

# The F Factor

The impact of Family Learning  
on  
children, schools and families

A Campaign for Learning Report



The Campaign for Learning believes that Family Learning<sup>1</sup> deserves more recognition for the positive contribution it makes to social and economic change. Some of the key challenges and issues that we face today, including giving children the best start in life as well as ensuring adults have the confidence and skills to lead fulfilling and successful lives, can be addressed by Family Learning approaches.

On the eve of this year's Family Learning Week (6 – 14 October), we are releasing this report to:

- highlight the contribution that Family Learning makes to releasing and realising potential in children and parents
- show how Family Learning supports and links together a number of key policy areas including the Every Child Matters agenda and the National Skills Strategy.
- recommend that current Family Learning provision is built on and strengthened through an overall vision and strategy, backed up with dedicated, cohesive funding streams.

### A unique position

As the research and case studies in this report demonstrate, Family Learning occupies a unique position in learning provision – it benefits children's education and adults' skills progression. But this means that it also cross-cuts policy areas and, due to recent changes, the government departments that are responsible for these.

Juliette Collier, Head of Family Learning at the Campaign for Learning says: 'Family Learning's strength can also create its difficulties. It has the power to transform lives of all ages, yet funding often is attached to outcomes for children or outcomes for adults, rarely both. The danger for Family Learning with the splitting of the Department of Education and Skills into the Department for Children, School and Families and the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills is that it is caught between the two. What is needed is an overall vision and strategy for Family Learning that links the key policy areas of Every Child Matters and the National Skills Strategy, backed up with dedicated cohesive funding streams.'

### Those important first steps

Family Learning approaches are a powerful way to encourage parents to take a first step back into learning, both for themselves and children. This includes parents who may have left school with no qualifications and due to negative experiences of school have not taken part in learning since.

Juliette Collier says: 'Why would people return to something which at best they felt was irrelevant and at worst humiliating? The answer is they do it for their kids.'

The key to family learning is inspiring parents to learn in a fun way, with their children. One well organised family learning session that may only last an hour can ignite a love of learning and encourage parents to develop an interest in their children's learning, lead to more motivated

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<sup>1</sup> Family Learning describes a range of activities that promote or deliver learning that happens between children and parents/carers. Professionals and practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds deliver Family Learning in diverse settings. It ranges from informal services to structured and accredited learning.

children. a have a substantial impact on schools in terms of more involved parents and more motivated pupils.

Juliette Collier says: 'Our report brings together research, specific case studies and individual stories to highlight the triple impact that Family Learning can have on parents/carers, children and schools. Given the range of benefits that Family Learning provision brings, and the policy agendas that it delivers on, it is time that Family Learning is recognised, celebrated and supported to fulfil its potential.'

## The Family Factor: research

Research consistently shows that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life (Harris and Goodall 2007).

The Campaign for Learning's report 'Give Your Child A Better Chance' emphasised that parents who do not or cannot help their children learn risk seeing them lose out on nearly one-quarter of their potential attainment ((Campaign for Learning 2003) citing (Feinstein and Symons 1999)). Feinstein and Symons' (1999) research demonstrated that parental interest in education is much more important in explaining children's academic achievements than standard demographic measures such as social class. Professor Desforges and Abouchar (2003) reiterated this finding that home learning is the biggest influence on achievement of children at pre-school age (citing (Melhuish, Sylva et al. 2001)).

NIACE (Horne and Haggart 2004) conducted a small study of the impact of family learning in Lancashire. It found that 45% of parents talked and read more often with their children and increased their level of involvement with homework as a result of participation. Just under a third of parents thought their child was doing better at school, and analysis showed that the quality of help with homework improved. A fifth of parents reported that their child's behaviour had improved. Similar results were found for parents who had participated in family learning over a year ago. More parents reported that their child was doing better at school and that their behaviour had improved.

Parents also benefit from Family Learning. Horne and Haggart (2004) identified that 85% of parents felt more confident generally and/or when talking to the child's teacher. Parents were also pleased with their own learning and socialising, which widens their social network and builds up social capital. Over half of parents who had participated in family learning between 1 and 4 years ago had gone on to do another activity because of family learning, and this included further learning, volunteering in child's school or wider community, working as a paid classroom assistant or obtaining a job, or better job. In addition, about a quarter of parents said that other family members were more interested in learning.

Schools involved in the Campaign for Learning's Learning to Learn project have found that family learning approaches have increased pupil motivation, parental involvement and, in some case studies, had an impact on children's attainment.(Higgins, Wall et al, 2007). Horne and Haggart (2004) also found that as well as schools benefiting from parents working or volunteering in the schools following family learning programmes, parents reported greater involvement with schools;

for instance they were more likely to approach teachers if there were any issues or problems (Horne and Haggart 2004). In addition, schools benefit from an increase in child behaviour, motivation and attainment. 39% of head teachers in the NIACE study (Horne and Haggart 2004) agreed that parent’s participation in family learning had lead to an improvement in children’s academic performance in school.

## The Family Factor: Case Studies

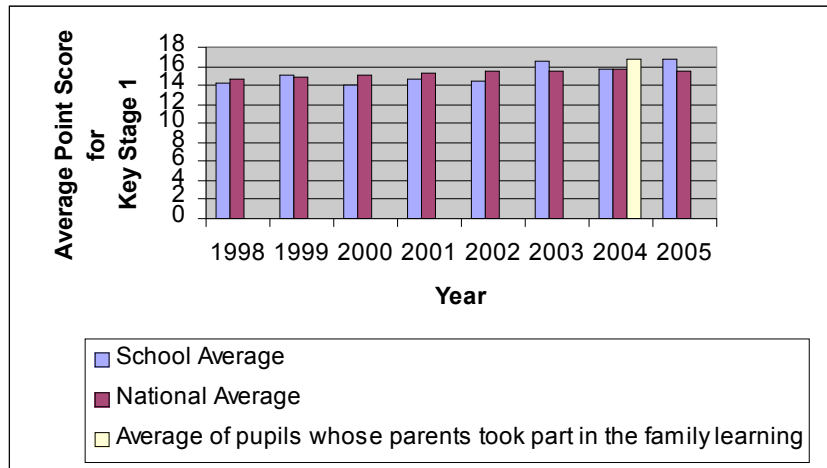
### The impact on children and schools: St Meriadoc C of E Nursery and Infant School, Cornwall

St Meriadoc is in an area of high unemployment and poverty. Twenty percent of children at Key Stage 1 are on the Special Educational Needs register, and eighteen percent are eligible for free school meals. As part of the Campaign for Learning’s Learning to Learn action research project, the school investigated the impact of family learning on children’s attainment. Parents were invited to a series of evenings to give them strategies to help them and their children to become better learners. Parents were introduced to topics such as the importance of self-esteem and resilience – persevering when stuck.

Twelve sessions were run. Half the parents filled in a questionnaire and of these 22 out of 23 parents stated that they felt the sessions benefited their child (the other parent having not attended all the sessions). In addition 92% stated that their confidence in their ability to help their children had increased – the remaining 8% already had a high self belief.

In 2004, national and school average point scores were equivalent at 15.6 (Figure 1). However, for the 17 pupils, whose parents participated in the family learning sessions, the average point score was 8% higher than their peers at 16.8.

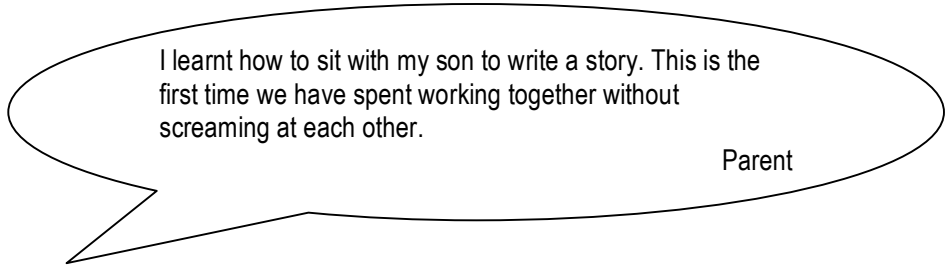
Figure 1



As a result of the project there are cases where the school has seen improvement in the child's performance at school. The school also feels that there are stronger links with parents who now feel more involved in their child's learning, and there has been an increase in self esteem and confidence amongst parents which is being passed onto the children.

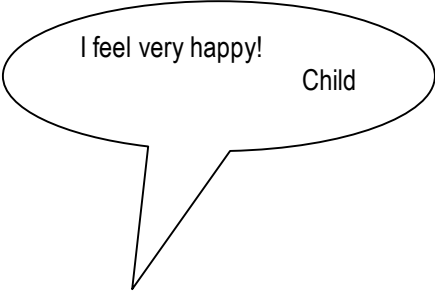
After the success of this project, St Meriadoc invited parents to work alongside their children in normal lessons and to attend after school clubs two to three times every half term. 14 out of the 26 parents attended. All children received the same input from teachers, and both groups had a full range of abilities, and children with Special Educational Need Statements. The previous year, 49% of children achieved above average grades in three subjects (Maths, English and Science). However, this year 57% of children whose parents attended lessons achieved these grades, compared to 18% of the other children that did.

Parents appreciated the opportunity to take part in lessons and the school noted that the children who took part were more motivated. There was also an increased dialogue between home and school, and that the children whose parents attended got higher SATs results than those who didn't.



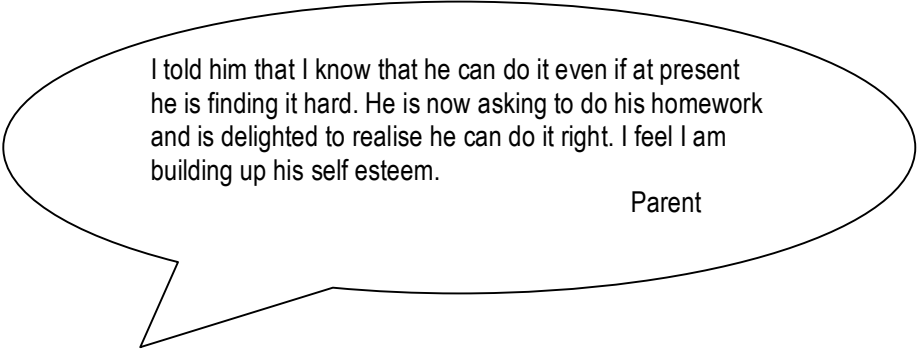
I learnt how to sit with my son to write a story. This is the first time we have spent working together without screaming at each other.

Parent



I feel very happy!

Child



I told him that I know that he can do it even if at present he is finding it hard. He is now asking to do his homework and is delighted to realise he can do it right. I feel I am building up his self esteem.

Parent

## **The impact on children, schools and parents: Family Learning in Leicestershire**

Marion McMillan, a Family Learning Development Tutor in Leicestershire has tracked learners who've completed a family learning course. Seventy one percent of learners from 2006/07 gained a Level 1 and/or Level 2 qualification (equivalent to 61 OCR passes). At least 28 of the 66 learners who participated on the Family Learning Literacy and Numeracy course 'Keeping up with the children' were continuing to study. This included:

- Skills for Life qualifications
- GCSE English with a view to becoming a learning support assistant;
- attending higher education classes
- studying for a Child Care and Learning Development course
- NVQs to be a learning support or teaching assistant.

One learner reported that they were now volunteering and three learners said that since doing the family learning course they were inspired to change job or further their careers. These figures may be underestimates as not all learners have been tracked and the figures were compiled before the start of the new academic year (September 2007). A child in year 1, whose mum attended a 'Keeping up with the Children' numeracy programme, moved from 'special needs' in the Autumn term in Maths to a level 1A at the end of the summer term, which is above average.

As well as the successes from last year's course, Marion is aware from previous learners that this year at least 10 parents went on to achieve Level 2 Literacy and Numeracy qualifications and have become employed as Learning Support Assistants and one as a volunteer. Another parent has just begun her NVQ Level 2 Teaching and three further parents have begun a Level 3 Teaching Assistant qualification. One parent achieved her Level 2 English and recently completed a course to become a qualified swimming instructor. Two parents began their studies on a 'Keeping up with the Children' programme, gained a Level 2 in Maths and English and then became a learning support assistant. One went on to study at Northampton University for her foundation Stage Teacher Status. The other completed a 2 year Access course and is now in her third year of four studying at Warwick University for Early Childhood Studies (Hons). She then plans to do a PGCE at Warwick University.

Parents have also highlighted the impact on their children as a result of taking part in the family learning programmes 'Keeping up with the Children' numeracy and literacy and Joint Family Learning since 2005:

'I felt I was able to help and do things with him. Beforehand I hadn't a clue about circle time/ plenary/ CVCs. I hadn't known where to start before the courses.'

'I have the understanding to try to read his writing instead of just brushing him off.'

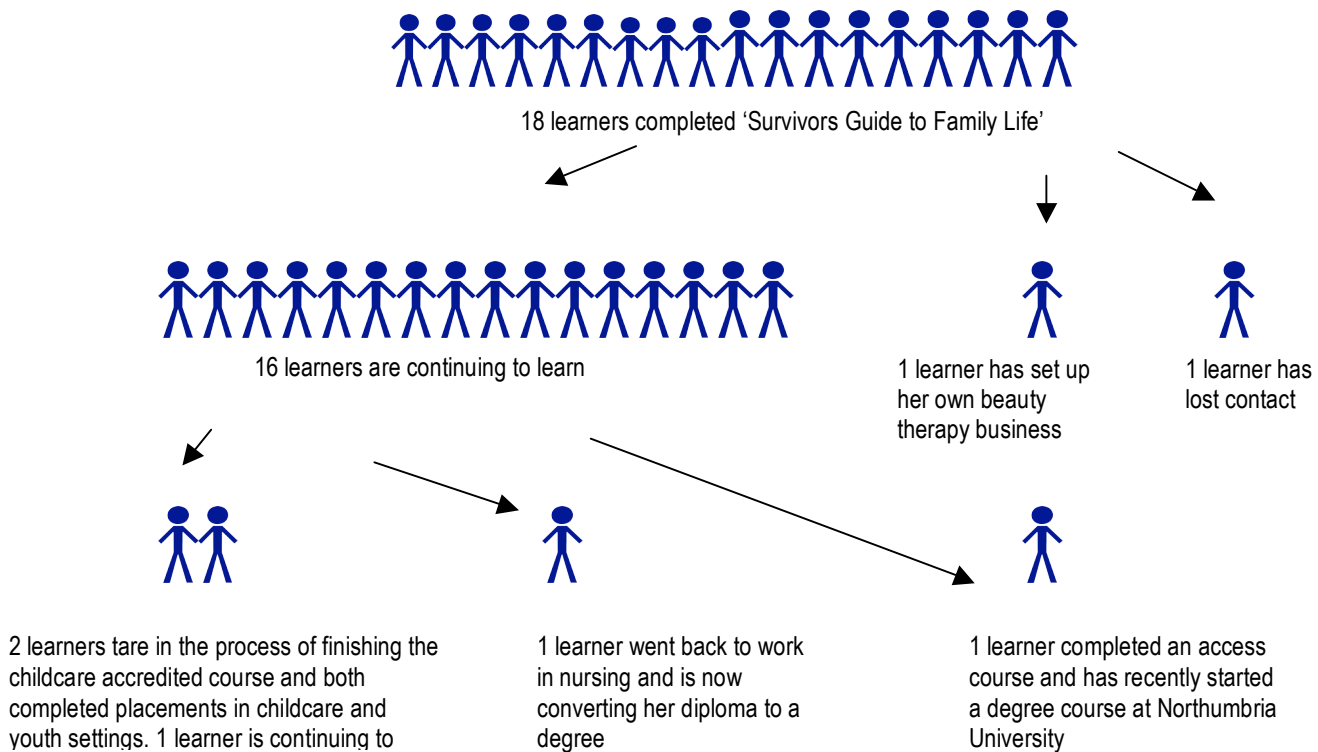
'I could not get my 13 year child to pick up a book and read. I struggled with this, not knowing how to help her. However, after discussing various strategies in the Family Literacy programme, I decided to read her book to her that evening and then suggested we could take turns in reading a page each, which we did. From that moment her attitude towards reading changed and now she is asking for more books and to go to the Library.'

Barwell Junior School, where the family learning took place, has been rated as 'outstanding' in many respects by school inspectors. The Head teacher Brenda Davies was 'really pleased that the inspection teams recognised the strong teamwork between staff, pupils, parents, governors and a number of representatives from the wider community that goes into making our school so successful'.

### The impact on parents and their progression: Family Learning in Northumberland

Linda Goode, Family Support Worker at Coquet Children's Centre in Northumberland has reported excellent feedback from a wider family learning course "Survivors Guide to Family Life". Figure 2 summarises what happened to each of the eighteen learners since completing the course. In total, 89% of learners (16) have continued onto other courses and one has become self employed. From this group, 72% of parents went to do other courses at the centre and have stated that they will continue learning and progressing until their children are at school and they can take up employment (most parents have children under 5). This includes two parents that are in the process of finishing the childcare accredited course and have completed placements in childcare and youth settings - one of which has continued to work for their placement setting as a volunteer. Of the remaining parents – one parent went back to work in nursing and is now converting her diploma to a degree and another young woman, a lone parent, went on to do an Access course and has recently started a degree course at Northumbria University. In addition, one mother who had suffered from domestic violence and had particularly low self esteem prior to her involvement with the centre, went on to create her own beauty therapy business.

Figure 2



The Coquet Children's Centre has found that parents are keen to learn and once start learning, never want to stop. However, Linda emphasises that just advertising the centre and its courses

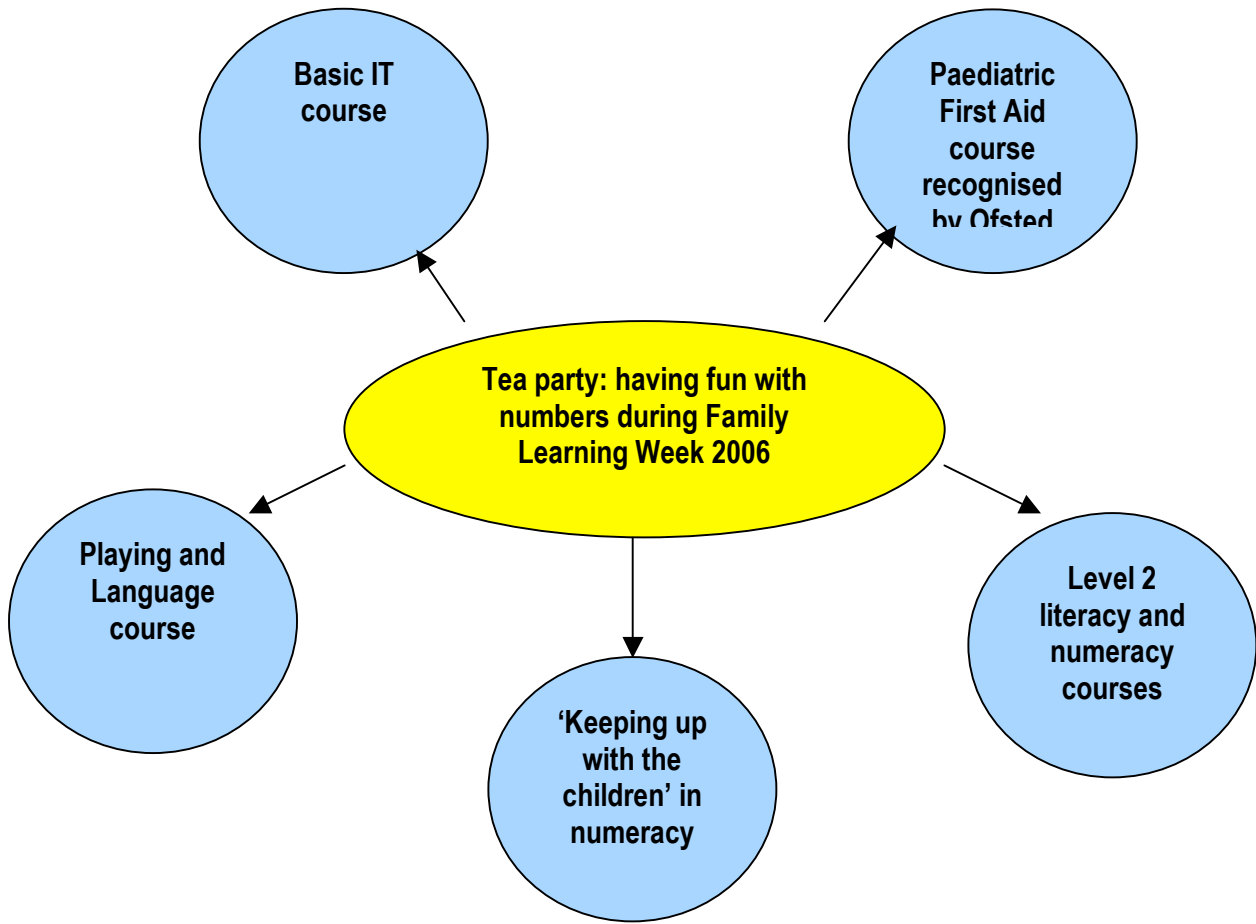
isn't enough for most parents. One of the best ways to recruit parents is to speak to them face to face, and give them the support and confidence they need to 'put a foot through the door'. Most parents begin with confidence building sessions so that they gain confidence in speaking out in a group, and then move onto family learning sessions, such as the current course "Share" that helps families learn at home and give children some preparation for starting school. From here they are often inspired to join other courses ranging from non-accredited sessions to skills for life qualifications. Working in a rural area, the centre believes it is invaluable to giving parents the confidence they need to travel further a field to other educational institutions, and the staff work hard to signpost parents to other appropriate courses when they are ready.

### **The impact on parents and their progression: Family Learning in Northamptonshire**

After attending a couple of conferences and workshops for Family Learning, Liz Willis, Northamptonshire felt inspired to see something happen in the school in which she worked. As it was the first time, she started with something small and organised a 'numbers' tea party during Family Learning Week 2006. The school is in a deprived area, and came out of special measures four to five years ago. All parents with pre-school children were invited to come along and learn with their children how to have fun with numbers whilst teaching their children at the same time. All the children took part and the coordinators were pleased that six mothers were able to make the event as well as a few others expressing interest, although were unable to attend on the day. They received really positive feedback and the mums talked about their experiences at school and how they left without any qualifications and would like to do some now. The morning went really well with all mums leaving with a positive feeling and a commitment to learn more about how their children learn and how they can help them in this process.

The snowball effect had begun – from a simple activity during family learning week. A non-accredited Play and Language course that lasted 12 hours was held, and all the mums from the tea party attended, including another mum who had been interested since hearing about the tea party. Again, feedback was positive and this time an accredited City and Guilds numeracy course "Keeping up with the Children" was held. All ten mums passed this course, including two mums who also took and passed their Level 2 Literacy and Numeracy. In addition to these courses, mums from the tea party have spread the word, which is seen as the most effective way of recruiting, and 12 began the accredited Paediatric First Aid course recognised by Ofsted. With the exception of one parent who was unable to complete the course due to illness, all parents passed this course. Parents and grandparents were also keen to start a basic IT course at the school, which was non-accredited, but aimed to increase IT skills. Seven out of ten learners were able to finish it. All in all, the tea party from last year's FLW has snowballed into providing a variety of courses from numeracy to First Aid. Beneficiaries have included children, parents and grandparents and everyone can't wait for a new year of family learning. This snowball effect has been summarised in **Figure 3**.

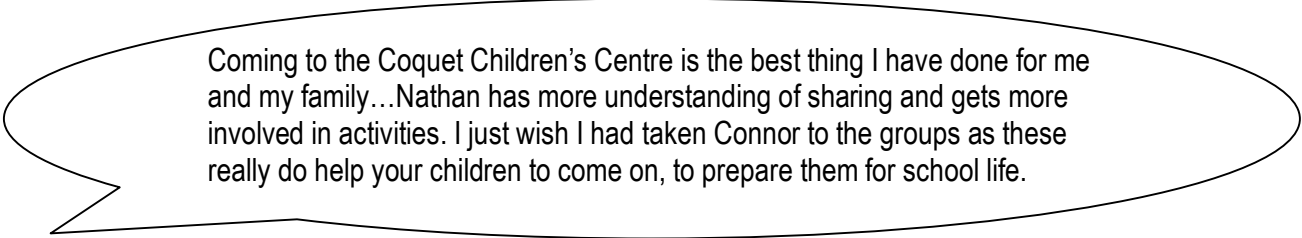
Figure 3



## The Family Factor: individual stories

### Cheryl, Coquet Children's Centre, Northumberland

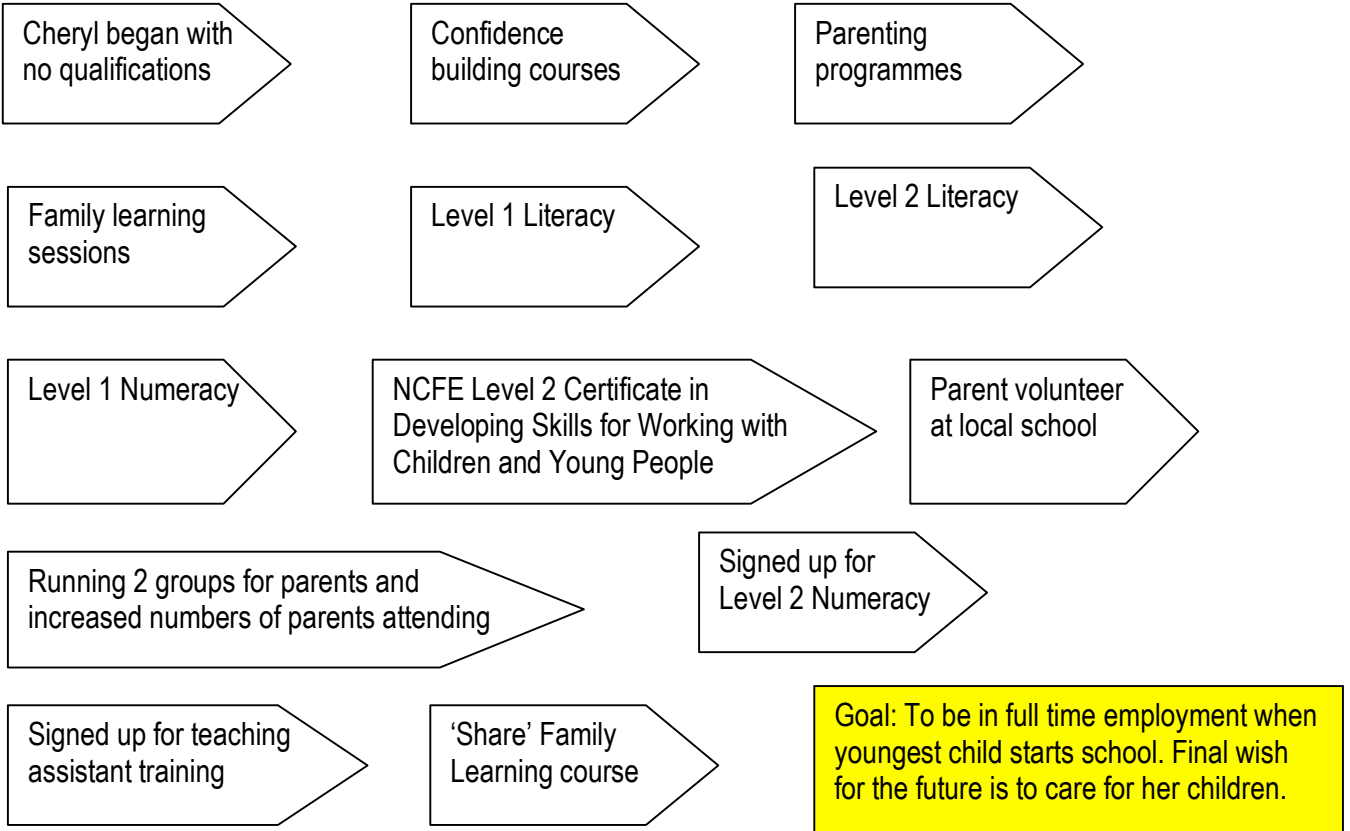
Cheryl is a young mum who came to the Coquet Centre with very little confidence, and with no basic skills qualifications. With the Centre's support in terms of transport and crèche facilities, she has attended a range of confidence building courses, family learning sessions and parenting programmes. These initial courses led to Cheryl successfully completing her Level 1 Literacy very quickly. However, she failed the Level 2 Literacy at her first attempt and, despite the setback, she was determined to carry on and within a few months she passed her Level 2 Literacy, an achievement of which she is very proud. She has also passed her Level 1 Numeracy National Test, and has recently signed up to study for the Level 2.



Coming to the Coquet Children's Centre is the best thing I have done for me and my family...Nathan has more understanding of sharing and gets more involved in activities. I just wish I had taken Connor to the groups as these really do help your children to come on, to prepare them for school life.

Cheryl's successes in the National Tests encouraged her to study (and pass) the NCFE Level 2 Certificate in Developing Skills for Working with Children and Young People. Cheryl says that she is preparing for full employment once her youngest child starts school. After a placement at one of the Drop In & Play Groups, she is now running two of these groups. In one village, the Drop In and Play Group sessions had to close due to poor turnout, and a change of venue did not significantly increase numbers. However, through hard work and enthusiasm, Cheryl has managed to significantly increase the numbers attending, so that it is now very successful. Cheryl is also a parent volunteer at a local school and is soon starting a course to train as a teaching assistant. Cheryl specifically says that her own children are happier because she is and that her family are closer and have greater understanding of each other. Cheryl still has the learning bug – she signs up to as many learning sessions as possible at the centre and is taking part in the current 'Share' family learning programme. Starting with qualifications, Cheryl began her lifelong learning at a confidence building workshop and is now well on her way to gaining full time employment in a skilled profession.

**Cheryl's progression route:**



## Sally, Leicestershire won the “Most Improved Learner in Leicestershire” award in 2006

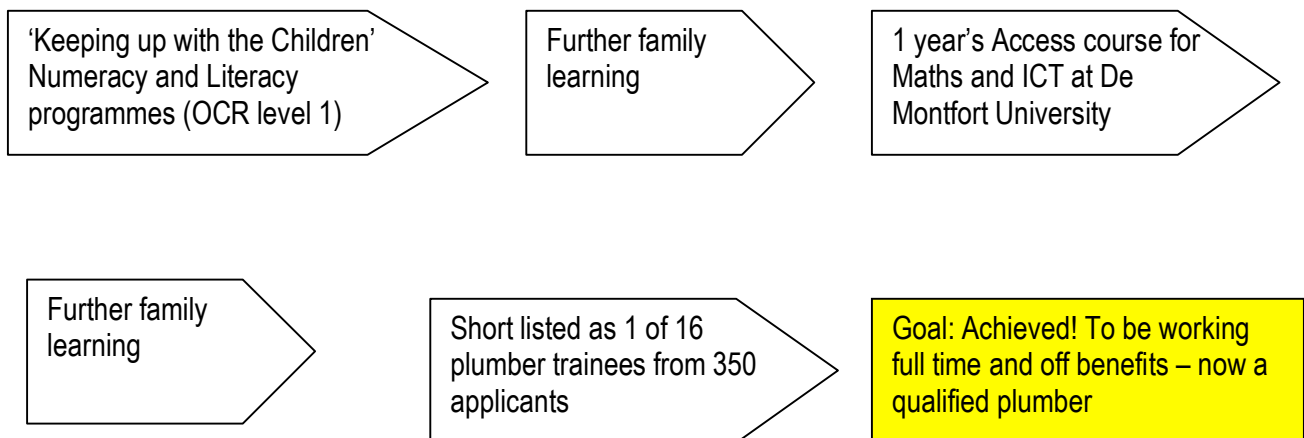
As a single parent with two primary school boys, Sally re-started her learning journey in May 2001 attending a ‘Keeping up with the Children’ Numeracy and Literacy programmes (OCR level 1) in order to help and support her children’s learning. Further family learning led to Sally gaining key skills accreditation and a place at De Montfort University on a year’s Access course to study Maths and ICT. Unable to draw on financial assistance, yet undaunted, she travelled to Leicester every day by public transport and graduated in the summer of 2003. Sally decided against further study for an HND qualification as she was looking for a career and the opportunity to be ‘off benefits’.

Further Family Learning at her children’s school led Sally to decide to become a plumber. She was accepted, having been short listed from 350 mainly male applicants and was the only female in a group of fifteen men. She qualified in 2005, was accepted as a trainee with a local plumber and thus achieved her target.... “to get off benefits and have a full-time career’.

Marion McMillan, Family Learning tutor, nominated Sally for her award. “Sally was a constant source of fun, inspiration, motivation and vision with her ideas for further study to benefit both herself and her friends. She thoroughly deserves this recognition.”

...and last words from Sally...”Going back to learning has completely changed my life for the better, not only because I am working but that I have something to offer now. I also feel that I know a lot more about me as a person than I did before. I feel complete”

### Sally’s progression route



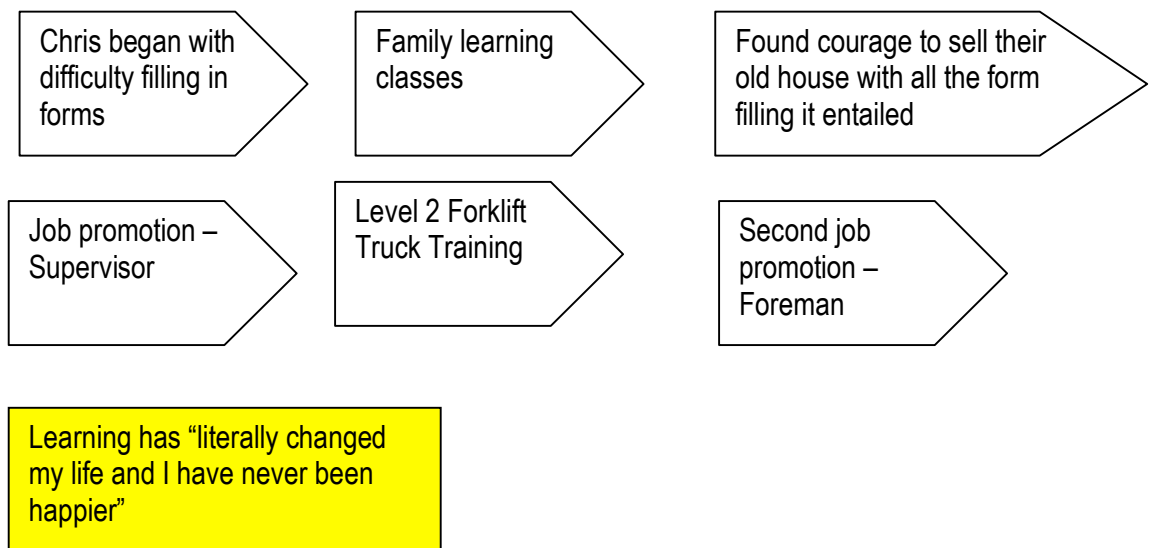
## Chris in Leicestershire won an award recognising his achievements as an adult learner<sup>2</sup>

Chris' learning journey began by attending family learning programmes at his daughters' primary school. Chris said, "I decided to go back in to learning initially to help my children with their homework. I soon realised I had huge chunks of my education missing. I didn't know the difference between upper and lower cases". Chris needed a lot of support with his learning, first through individual tuition then by joining family learning groups.

Chris confessed to bluffing his way through filling in forms "saying my wife's writing was neater". Chris gained a lot more confidence, whether helping his children or just writing a card. He found the courage to sell their old house with all the form-filling that this entailed and move to a bigger place that the family love. At work he progressed to supervisor, completed the forklift truck course and since then has been promoted to foreman. Chris said learning has "literally changed my life and I have never been happier".

Last year Chris from Earl Shilton completed a week's course at work to obtain a Level 2 Forklift truck training certificate.

### Chris' progression route



<sup>2</sup> See NIACE (2007) for more details.

## Summary

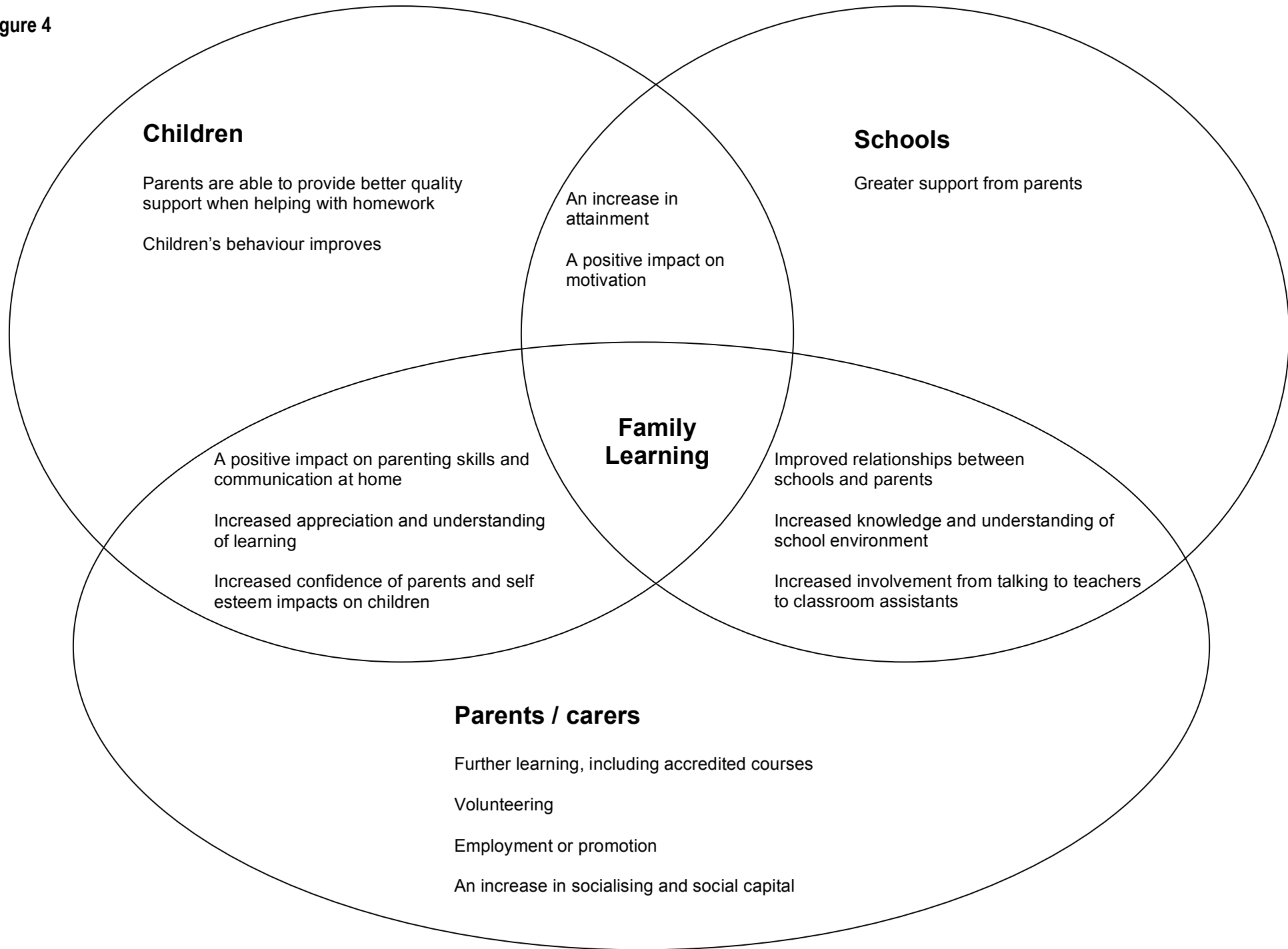
Family Learning promotes a learning culture within families and leads to better outcomes for children and adults. The small scale studies and case studies collected in this report highlight its potential to transform lives. Figure 4 shows the impact that Family Learning provision can have on parents/carers, children and schools.

Children benefit from family learning in numerous ways. They receive higher quality support from their parents when helping them with their homework. Parents are also more likely to understand the education system, what is expected of their child and how they can best support them. In addition, some studies have shown that children's behaviour has improved. It would seem logical that children are more settled if parents have gained confidence in their parenting skills, and there is an increase in communication in the household. Studies have also seen that increased confidence and self esteem has translated onto the children. Finally, the key outcome of family learning that it has a positive impact on the motivation of children to learn and has a positive impact on attainment.

Family learning does not stop with the children. As well as gaining confidence, parents are increasing their social capital by widening their social network. They are quite likely to continue onto further learning, some moving on to Skills for Life qualifications, others continuing to degree level or NVQ level 3 to become a teaching assistant. Many parents volunteer at their school or in their local community, and some gain the confidence to get a job or strive for job promotion. The rewards to parents are numerous.

Finally, schools benefit from increased parental involvement and support, which is enabling them to produce young adults who are motivated, effective learners.

Figure 4



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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who contributed cases studies and stories for this report.

## About the Campaign for Learning

The Campaign for Learning is an independent charity which aims to stimulate a love of learning for life that leads to positive change. It works with families, schools, workplaces and communities.

National Family Learning Week is the biggest celebration of Family Learning in the country involving thousands of organisations offering opportunities for families to learn in different and exciting ways. The week is the flagship event of the Campaign's wider Family Learning Strategy. It co-ordinates a national network of Family Learning Practitioners and is piloting various ways of supporting parents through its projects and research. [www.familylearningweek.com](http://www.familylearningweek.com)

For more information on the Campaign for Learning and its work visit:  
[www.campaignforlearning.org.uk](http://www.campaignforlearning.org.uk) or call 020 7930 1111.