers or practitioners to go to access what was on offer. Some of the provision is advertised on the Coventry City Council website but it is dispersed through different pages according to the services delivering the provision.”

Local coordinators used a variety of different methods in order to identify and map local provision for literacy (services, informal support and time-limited initiatives).

These included:

- **Accessing local data**, for example information databases that list services such as the family information directory.
- **Utilising line manager/colleague** contacts and knowledge.
- **Accessing existing network groups** within the authority (formal and informal).

- **Making lists of national initiatives/projects** delivered locally through internet searches.
- **Meeting** with and asking key partners about provision.
- **Asking other authorities** working on a similar approach.
- **Asking partners** to bring information to meetings and looking for creative and fun ways to share information and good practice.
- **Using the national survey** provided by the National Literacy Trust to identify support.

All areas stated that partners were not aware of the scale and scope of local provision and that just by identifying provision partners started to make links with each other and started to explore how they could signpost families and work together to improve their support.

Some authorities reported asking the same questions of each partner, others decided to be more flexible. However, most reported that they asked questions around the following areas:

- How do you work with local families and people?
- Which local families/people do you mostly work with and why?
- What targets do you have to meet?
- How does poor literacy affect your work?
- How does poor literacy affect the lives of your clients?
- How could literacy be embedded in your work?
- Do you think there are any gaps in the support offered locally in terms of literacy?

Suffolk: the coordinator had ready access to databases held by the early years and childcare teams including the family information services directory (called Suffolk InfoLink) and the Enhanced Childcare Directory. A local definition of literacy support was defined and all appropriate entries in the directory (and all new entries) were tagged as “literacy” if they supported families to engage with speaking, listening, reading or writing.

328 services were immediately identified and more have been added as new partners were engaged and supplied details. These services were in addition to the pre-schools, nurseries, schools, childminders and out of school providers who provide literacy support in Suffolk.

Local authorities found it almost impossible to establish a baseline for who was accessing literacy support. In most cases this data was not collected by service providers. Many providers felt that it was not part of their remit to collect this information as they offered universal support; others felt it was not appropriate to ask service users questions at the point they accessed provision. However, across all the pilots, there was a general consensus that only some services were well accessed by target families. Coordinators had to work hard to find alternative ways of scoping how literacy provision was used and by whom.

Knowsley: Children’s centre data showed that despite efforts to increase uptake via outreach programmes the average reach of centres was just over 16 per cent of local families with children aged from birth to five. Research commissioned by the Young People’s Commission showed that many of the most vulnerable families were not aware of the full range of local services and took advice from friends and family. This was supported by consultation activity undertaken by the coordinator with partners and local families.

Identify partners

Pilots were committed to increasing the number of partners that supported and advised on literacy across their local area. Some entered the pilot with ideas on who could be an effective partner. However, in the main, authorities used the information gathered from mapping provision and research on their target families to identify which partnerships they should prioritise.

Common approaches to identifying partners included:

- Utilising existing networks, partnership meetings and relationships to identify new partners, for example Think Family meetings.
- Approaching partners more easily engaged in literacy first, such as children’s centres and family learning providers.
- Identifying which services were being offered in a particular area, for example by working through neighbourhood partnership boards, multi-agency support teams or district children’s trust boards.
- Using the results of the survey provided by the National Literacy Trust to pinpoint which partners to engage and any gaps in partnership.
- Using the National Literacy Trust resource *Potential Partners for Partners in Literacy* and the *Literacy and Social Inclusion Diagram* to identify possible partners based on national analysis.
- Using a local conference or senior officer support to raise awareness with partners.
- Using results of consultation to identify which services families use and trust. These were often identified as children’s centres, health practitioners and housing providers.

Chapter 3

Develop a new local approach to literacy

In response to issues identified during an initial period of need assessment research and planning, the pilot authorities began to work with a range of partners. These partnerships focused on two areas:

- **To improve local literacy provision** so that it better meets the needs of local families and more effectively supports literacy in the home.
- **To extend the reach of literacy support** to vulnerable families and ensure that local support is easily accessible.

3.1 Add value to and improve existing literacy provision

Local partners worked together to address the following issues:

Bring together provision to increase accessibility

This was a common result across the pilots. By auditing literacy support, coordinators were able to make information about local provision more accessible. For example in Wiltshire provision was added to the ASK family information directory. In Suffolk provision was added to the family information directory and incorporated into the universal offer for all children in Suffolk, while in Sheffield it was shared via a dedicated webpage¹⁰.

All authorities identified that coordinating provision in this way enabled, for the first time, a more consistent approach to signposting to literacy support across the local authority area. This comment from the Wiltshire Coordinator

represents the views across all the pilot authorities:

“Over the last 18 months I have spoken with over 78 different agencies and services which work with families. Through many of these meetings the same questions were asked about who provided literacy support and why this information wasn’t pulled together where people could access it. I heard the story of a man under probation who had dropped out of school aged 13 and now wanted to improve his reading and writing following the birth of his second child. He was referred to a year-long GCSE course which was simply not appropriate for him.”

In Wiltshire, the ASK directory received over 22,000 visits in the last twelve months.

Providing information about literacy support online was particularly helpful as another result of partnership activity was an increased awareness of literacy as an issue. Sheffield ran the national survey provided by the National Literacy Trust in each year of the pilot. In year one, responses were received by 49 partners. In year two this increased to over 250 responses. Sheffield reported that these figures reflected a wider awareness of literacy across the local area and across community partners.

Creative approaches that add value to existing work

Local authorities reported that bringing partners together provided them with the chance to identify ways they could work together to increase the effectiveness of their work. This also provided a creative space to consider if new provision was needed and to work together to deliver it.

¹⁰<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/escal> [accessed 26 April 2011]

In **Derbyshire**, a conference provided the opportunity for links to be made between a local nursery, a library, a children's centre, the Sure Start Librarian and the family learning service. The three organisations met through a local conference and agreed that parents they worked with lacked confidence and knowledge in supporting their children in literacy activities. The partners coordinated their activities so that a buggy walk arranged by the children's centre (as part of their health agenda) took parents to the local library where family learning colleagues ran a mask making workshop and modelled storytelling. Library staff talked through the facilities and signed parents and children up as new members. Similar links were made among other partners which helped target families identified as needing extra support.

Other examples show how local authorities shifted provision to include a focus on literacy in the home or to address a specific literacy need:

Example A: Sheffield

Ensuring parental engagement was a mandatory unit of training developed and rolled out as part of the Every Child a Talker programme. Sheffield also developed a local "award" scheme which recognised good practice in early years settings and schools. This award included a series of commitments to supporting literacy in the home. **120** settings received the Every Sheffield Child Articulate and Literate award and of these **80** settings also signed up to National Literacy Trust support for early years settings (then called Early Reading Connects). This helped drive improvements across statutory literacy providers.

Example B: Lambeth

A survey of local service providers recognised that frontline staff often lacked confidence in promoting home learning. Lambeth provided a training day on parental engagement and home learning to **32** members of frontline staff including childminders, children's centre staff and school teachers. Content was developed and delivered by Lambeth Council staff including staff from libraries, literacy development workers, children's centre managers, EAL staff, a literacy consultant, adult learning, the family learning manager and tutor and the family information service. The training explored barriers to parental engagement and the importance of home learning. Evaluation demonstrated how training had helped increase the confidence of staff and helped them identify "simple and useful ideas."

"I picked up a lot of ideas."

"Fabulous information about how to reach hard-to-reach families and how to get past barriers."

Example C: Wiltshire

Rhyme Time sessions in Wiltshire now include details of other support available such as story time sessions and Book Start packs. **Twenty six** members of staff who run Rhyme Times have been given training by the Family Learning Manager and Advisory Teacher for Communication, Language and Literacy to help them support more parents with communication and to evaluate the impact of Rhyme Times on parental support of learning and other social outcomes. This has increased the value of these sessions by increasing staff confidence:

"I encouraged a couple of mums who brought small babies as well as toddlers to see that even quite young babies respond well to Rhyme Time. At the end of the session they agreed that the babies had responded and enjoyed the session."

Example D: Suffolk

Partners in Suffolk made contact at a Literacy Enthusiasts Network event organised by the Partners in Literacy Coordinator. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Coordinator identified a need for a range of resources to suit the varied reading ages of pupils. A local playgroup identified that they also felt they lacked resources and time to read one-to-one with children. Agreement was reached with the local school and parents for SEN pupils to read with the children at the playgroup every fortnight. This “Tots and Teens” partnership is being evaluated and early findings suggest it will find a place in the SEN curriculum in Suffolk.

Example E: Kent

A literacy element in parenting courses is being trialled in Kent and is being delivered through links with Amicus Horizon Housing Association, Kent libraries, parenting and adult education.

Better target support

Local authorities improved provision for literacy by looking at ways support could more effectively target priority audiences. In Coventry and Wiltshire the Coordinator made links to the library service. In Coventry, work with library colleagues identified opportunities to track which families access the Rhyme Time service and to link with partners such as



children’s centres to increase access to the session. The Partners in Literacy Coordinator in Wiltshire worked with library colleagues and found similar opportunities to add value to Rhyme Times by increasing uptake among families in postcode areas identified as priorities.

Some other examples include:

Example A: Knowsley

Extending existing communication, language and literacy (CLL) training to childminders in Knowsley by linking the Childminder Network Coordinator, Bookstart Coordinator and CLL lead officer. This resulted in an increase in reading and storytelling activities and trips to libraries as well as signing children up to Bookstart Baby Book Crawl. All the childminders who attended were able to identify ways they could help parents to support reading.

Example B: Knowsley

Linking family learning staff with the teenage pregnancy team meant teenage mothers were given support with reading to their babies. In addition, it supported reading for pleasure, giving the mothers access to Quick Reads from the local library. This led to the mums reporting a greater enthusiasm for reading and staff being able to identify parents with literacy issues who were offered more support. Similarly linking family learning staff and resources to a Polish community group in a local children’s centre meant they were able to access an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) course in this setting.

Example C: Sheffield

Sheffield initially focused on linking National Literacy Trust resources for early years to settings taking children identified as needing to receive free childcare places via the Two-Year-Old pilot. This led to several changes in practice around parental engagement, for

example new Stay and Play sessions and supporting book loans to parents by holding coffee mornings.

Example D: Lambeth

Lambeth libraries and the early years literacy development team delivered story and rhyme session at locations identified by the Refugee Council.

3.2 Extend support to vulnerable families

The majority of local authorities expected non-traditional partners (those who do not normally offer literacy support) to be resistant to a focus on literacy. Generally this was not the case. Partners who worked with at-risk families reported that low literacy was often a barrier for the families they supported; many saw it is a factor in inter-generational issues of low confidence and disengagement with services. These partners were keen to understand how they could include literacy support within their work either by providing information on support, brokering access, building confidence or encouraging changes in literacy practices themselves.

The following were common approaches developed in working with a wider range of partners across the community:

Link low literacy to the work and priorities of partners

Local authorities found it helpful to discuss with partners how low literacy undermined professional targets as well as how it undermined life chances for families supported by partners. This often meant identifying opportunities where these conversations could take place and freeing up time to explore how literacy could fit.

In Kent, literacy assessment has been built into the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, providing an opportunity to target support to many vulnerable families. In Kent the CAF assessed over 1200 families between April 2010 and February 2011.

Sheffield: Looked-after children are a priority across Sheffield's services and this helped the Partners in Literacy Coordinator make links with relevant personnel and discuss how more support could be provided to foster families to build language-rich homes. The coordinator made contact with a fostering support worker and together they reviewed existing resources and developed a workshop on language and literacy that was rolled out via the regular fostering network meeting. The workshops brought together resources and expertise from across Sheffield services including children's centres, family learning and libraries. Fostering staff were supported to develop skills and confidence in supporting foster parents as well as having access to shared resources such as a Literacy Bag loan scheme. This meant they could loan foster parents books and materials to use at home. Fostering staff now feel more confident to signpost carers and families to support and to offer them advice on how to encourage literacy at home.

From this initial work, links have been made to other teams including commissioning, adoption, residential homes and corporate parenting. Plans are now being developed to take this work forward, developing more training opportunities and to make literacy support a requirement in training for carers. Sheffield also hopes to use a similar approach with social workers.

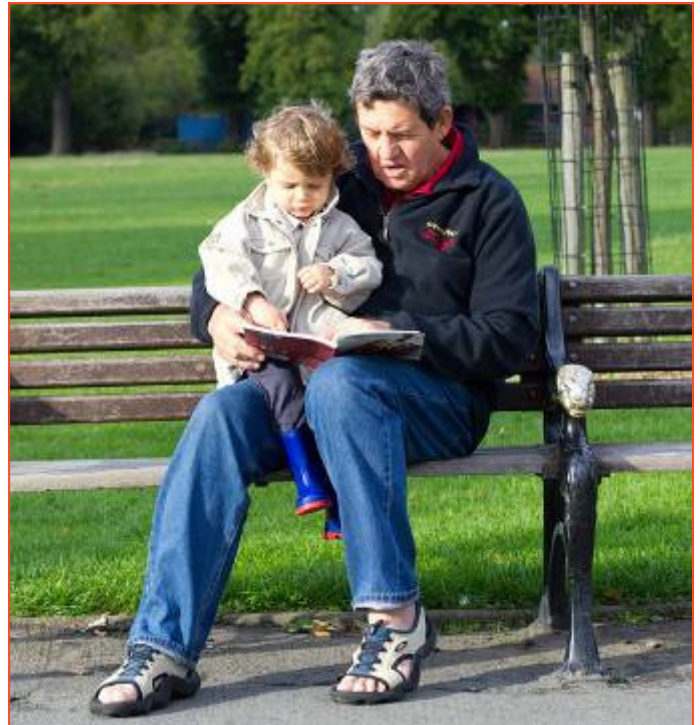
Train frontline members of staff and build capacity across the community

In many local areas, partners reported encountering families with low literacy but said they lacked confidence in identifying low literacy, signposting to support (including knowing what services were available and where to go for this information) and how they might offer families some support themselves. Partners in Literacy coordinators reported being asked for training on these issues by a wide range of partners and that this training did not exist locally.

In most cases the coordinators worked with local partners (such as libraries, adult education, children's centres, family learning and Bookstart) to develop content for training. The aim was to increase the confidence of partners, providing them with the information and skills they needed to address the low literacy they encountered. Local authorities were clear that this was not about replacing existing services but about extending reach. As the coordinator in Knowsley reported, this was about helping to make literacy "everybody's business" and to utilise all opportunities to provide support:

"Partners, in effect, become free literacy outreach workers, extending the reach of support to the most deprived families and communities."

Many local authorities accessed training materials already developed by Rochdale as part of their Literacy Champions programme, adapting them to their local needs¹¹.



Example A: Working with housing providers

Across a number of pilot authorities, housing was identified as a partner that offered reach to poorer families and those who might not be accessing literacy support. Consultation with partners working in housing identified that they were aware of low literacy as an issue but, in the main (with the exception of Kent), did not offer information or support. One provider asked all new residents if they had any problems with reading and writing but then did not act on the responses received. Others reported signposting families to services, such as children's centres, but felt that families did not attend because they felt support was too intimidating, too hard to access or not for them.

¹¹As with all the other areas of activity discussed in this report, training materials and other resources are available via the National Literacy Trust website in the, free to join, Local Partnerships Zone.

Wiltshire and Kent worked successfully with housing providers, giving training sessions and building capacity in the housing workforce.

The coordinator in Kent was able to build on existing links between Kent Library Service and Amicus Horizon Housing Association Community Development Team. Family learning was already a key part of the Amicus offer. The Partners in Literacy Coordinator was able to extend this by linking Amicus staff to training being provided via Every Child a Talker and volunteer literacy support provided by Doorstep Library. Amicus were also keen to develop a new approach to literacy with their residents around children's stories, which would provide an opportunity to focus on parenting and literacy. At the time of writing this work is being piloted and involves all the partners mentioned above.

In Wiltshire, initial research identified families in need of extra support with literacy and where they lived using indices of multiple deprivation and MOSAIC data. Links were made to neighbourhood workers and then to the neighbourhood involvement managers and Senior Neighbourhood Involvement Adviser in two target towns. Conversations with strategic level managers confirmed that literacy fitted with their aims to improve tenant's social and economic lives. Frontline staff confirmed that they encounter poor literacy issues and often help tenants with form filling and reading letters. Training was developed to help staff have greater awareness of literacy issues and offer practical solutions. Initially, training was provided by partner agencies for free as a trial with the aim of embedding it in future staff development. Training raised the confidence of staff and Westlea Housing Association is now developing a two year plan to improve the literacy skills of its residents. This includes part-funding a literacy development post with Wiltshire Council.



Example B: Child protection volunteers in Coventry

The Partners in Literacy Coordinator in Coventry attended training offered to volunteers and frontline staff in Rochdale. Building on this, and work in other areas, the Coordinator developed a half day training programme that raised awareness of low literacy and the issues around it, provided practical activities which partners could employ and gave details of other support available locally. This training was initially delivered to 30 individuals including a group of dads and a multi-disciplinary team. Those attending the training reported that they understood how to signpost families to literacy support (67 per cent) and could support parents to encourage their children's literacy development (69 per cent).

A link established by the National Literacy Trust enabled the Coventry coordinator to deliver this training to community service volunteers (CSVs) commissioned by the council to work with families on the child protection register. The training was received extremely well, raised confidence and enthusiasm among volunteers and provided

them with practical ideas. Child protection volunteers reach relatively small numbers but their programmes are targeted to extremely vulnerable families dealing with multiple issues. This programme supports 25 families per year with home visits each week where volunteers provide emotional and practical support. Training helped these specialist volunteers to gain confidence in helping parents to support literacy in the home:

“It helped me understand how literacy can help families. I really enjoyed the talk explaining how to engage families in literacy with chatter cards and how they can learn basic reading and writing.”

CSV Child Protection Volunteer.

A similar approach was adopted in Knowsley with child poverty volunteers. This work is being taken forward as part of longer term planning for these volunteers.

Example C: Health visitors in Derbyshire

Consultation with families identified a range of professionals who they already had regular contact with. It also identified that in many cases signposting to provision would not be a solution as families saw support as not being for them. Through a Primary Care Trust contact, links were made initially to the District Network Manager for Community Services and then to a health visitor who was keen to co-create literacy support suitable to her role. The Partners in Literacy Coordinator and health visitor took time to understand each other's roles through a period of “reciprocal learning”, which involved meetings, work shadowing and surveys of other staff. This established the “business case” for the partnership with clear links between literacy and health priorities, such as attachment and cognitive development.

Work initially focused on increasing and improving gifting of the Bookstart pack by involving information on child development (language and literacy), encouraging parental engagement and signposting to provision such as Baby Play, PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) and library Rhyme Times. Evaluation would be conducted during the regular health visitor checks and visits as well as monitoring uptake of services. Following this early work a pack of information is being developed that can be given out to health visitors to support this practice more widely across Derbyshire.

Derbyshire also worked with the Family Intervention Programme and developed a set of resources, including a backpack of family learning materials, that family intervention workers could take into homes to support parents.



Develop community and volunteer capacity

In some areas, consultation with families raised concerns that suitable provision was not currently available and that existing literacy support rested on families accessing services. Consultation highlighted that not only did families think services needed to change to become more relevant to their needs and circumstances but that new support was needed, based in their community and offering peer support on an informal and one-to-one basis. In response to this, a number of authorities started to develop volunteer capacity in communities. Pilot authorities utilised training and expertise developed in Rochdale as part of their Literacy Champions programme which offers peer-to-peer support through volunteers.

The National Literacy Trust is keen to support local areas to develop volunteer capacity around literacy. Some resources are available online through our communities page. We are also looking to develop a rigorous national programme of training and are exploring funding opportunities for a national Literacy Champions programme at the time of writing this report.

Example A: Literacy Champions in Knowsley

Building on training developed in other local authorities, Knowsley identified a need to extend one-off training opportunities for frontline staff and volunteers and to create a new and ongoing area of literacy support. Using the model (and title) developed in Rochdale, the Knowsley Coordinator trialled a new approach to literacy support delivered in the community: "Literacy Champions." Literacy Champions are individuals who, supported by training and networking, can provide peer-to-peer support for literacy and can act as a bridge between people and provision. Rather than working with different partners (services, organisations and individual volunteers)

separately, Knowsley provides collective training. At the time of writing, Literacy Champions have been trained from Knowsley Housing Trust, homeless support, support for domestic violence, family support services and the Volunteer Family Mentor programme. In a short period of time these Literacy Champions are reporting that parents and carers have increased confidence, are helping with homework and making plans for the future, including writing CVs and asking for help in gaining employment. Within the first month of delivery, three Literacy Champions were supporting four parents of young children.

Example B: Derbyshire parent mentors

Derbyshire was keen to respond to family views that they wanted to develop and deliver their own support and to support community-based activity that could address barriers around transport and fear of formal services.

One district decided to set up a buddy system between parents. The idea was to train five parents to become Family Reading Buddies and to support them through two lots of 10-week-long projects. A children's centre became the hub of this project and was responsible for recruiting all participants and setting up the sessions.

The training included a "crash course" in how children acquire reading skills, what role families have in supporting learning, ideas for activities that families can enjoy together and a kit for identifying what sort of support parents might ask for, with suggestions for solutions. It also included some general advice on volunteering and setting boundaries.

Chapter 4

Evidence of impact

In 2009, the National Literacy Trust conducted a survey that was sent out to 12 local authorities in the Partners in Literacy network. 500 responses were received from a range of local partners and service providers¹². The results highlighted the prevalence of low literacy and the lack of a cohesive response to perceived need. 75 per cent of respondents reported, frequently or occasionally, encountering parents with literacy difficulties with nearly half (45 per cent) of these taking no action.

Local scoping activities also reinforced the level of need among children and adults. Local partners found that, for a range of reasons, many families did not access support available. In the main, local services were unable to evaluate who was accessing their provision and if they were reaching the local families who needed it the most.

Pilot authorities are still tracking the impact of work as partners continue to adopt new ways of working to include literacy support. Pilots have reported increased referrals to literacy support from a wider range of partners (for example via housing and midwives in Wiltshire) and increased confidence amongst parents and carers offered support through new partners. In some cases parents have reported establishing new routines (such as reading at bedtime and helping with homework) while others are improving their own skills leading them to new levels of self-worth and opportunities for training and employment.

The pilot authorities demonstrated that, by working together and sharing good practice, partners providing literacy provision could do

more to help families support literacy at home. They also identified that they could increase the number of families accessing support by coordinating services and by working with a greater number of partners across the local area.

Across the pilots a wide range of evidence was collected by the coordinators and by local partners. The evidence showed how this new partnership approach had supported more families to engage with literacy in the home and to access local provision. Evidence came in different forms: quantitative data, case studies and other qualitative feedback from partners and from parents and carers. This reflected the range of changes taking place and the huge number, and variety, of local partners involved. Across the evidence collected the following emerged as key themes:

- **Increased parental confidence** in supporting their children's literacy at home leading to them changing their behaviour and undertaking activities to support literacy in the home.
- **More opportunities** for families to access support for literacy.

The pilots kick-started new ways of working across services and community organisations which are ongoing. Evidence continues to be collected and evaluated, and the National Literacy Trust is committed to supporting local areas to evaluate impact and to share evidence nationally.

¹²National Literacy Trust (2009), *Partners in Literacy Survey: A snapshot of local support for literacy*.

4.1 Increased parental confidence

Pilot authorities reported that this new approach to literacy increased the opportunities for parents and carers to consider their role in supporting literacy development. Qualitative evidence collected from parents and from local partners demonstrates how parental attitudes shifted, with parents beginning to understand their role in supporting their children and an increased confidence to do so.

The following give a snapshot of evidence collected across the local authorities and across a huge range of partners.

Example A: Knowsley – focus on teenage parents

“I tried just sitting and reading a book out loud like you said; she came over and began to look at the pictures.”

Teenage parent in Knowsley who accessed support via a new partnership between family learning and the local community college.

“I didn’t realise how ignorant I was being. I need to stop and listen to her when she is talking to me... I went home and phoned my cousin - I told her that she needs to turn the telly off.”

A teenage mum in Knowsley accessing literacy support through a partnership with family learning, the children’s centre and teenage pregnancy service, referring here to her young daughter.

Example B: Derbyshire – focus on vulnerable families through partnership with family intervention workers

“They have made amazing progress. They have five to ten minutes special time each day together, mainly reading, but sometimes just talking which is building their relationship. Mum has learnt how to make reading fun for her daughter.”

A family intervention worker (FIPW).

“The mum said she was going to read one of the books with her child that night, using an idea given to her by her family intervention worker. In addition to ideas, the mum also receives a great deal of emotional support from her FIPW; ‘Rightly or wrongly, she is often the first person I call when something happens in my life.’ The FIPW has provided ongoing support and encouragement for the mum to read with her child.”

“In one family the little girl has just finished reading ‘The Big Friendly Giant’, the first book she has ever read. Other families supported include one who received a backpack with literacy games in it. This family had never played educational games and now report playing them around three times a week.”

Derbyshire Coordinator describing outcomes from a partnership with family intervention workers.

Example C: Lambeth – work between the library service and Refugee Council

“Parents also feel relaxed and comfortable to try out new strategies observed throughout the session, develop friendships and feel confident to seek advice from practitioners when necessary.”

Observation of a song and rhyme session developed by Lambeth Library Service, Foster Care Service and partners in speech and language therapy.

Example D: Sheffield

In Sheffield, settings offering free child care to the poorest two-years-olds, many of whom also had English as an additional language, were invited to run a five week Stay and Play session for parents and carers. Thirteen families were engaged and at the end of the five weeks they reported they were reading more with their children and had learnt how to share books and look at pictures. Staff reported that parents had started to borrow books from the loaning scheme in the children's centre, had all registered at the local library and enjoyed the songs and rhymes. Staff felt that a focus on literacy was beneficial and were keen to do the sessions again.

4.2 More opportunities for families to access support for literacy

Example A: Focus on Wiltshire

"We've had referrals for literacy support from our new partners, including teenage pregnancy midwives, housing workers and library staff. The individuals accessing support are all looking to improve their literacy in order to support their children more with their learning and to help them get jobs. This is all new."

Wiltshire Coordinator.

Work with housing in Wiltshire...

The potential reach to local families through work with these housing partners is huge.

Conservative estimates across the three housing partners (Westlea Housing, Selwood Housing and Community4) suggest that these partners offer access to over 9000 Wiltshire families.

Work with libraries...

Training for library staff delivering Rhyme Times means that many more parents and carers will access support on how they can promote literacy at home. Across the 30 different Rhyme Time sessions offered in Wiltshire the latest figures show that over one thousand Rhyme Time sessions are held.

In 2010 these sessions supported over 13,500 adults and 15,750 children.



Example B: Reach to foster parents in Sheffield

In Sheffield work with fostering staff meant that over 90 looked-after children received literacy bags.

24 carers received an award recognising their efforts to support literacy in the home.

This has helped looked-after children register with the library and access songs, rhymes and mark making through activities such as creating a memory box.

Example C: Derbyshire Work with health visitors...

“Several families have already found the library and attended groups as a result of this project.”

Feedback from work with health visitors linking them to family learning support, Bookstart and the library service in Derbyshire.

The partnership established between a local nursery, children’s centre and library (outlined above on page 13) supported 71 parents to visit the library and 22 of these parents joined the library.

Work with Parent Volunteers...

Library membership and attendance at PEEP sessions has increased. Thirty six new members were joined by parent volunteers in one area.

“Before becoming a Parent Volunteer she had felt intimidated about using the library with her son. He now visits the library regularly with his mum and they both feel comfortable and welcome in the library”

Volunteer staff.

Example D: Suffolk Families Information Coordinators (FICs)

FICs were asked to consider literacy within their role. The Early Years Librarian and Bookstart Coordinator helped raise their awareness of early learning and support offered in children’s centres.

In November and December 2010, these coordinators engaged with 769 families in Suffolk and provided information to these families on literacy support provided in children’s centres.

Chapter 5

Why does this approach work? Critical success factors

Despite the range of local authorities and the diversity of activity undertaken, the following are clear critical success factors for a strategic approach to literacy. They reflect how the local authorities initiated a robust planning process; the National Literacy Trust would recommend that any authority planning a literacy strategy addresses them.

1. Capacity to develop the approach

In all the authorities it was agreed that the coordinator post was crucial in driving work forward. The various configurations of this post (and the comparison of activity undertaken by the unfunded authorities working with us) suggest that a full-time post is not required but that capacity is required.

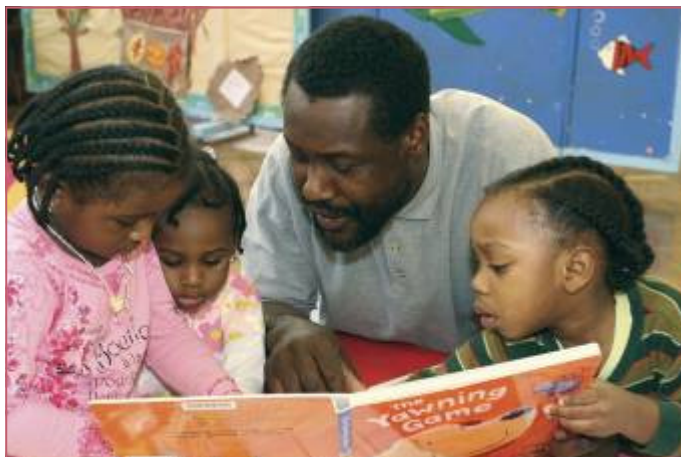
We would advise any authority developing this approach to ensure there is a lead officer to direct and support the work and that this officer has at least two days per week to dedicate to the work.

The achievements of the individuals who led this work across the pilot areas also underlines the importance of the person behind the role. All the coordinators had a passion for the role of families in literacy and for improving lives, they were skilful in building consensus and working in partnership with a range of partners and they all demonstrated tenacity in the face of challenge and flexibility in response to change.

2. Senior commitment

Although each authority secured a senior champion it was clear that the drive for the strategic approach rested, in nearly all authorities, with the coordinator as lead officer. Local progress showed that partnerships were often time-consuming to form and were often subject to delays. Most authorities spent a large proportion of time raising awareness with a wide range of partners, trying to access data and advocating for literacy.

We believe this approach is most effective when it is not simply championed at a strategic level but when it is owned at that level.



3. Partnership with the National Literacy Trust

In a survey sent out to the local authority network in February 2011, 100 per cent of respondents said they would recommend working with the National Literacy Trust to improve literacy levels. The following comments detail why this was the case:

“The National Literacy Trust has given us a starting point and areas to focus on, which, in turn, has allowed us to gather momentum and discover our own ideas for tackling literacy. The National Literacy Trust has been fully supportive and has also provided suggestions on how we can tackle certain issues (such as how to approach different partners). The level of expertise is fantastic and they are always available to offer advice when needed. The amount of enthusiasm alone is inspiring enough to make me want to continue working with them.”

“Our partnership has challenged our thinking and made us look at things we are familiar with from different perspectives.”

“They have brought real expertise and credibility to the work we are undertaking. The National Literacy Trust has been a critical friend and provided a wealth of research and examples of good practice to save us reinventing wheels.”

“Through working with the National Literacy Trust you get access to a powerful source of research and a robust evidence base. You also get to draw upon the knowledge and direct experience of colleagues from partner authorities and this is invaluable when developing plans and delivering services in your own authority. You learn from best practice.”

Local reports demonstrate how much being part of a national network has supported their work, giving them access to national research, policy analysis and resources from other local areas.

4. Evidence

Coordinators often struggled to access data and build evidence of need locally. Often this was because this data did not exist, but support from corporate data and performance teams could have shortened some of the processes. Authorities reported that it was critical to consult with partners but that it was as vital to consult with families to establish literacy need, barriers to accessing support and opportunities for the authority to do better. This evidence provided a powerful mandate for change alongside research and analysis of data around literacy levels and deprivation.

5. Evaluation

At the time of writing this report a number of pilots are evaluating the impact of their work, with some evidence yet to be collected. However, in the main, coordinators report that in hindsight they spent a great deal of time raising awareness with a wide range of partners, which then made it difficult to track impact. They recommend authorities developing this approach focus work, and evaluation, on a small number of partners in order to build a robust evidence base for a longer term strategy. Partners need to be equals in collecting evidence of impact and this could be supported with strong senior engagement.

6. Partnerships

Throughout all the pilots it was clear that at every level (frontline practice, changes to planning and to strategy) change was driven by collaborative practice. Many of the other critical success factors listed here were vital to development because they enabled partnerships to flourish. Often local service providers, and other community partners, simply needed the opportunity to reflect on literacy in order to change practice and achieve benefits for local people. It is heartening, in this time of economic constraint, that so much can be achieved through a collective effort and willingness to collaborate.

Kent identified that work should focus in Thanet and Swale; two districts identified as priorities on the indices of deprivation. The Swale literacy forum was led by Kent libraries and provided a useful networking opportunity for stakeholders to come together and share practice. The Partners in Literacy Coordinator helped to broaden membership and encourage planning and delivery of joint literacy initiatives. Membership comprised of Kent libraries and arts services, adult education, Swale children's centres, the Swale Extended Services Development Manager and Swale Extended Services Coordinator, Amicus Horizon Housing Association, the Senior Family Liaison Officer for Swale, the Swale Senior Early Years Foundation Stage Teaching and Learning Adviser and the Minority Community Achievement Service.

5.1 Enablers of effective partnerships

In addition to actively providing a range of opportunities for partners to come together, the following were identified as enablers for effective partnerships:

The evidence base for improving provision

Consultation with families was vital. It challenged partners to reflect on the provision they offered and consider how they might do more to support parents to promote literacy in the home. It gave a mandate for innovation and helped to shape evaluation frameworks and what "success" should look like. Similarly it was crucial to refer back to the research evidence for focusing on parental engagement in home learning. This challenged partners to consider how their support for children could be extended to take account of the home environment. It was also important to involve operational staff in shaping solutions to ensure they would work on the frontline.

Senior engagement

Across all the pilots senior management support was crucial to keeping literacy high on everyone's agenda and enabling time and effort to be given to partnerships. Local authorities found that sharing resources and working together took time, planning and willingness, all of which could be enabled (and fast-tracked) with strong strategic and management buy-in. Management and strategic support also enabled good practice developed to be embedded more widely in planning and to prevent it remaining in pockets.

Successful engagement and barriers

Within the timeframe of the pilot, it was sometimes the case that partners successfully engaged were often the most enthusiastic or "willing".

In some areas pilot coordinators took substantial time to understand the detail of a partner's work and, through reciprocal learning, how literacy support could be embedded in their work for the benefit of families they support.

Partners were often engaged by making links between the effects of low literacy and their strategic aims, for example early intervention and prevention or child poverty. You can read more about embedding within broader

priorities on page 29.

During the two years of the pilot many factors, including restructures and job uncertainty, acted as barriers to partnerships.

Knowsley kick-started partnership activity by holding a local conference supported by the Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and the Director of the National Literacy Trust. Thirty different services attended the conference and signed up to commitments, which then formed the basis of partnership delivery of literacy support. Partners included Knowsley Housing Trust, homeless support, support for domestic violence, child poverty volunteers and family support services.

Derbyshire: Following a conference where the results of consultation with families were presented, the Derbyshire Coordinator worked closely with a health visitor to scope how literacy support could be more deeply embedded into practice and training.

Wiltshire: Enthusiasm from the Teenage Pregnancy Midwife provided opportunities to access training of midwives across the whole of Wiltshire and to influence training provided across two neighbouring counties.



Chapter 6

Sustaining and developing the approach

A local approach to sustainability

All the Partners in Literacy pilots have developed forward plans to sustain work. Signs from a number of authorities are positive, with strategies being approved by senior management and Cabinet and in three authorities coordinators are remaining in post (often funded from a range of sources such as local authority and housing providers). In others, a range of staff and partners have identified streams of work that will be maintained and developed as part of the “business as usual” activity of partner services and organisations. It remains to be seen whether senior managers and elected members will facilitate this ongoing work, ensure there is capacity to expand the strategic approach, and secure a longer term return on the initial investment from the National Literacy Trust and the achievements of the Partners in Literacy Coordinators.

To help ensure that work developed during the pilots did not come to an end with the National Literacy Trust grant in March 2011, the pilots were asked to consider sustainability throughout all their work. They were also asked to secure a senior champion (usually a director and/or lead member) for their work to help advocate for a longer term strategy and to establish reporting lines to strategic forums, such as a children’s trust board or local strategic partnership. Many pilots also sought to exit the pilot with a literacy strategy in place as a way of securing a long term commitment locally.

The life of the pilot has spanned a time of great change and challenge for local authorities. Pilots have advocated for literacy, while senior managers and elected members have been preoccupied with changes in government policy, making savings, cutting services and restructuring.

“This is a time of immense change under the new Coalition Government which has led to changing priorities and funding. During the merger [to unitary status] Wiltshire made significant savings and will need to continue to do so – the full impact of this is not yet understood. The uncertainty made many of our key partners focus on core business. This is starting to change as managers begin to think about new ways of working and ways of delivering services in a coordinated and cohesive manner.”

Wiltshire Partners in Literacy Coordinator.

Develop a literacy strategy

A number of authorities (for example, Sheffield and Rochdale) have identified that having an overarching literacy policy has helped to give status to literacy locally. Sheffield entered the pilot with a literacy strategy in place and championed by their Director of Children’s Services. The pilot activity became subsumed into this wider piece of work, providing capacity and motivation to engage with wider community partners and to focus the full range of activity on engaging families. These authorities found that having a strategy, and crucially strong senior support driving it, has been an enabler for their work.

These authorities reported that the strategy was a practical enabler for work with partners. It sets the vision, providing a clear (and collective) set of objectives and a supporting action plan that is reviewed by senior managers. It provides a mandate for partnership development by explicitly linking literacy to a broad range of strategies and outcomes. Finally, it is a physical document which can be revisited to review progress and maintain momentum.

These examples prompted other pilots to develop a literacy strategy with partners as an outcome of their funding. Gateshead, Coventry, Wiltshire, Derbyshire and Kent have all either drafted a literacy strategy or have made recommendations to senior managers that this should be the next stage of activity. Pilots have recognised that strategies need to be collectively developed and owned at senior levels. The Derbyshire strategy, for example, has been submitted to the Derbyshire Partnership Forum. Others are similarly owned at local strategic partnership, children's trust or local authority level at director level meetings.

Embed within broader priorities

In order to make the case for a partnership approach to literacy, local authorities have needed to link literacy to key local plans, significant priorities and initiatives that are being prioritised in terms of sustained funding locally.

The following are some of the links that local authorities have effectively made by positioning literacy within a wider social context:

- Resilient Communities Partnership.
- Sustainable Community Strategy.
- Area Partnership Board.
- Children and Young People's Trust.
- Every Child a Talker.

- Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy.
- Child Poverty Strategy.
- Narrowing the Gaps agenda.
- National initiatives such as the National Year of Communication.
- Youth Strategy.
- Common Assessment Framework.
- Planning for children's centres and other priority services such as family intervention projects, family nurse partnerships and health visitors.

Identifying the "right" links to make was challenging for the pilot coordinators. In many cases it required them to develop a new set of skills and knowledge around national policy, local priorities and structures. It also required them to operate with great flexibility as policies changed nationally and local authorities responded by changing existing structures and strategies. In many cases it forced coordinators to develop advocacy skills (and personal confidence) to have conversations at a new, and higher, level than they were used to.



A few examples of links made include:

- Exploring how literacy needs could be assessed as part of the Common Assessment Framework in Derbyshire and Kent.
- Embedding literacy within commissioning frameworks in Derbyshire and Wiltshire.
- Ensuring literacy was threaded into new strategies such as the Supporting Parents Strategy in Kent.
- Ensuring literacy in the home and the need for wider partnerships were identified as priorities within the Children and Young Person's Plan as in Knowsley and Coventry.
- Some authorities found holding a local conference a helpful way to establish links and to make the case for literacy as a priority – Suffolk, Derbyshire, Wiltshire and Knowsley.

Build sustainable practice with partners

Pilot authorities were asked to avoid working with partners in one-off ways and to prioritise partnerships that offered a sustainable way of partners supporting literacy. The following key approaches are explored elsewhere in this report:

- Adding value to existing services, for example by challenging services to consider engagement of families and sharing existing good practice and helping partners to work together.
- Improving signposting routes, for example by creating a literacy page on the council website or by adding details of literacy provision to databases such as family information service.
- Providing training to frontline staff and volunteers, building capacity for the long term. In Suffolk training developed has

become embedded in broader workforce planning around communication, language and literacy.

- Establishing sustainable ways for partners to meet, for example at regular network meetings which partners collectively run, host and support.

It remains to be seen if these approaches are effective at keeping literacy on the agenda in the long term but early evidence suggests that senior support is of critical importance. Local authorities have also reported how crucial the relationship with the National Literacy Trust has been, helping them to raise awareness at senior levels, supporting their advocacy with research and credibility. Authorities have regularly sought our support for conferences, strategic meetings and in drafting strategy documents.

“The sustainability of Partners in Literacy has been strongly influenced by having an active champion at senior level who has the capacity, passion and enthusiasm to drive the approach forward strategically. Fortunately for Sheffield, Sonia Sharpe (Director of Children’s Services) set the vision and has had a vested interest from the beginning. She sees this as being ‘the kind of approach that changes culture and practice’ and she has been a strong local support and advocate. She has also been willing to share our experience with other authorities, for example speaking at a National Literacy Trust conference. Equally, the profile Sheffield has received through its partnership with the National Literacy Trust has contributed to sustainability.”

Sheffield Partners in Literacy Coordinator.

Our national support **Thank you**

The National Literacy Trust is committed to the difference a strategic approach to literacy can make at a local level. Information, guidance, resources and case studies are freely available to any local area via a Local Partnerships Zone within our website. We will continue to work in partnership with local areas and offer our time, expertise, research and support to any local area wanting to develop a partnership strategy to improve literacy levels. We can work with local authorities to support the development of a strategic framework for literacy and to build an evaluation framework that reflects local needs and focuses on outcomes.

The level of interest in training for frontline staff and volunteers is an area we are keen to support. We are currently exploring different funding streams to enable us to develop a national programme of training and support for Literacy Champions.

Finally, we will continue to share good practice and raise awareness with local leaders via our conferences and campaigns.

We need a long term and collective response to the issue of low literacy. Only by innovating and working together can we raise literacy levels.

The National Literacy Trust would like to thank all individuals¹³ who have been involved in the pilot. Your determination and tenacity has been a huge inspiration to us. We believe that our partnership has created an approach to an issue that undermines personal happiness and success across the country. Thank you for your intelligence, generosity and passion. We look forward to continuing our work together.

The National Literacy Trust would like to recognise the specific involvement of Rochdale as an unfunded partner authority. Rochdale was an invaluable member of the network and the lead officer shared her knowledge and expertise with the National Literacy Trust and other local authorities with a great generosity of spirit.

¹³Details of all individuals, networks and frameworks that supported the pilot can be found in Appendix C.

Appendix A

An overview of the pilot at a national level: set-up and national networks

In 2008, the National Literacy Trust secured funding from the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Funds came jointly from two divisions – Families and Narrowing the Gap – on the premise that the pilots were to inform the National Literacy Trust’s future support for local authorities across England. Therefore the pilots needed not only to establish impact but to develop resources to support other areas’ approach in the future.

The DCSF gave funding over two years with the bulk of the budget being spent on local capacity to develop work in nine pilot authorities. The grant also funded two posts at the National Literacy Trust – a full time manager and a full time support post.

DCSF, and subsequently the Department for Education, provided support in a number of additional ways. Senior civil servants chaired a quarterly cross-government meeting to discuss the links between literacy and a range of policy areas. Departmental partners included the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Local authorities reported that this cross-cutting national forum helped them to make links to partners locally and helped emphasise the importance of literacy to senior managers and councillors.

The project was also supported nationally by a forum of research agencies that provided vital expertise, supporting the development of a strong research basis for the project and the pilot evaluation framework. Finally a national project steering group, largely made up of managers from the pilot authorities, provided critical support to the national manager. Their help has been invaluable to the National Literacy Trust.

Pilot set up

In the main, local authorities chosen to be a pilot had some existing connection to the National Literacy Trust. Many of these exited the 2008 National Year of Reading with strong partnerships and a clear determination to make literacy a local priority. This provided them with a strong base to make progress during the timescale of the pilot and an existing understanding of the case for a strategic approach.

During 2008 the National Literacy Trust made contact with prospective pilot authorities to negotiate their involvement. In the main, the grants made to local authorities funded the appointment of a full time coordinator although

other arrangements included a team approach with the grant being used to back-fill days in existing roles and two people sharing the role (including the use of an external consultant with a lead officer). Funding from the Government enabled the National Literacy Trust to fund four authorities for two years and a further five authorities for one year from April 2010. The National Literacy Trust negotiated where the coordinator would be based to ensure that the approach was developed from a range of service locations. This was intended to provide a point of comparison and to understand if this was a critical factor in successful delivery. A range of local authorities were chosen for the same reason – the nine pilots reflected diversity in size, regional location and political leadership.

The pilot authorities were provided with an evaluation framework (see Appendix B for details of the outcomes reported against), a reporting structure, online resources (including a discussion forum) and quarterly workshops to support development and information sharing. In addition, many of the authorities made use of the national team for support on an ad hoc basis, calling for advice, asking the manager to provide input for plans and strategic documents and requesting speakers for local conferences and meetings.

The terms of local grants made it clear that funding was for two purposes:

1. To develop the strategic and partnership approach and evaluate impact.
2. To share information with the National Literacy Trust and with other local authorities to help inform the development of resources and guidance.

In addition to the nine pilot authorities, 12 local authorities formed part of the learning network. These authorities received no funding but they were able to attend workshops and make use of national support including contact with the national team and use of online resources. The level of progress in these authorities was very varied, usually according to managerial/senior support and available capacity. Two local authorities left the network as they felt they were not able to make any useful progress. Others attended all the workshops and were able to make links to partners and evaluate progress locally.

Appendix B

Evaluation framework

The National Literacy Trust provided each of the pilot authorities with an evaluation framework that incorporated the research basis for the pilots and outlined outcomes for their work and indicators of progress.

1. Literacy is embedded as a priority:
 - a. Literacy is embedded in service level and strategic level planning.
 - b. Senior managers across services and agencies are engaged.
 - c. Active champion for literacy at director level or above.
 - d. Reporting lines to cross-cutting partnership forums and senior officer level established.
 - e. Awareness of literacy as an enabler for corporate and strategic aims.
2. Extending support to audiences with greatest need:
 - a. Priority local families identified - mapping and data analysis.
 - b. Partnerships across agencies developed to reach and support more families, particularly priority families.
 - c. Partners engaged to develop sustainable ways to support parental engagement in literacy in the home.
 - d. Support for parental engagement in literacy in the home embedded in practice and partner planning.
 - e. Partners engaged in evaluation of impact on families, evaluation to consider value for money and any efficiency savings.
3. Improving literacy provision:
 - a. All local provision which supports literacy in the home is mapped and identified.
 - b. Provision is joined up, enabling signposting and cross-referrals.
 - c. Gaps in service provision are identified and raised with partners - service improvements are captured and raised.
 - d. Local provision is a coherent offer - accessible to professionals and families.
 - e. Partners engaged in evaluation – considering changes in numbers of families accessing provision and the impact of provision on family attitudes and behaviours.
4. Evaluation:
 - a. Evidence collected across three areas above.
 - b. Particularly to consider changes in parental attitudes to their role in supporting literacy and any changes in behaviour, for example accessing services and supporting literacy at home.
5. Participation in national project:

All pilots agree to attend quarterly workshops, host visits from national team, submit quarterly reports and support.

Appendix C

Networks and frameworks supporting the pilot

Pilot authorities funded from April 2009 were Derbyshire, Knowsley, Sheffield and Wiltshire. Authorities funded from April 2010 were Coventry, Gateshead, Kent, Lambeth and Suffolk.

Coordinators were based in the following council services: family learning, learning and achievement, library service, excellence in cities/education, children's centres, parenting, early years and childcare and an external partnership organisation funded primarily by the council to deliver family learning activities. One authority funded an external education consultant.

Over the course of the pilot, unfunded authorities involved included: Barnet, Hackney, Halton, Luton, Oldham, Peterborough, Rochdale, Rotherham, Staffordshire, Stockport, Stoke-on-Trent and Tameside.

Special thanks to local authority colleagues who have expanded our thinking:

- Sheffield – Marie Lowe and Catherine Ellison
- Knowsley – Keith McDowall and Helen Maitland
- Derbyshire – Sarah Burkinshaw and Annette Lowe
- Wiltshire – Chris Moore and Lucy Kitchener
- Suffolk – Anita Abram and Emily Thurston
- Coventry – Rick Leigh and Chris Ashton
- Lambeth – Louize Allen and Rachel Windgard

- Kent – Jo Hook and Julie Street
- Gateshead – Jim Pace
- Rochdale, for your long standing support – Helen Chicot and Terry Piggott

Members of the Steering Group included: Peter Silva (Director of PEEP), Terry Piggott (former Director of Children's Services Rochdale), Sarah Burkinshaw (Director ROWA!), Helen Chicot (Skills and Employment Manager, Rochdale), Keith McDowall (Family Learning Manager, Knowsley), Jo Hook (Head of Commissioning, Parenting Support, Kent), Gill Bromley (Strategy Manager, Kent Library Service), Rick Leigh (Excellence in Cities, Coventry), Clare Meade (NIACE), Chris Moore (Library Operations Manager, Wiltshire), Marie Lowe (Principal Adviser Communication, Language and Literacy, Sheffield), (Louize Allen (Education Consultant, Lambeth) and Janet Cooper (Director Stoke Speaks Out, Stoke Council/PCT).

Member organisations that formed the Researcher Forum included (in no particular order): LLU+ at London Southbank University, University of Sheffield, Book Trust, Family and Parenting Institute, National Children's Bureau, Institute of Education, University of Oxford and NIACE.



The National Literacy Trust is a charity that transforms lives through literacy. Registered charity no. 1116260.

National Literacy Trust
68 South Lambeth Road
London, SW8 1RL

Phone: 020 7587 1742

Fax: 020 7587 1411

Email: contact@literacytrust.org.uk

www.literacytrust.org.uk

Copyright © National Literacy Trust (Local authorities improving life chances: A review of a new approach to raising literacy levels) (May 2011). All written materials, literature, drawings, photographic images, icons, artworks and other graphical images in this document are copyright works belonging to the National Literacy Trust. Such copyright material may not be used unless a licence is obtained from the National Literacy Trust. Any unauthorised publication, copying, hiring, lending or reproduction is strictly prohibited and constitutes a breach of copyright.