



End of project report for: Exploring the Wider World

Project summary

The Stoke-on-Trent Opportunity Area (OA) commissioned Early Education to design and deliver a project to boost the knowledge and confidence of early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings in relation to the Understanding the World area of learning of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The focus of the project was encouraging practitioners to take children out into the locality to develop the children's sense of community and widen their experiences, thereby impacting on the outcomes for children in Understanding the World strands of People and Community and The World. This was achieved through having an initial focus of exploring what the locality surrounding each setting had to offer with the staff in a range of ways. The project was offered in a bespoke manner to each setting so that the needs of the staff and children could be supported.

The project has been successful at increasing practitioners' knowledge and confidence about Understanding the World, and has had a transformative effect on practice, with many more settings taking children out into the local area, sometimes with their families, and developing their practice to enhance the learning from such opportunities.

The aim of the project was to be as bespoke as possible to ensure the needs of the settings were met. The achievement of this goal was borne out in the evaluations from the settings "The project was very bespoke and individualised to our setting, our community and our families." The support programme was devised in conjunction with the settings and was made up of coaching visits, accompanied outings, staff meetings, general training and follow up sessions. Each setting was allocated a dedicated Early Education Associate who made visits at intervals that were dictated by the settings. The face to face nature of the support helped to develop the positive



relationships between the settings and their associate. This helped with ensuring the project had impact. The quality of the relationships was commented upon at the deep dive. The drawing and piece of coal (pictured left) given to the project lead as a thank you by the children from one of the settings on the project are an example of the close relationships that were built up within the project.

Feedback from the consultants working with the settings and to the local authority's development team has provided evidence of changes in practice including settings

who previously did not take children out now doing so regularly, and others who were taking their children out before commenting on how they are now doing so much more reflectively and building on children's learning more systematically.

Key figures

Numbers of settings participating in setting-specific training. 65 out of 69 = 94% (target = 90%).

Numbers of settings undertaking visits with training and support. 94% (target = 80%). 44 responding settings had between them undertaken 942 outings with 2879 children and 369 practitioners and had been accompanied by 107 families.

81% of settings have reported that they have seen an increase in the number of outings that children are experiencing on a regular basis. Some settings have considerably increased the frequency of outings. Two settings didn't take the children out at the beginning of the project and they now take a group of children out every day. The OA board have reported that they feel the project has generally met the intended outcomes. They feel that the project had a good reach and that settings are now more confident in taking children out and are now providing supportive and challenging opportunities to children after outings have taken place.

Increased practitioner confidence delivering People & Communities and The World activities in PVI settings: 81% of settings have reported that staff are now more confident in taking children out and 68% have increased their levels of knowledge for these 2 strands (target = 75%). 11% of settings reported that their confidence levels have remained the same; these were the settings who felt most confident at the beginning of the project and changed their practice the least.

The timing of the project has meant that it has impacted on 2 cohorts of children, but not for a full year for either, and so neither group has had long for the results to affect outcomes. Nevertheless, 81% of settings have reported that they have seen an increase in outcomes for children in The World and People and Communities, although it was not possible to measure this against a baseline cohort. 80% of settings have also reported that staff are now more confident in taking children out and 70% have increased their levels of knowledge for these two strands. This is despite the fact that some settings were still joining the project in January and so they have had very little time to have an impact. It was decided to allow settings to join so late in order for as many children as possible to experience opportunities that they might not otherwise have had. The experiences often provided learning opportunities that staff and children had not engaged in before such as going on a barge, going to an exhibition, using clay, seeing live animals and hearing tuned instruments.

45 settings attended the introductory training in person (64%). All those who opted not to attend in person received a phonecall to provide them with an equivalent briefing on the project.

In total there were 80 participants in general group training. This is in addition to setting level training as well individual coaching. Group training was requested by practitioners at the initial sessions, and 80 practitioners attended 18 sessions. This was lower than we had hoped for and some training sessions had no takers. Training was offered at a range of times so that settings could attend at times that suited them best. Feedback from those who attended the training was positive. Settings initially reported that they were feeling overwhelmed by the number of projects on offer through the Opportunity Area and knowing which ones would have the greatest impact, so this may be one factor impacting take-up.

All settings received copies of the bespoke project resources, including the small number which chose not to take up training or experiences. This included the project handbook, the #stokegoesout photobook and “What am I?” book, and giant maps of the settings’ local areas.



Celebrating the project’s achievements

The project has been celebrated a celebration event for the settings and other local organisations, and by sharing information about the project in a series of articles and a set of case studies.

Three Nursery World articles have highlighted aspects of the project and a possible fourth is still to come. An article was written for the Foundation Stage Forum, showcasing how a setting was using the online tracking programme Tapestry to communicate with families and supporting them to further support their children at home in relation to the visits. Early Childhood Outdoors published a blog from project lead, Caroline Eaton, to highlight the project and to share the benefits of taking young children out.

The celebration event was attended by 19 professionals from a range of audiences. Five settings shared their learning from the project, and three organisations involved in delivering experiences shared information about how they can continue to support settings. Delegates came from settings and schools in Stoke, the university and the Opportunity Area Board.

At the celebration event settings shared their learning in an informal manner. Delegates could ask questions about challenges they had yet to overcome and also share what they had learnt over the course of the project. Three of the organisations who provided the experiences for the children also attended so that settings could

hear about experiences their children may not have had but could do in the future, funds allowing.

An additional by-product of the event was that the author of the initial Staffordshire University report was able to see the impact of the project that she has suggested. As a result, the university are thinking about ways that they can support their students to have a deeper understanding of the need for outings and the focussed learning that can result from this. Two possible solutions might be to develop a bank of students who would be willing to support settings to take children out, as settings often stated that they felt they didn't have enough staff. The second solution will involve developing a set of resources that students could bring with them to support continuous provision and experiences to build on after the outing.

A set of case studies were drawn up to celebrate the learning that has taken place during the project. These have been put on the Early Education Website for settings from Stoke to access as well as more widely.

Ofsted have picked up on the project in 2 of their inspections:

'Staff demonstrate secure knowledge on how to support the development of children in all areas of learning. The manager provides staff with additional support and training to strengthen their knowledge. Recently, staff attended a course to better enable them to develop the experiences they provide for children. As a result, the children are encouraged to explore the history of the surrounding area.'

'Children develop an excellent understanding of the world around them. They take part in exciting outings within the local community. For example, they enjoy picnics in the park and visit the post office to buy stamps to post their paintings home.'

The project Newsletters celebrated practice that was worthy of dissemination and the final newsletter has an overview of the project, details of the organisations that provided the experiences and a reminder of the supportive information on the Early Education Website.

At the celebration event schools became aware of the bespoke Stoke resources such as the photo books. A request was made for these resources to be made available to schools as well.

An issue of the Early Education Journal will focus on this project to share more widely with our membership the elements that are transferrable, and it may also be a focus for a future Early Education conference.

Legacy and sustainability

The project resources, including the handbook, are in every PVI setting and electronic versions will be given to the development team. The support materials will

remain on the Early Education Website after the end of the project. This means that settings will have easy access to refresh their memory about best practice.



Sample pages from project photobook

There has been a group from the development team who have been directly involved in helping to ensure the settings made the most of the project. The development team will have the contact details of the organisations and other relevant information to help ensure the developments become embedded.

There will be an opportunity for settings to continue to network on the 11th June at Oaklands Nursery (if COVID-19 social distancing restrictions allow, or at a later date tbc). A reminder will be sent out via EYQI closer to the date. If settings would like further opportunities to network, they will be encouraged to take responsibility for doing that at this point. The headteacher at Oaklands Nursery has been one of the Associates involved in the project.

As part of the final conversation the settings have had with their Associate, there was a section on how settings will ensure outings will continue to take place.

Suggestions included:

- ensuring the profile of outings remain high by having a reminder on planning formats so that the clear expectation remains that children will be being taken out into the locality.
- regular slots in staff meetings
- continued use of the bespoke resources
- thinking about the cultural capital benefits of using the familiar area with the children.

Some settings feel that they now have outings firmly embedded into their practice and are confident that there will be a legacy to the project. *“We had forgotten how good going out is. We now take children out to shop for resources, whereas before the project, a staff member would pop out and get whatever was needed.”*

The legacy of the project will be helped by settings understanding the wider benefits of regular trips out, eg for language and behaviour, as well as to enhance opportunities for learning.

Settings have realised that taking children out is a beneficial way of finding out about the levels and types of language children are capable of using and have acquired. One setting took a group of children out and a staff member heard a child talking to another child. The first child was explaining about coping stones to the listening child. Without this outing the staff would have no idea about how in depth a knowledge the child had and how she was willing to share her expertise.

Settings have realised that challenging behaviour has been minimised in some situations with clear and consistent expectations as well as by providing more stimulating experiences for young children. The locality provides so many opportunities for talking with children that build on their interests.

Settings have reported how with the increased confidence levels have meant that staff who were concerned about to take children out are no longer reluctant because it is more interesting for both the staff and children to be out in the locality. As outings have become more frequent settings are feeling more part of the community and this has led to further opportunities as neighbours etc contact the nurseries as deliveries are made which they think the children will find interesting. Over the course of the project there has been a shift in seeing the locality as too dangerous to be in to being a place that provides many learning opportunities and that children will be using these spaces at other times and will need to feel confident in them. As this change has occurred so the frequency of outings has increased for these settings.

Some settings have begun to develop relationships with settings outside Stoke so that children will know about other areas of the UK.

Settings have been enabled to get equipment that will ensure outings and an understanding of the world focus will continue. Settings have been given equipment to enhance continuous provision or waterproofs etc. Some of the waterproofs are

new and some have been collected from other areas. *“Wellies and coats were collected to support our outings which was above and beyond.”*

It is unfortunate for the legacy of the project that the COVID-19 setting closures and social distancing regulations will for a time prevent settings from continuing to take children out. However, the knowledge and resources are all in place once settings resume normal operations and, if anything, going out may be even more valued and appreciated after a period of not being able to do so. It will also be particularly important for children who may have missed out on weeks or months of normal activity.

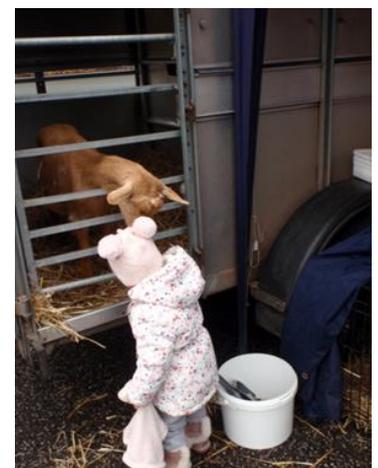
Impact, change and learning

The following data is based on the responses provided by 44 out of the 65 participating settings about numbers of children, families and practitioners participating. It therefore under-reports total participation – if those reporting were typical, actual numbers may have been a third higher.

- 2879 children and 369 practitioners at the responding settings were involved in the project over the last 15 months.
- 107 families accompanied children on outings
- 942 outings took place across the project.

Through the experience programme organised by the project:

- General celebrations as part of The Summer of Art led to multiple settings coming together and collaborating for an exhibition in a local gallery (see programme pages at end of report). Five settings took part to showcase children’s art, with families and other settings encouraged to support and take part in this wonderful exploration of creativity that helped to extend their understanding of the world in a range of ways, from the act of making the art, to the process of exhibiting. The exhibition provided many opportunities for young children to see art and to build on the experience of seeing it and for practitioners to work with professionals that they would not normally work with.
- 12 children went to Port Vale Stadium, they met the team, watched the groundsmen going about their business with the large machinery and saw the practice ground as well as the match day turf. The owner also made an appearance. 15 families accompanied this outing.
- 15 children took part in some Asian drumming.



- 405 children experienced the storyteller.
- Over 600 children experienced the Farm on Wheels.
- 108 children met an artist.
- Over 286 children worked with a ceramicist.
- 88 children met a musician
- 216 children went to Middle Port Pottery where they went on a barge and experienced clay.



Many of the organisations who worked to provide the experiences aspects were not used to catering for under 5s. The storyteller had worked with under 5s when he had been commissioned to tell stories at events in Stoke and had wanted to be able to work closely with the settings for some time, but finances had been a barrier. He particularly enjoyed the session at the Barewall Art Gallery where several settings came together to listen to him. The ceramicists, Middle Port and the drummer had not led sessions for under 5s before the sessions they did for the project.



All the organisations would provide opportunities for under 5s in the future as they have relished working with this sector. There is therefore enhanced local capacity to work with this age group.

Settings are now taking children to places that they would not have gone to before such as:

- Regular dance sessions
- Care homes
- The local café
- Using public transport
- Areas of rough ground that had been perceived as having no value or to be too dangerous
- Disused railway lines
- The canal
- Exhibitions
- Art installations
- Museums
- Walking round the block
- Including children in school pick-ups, which will help with transition into school



The settings have overcome different barriers to going out such as:

- **Thinking all the children needed to be taken out at the same time -** Settings now take children out in small groups which is more manageable and children learn more in these smaller groups. By going out, settings have seen a change in behaviour in their children. Children tend to be more focused and concentrate more readily. They have responded well to the stimulation that they receive when out.
- **Needing to have a minibus** – Very few of the settings own or have access to their own mini-bus. At the beginning of the project many settings thought that this was the best way to get from a to b. Some settings who had a minibus at the beginning have sold them as they are expensive to run. Solutions have been found such as adding business insurance to staff's own car insurance. Many companies include this at no extra charge. Using public transport has been found to be a good alternative, with many children never having used it before. For some settings this has been the focus of the outing, in order to widen the children's life experiences. *"Our children are really good at knowing how to catch the bus now."* Walking has also proved popular. Stamina sometimes needs to be built up and many settings have commented on how children can walk much further than the adults thought possible. Buggies have been used to give a break to those children who need it. By giving the children time to walk rather than feeling the need to rush them, the children can focus on the detail of what they see and are more willing to walk longer distances. *"The project has allowed staff to reflect on further ways to take children out into the local community and the manager is now insured to transport children in her own car."* (Taken from a record of visit by the Local authority development team member.)
- **Finances** – Initially there was a focus on what is low or no cost, so that outings would be sustainable. Settings took full advantage of the fully-funded experiences offered as part of the project. Settings have begun to think about they would afford to repeat some of these experiences with new cohorts or for children who were away or not in on the day of the experience. Strategies range from using the EYPP funding, fund raising and asking families for contributions. Some settings have proposed that by linking with other local settings this would mean they could share the costs which might make it more affordable. Some settings have also considered building up an outing fund by including this in the finance calculations for fees. This means that families will not need to be asked to find sums as the fund will build up over time.
- **Mindset change** – some of the staff in settings have undergone a huge mindset shift during the course of the project. At the start of the project, settings were regularly giving as a reason for not going out the idea that the



area was too unsafe to take children out into. Once they audited their locality and started to use it they found that the reality was not like the image they had built up in their minds. Some settings felt that it was a great effort to get the children out but with streamlining some processes they realised that it was manageable and enjoyable! Once the settings looked at the value of the outings, they were happy to make them happen. One setting commented “*We are now solution focussed rather than not being able to do something.*” This is also echoed in “*We didn’t think to take the children to rough ground as we didn’t see any potential in it. Now children have shown us what a rich place it can be.*” By going out more regularly settings have been welcomed as part of the local community. This has been shown with the regular litter picking some settings have done, the trips to the care homes and how local residents ask for the children to visit or to share interesting deliveries etc. Staff also have a better understanding of what interests children now and have reported that the photobooks have really helped them to see Stoke through the child’s eyes. Children find balancing on curbs or looking down drains to be infinitely exciting and staff have reported that they are more likely to allow children time to do this sort of activity rather than walking as quickly as possible to the destination.

- **Parental permission** – Some settings reported that families were not happy with children being taken out. They have now found that with outings taking place and the positive impact it has had, families are happy for their children to go out. One setting tackled this by always taking their families with them. Families were met at the venue and were encouraged to accompany their child. These families have gone on to re-visit the places again with their children.
- **Staffing** – Many settings felt that there needed to be different ratios for going out. They had policies in place suggesting that the ratio needed to be 1:2 when taking children out. Solutions to this have been to refer to the statutory guidance which states that the ratios are 1:8 for over 3s, 1:6 for 2-year-olds, 1:4 for 1-year-olds and 1:13 for over 3s with a QTS adult. The difference between the legal ratios and those the settings had self-imposed were causing a challenge. Settings are now taking a more flexible approach depending on the needs of the children and where the children are going. “Spare” or supernumerary staff are being utilised to enable children to be taken out. In addition, many settings have now identified their “magic number” so that settings know when they can take the children out on a spontaneous basis. Settings are looking at how adults could be deployed to maximise the number of outings that can take place.

The bespoke resources produced for the project have been well received and are still being well used. The photobooks have resulted in many conversations with children and have shown some practitioners that they need to widen their own vocabulary. They have realised that without a wide vocabulary in the staff,

conversations with children will not be as rich as they might be. In addition, staff have found that when children have images of familiar places and things, they are more likely to share their lives outside the setting. *“I go past that bridge on the way to my nana’s house.”* The maps have been used in a variety of ways – taking the register (children move their pictures from their home to the nursery), planning or reviewing outings, to share with families where the children have been or the families have taken the children and to begin to learn about keys etc.

There has been some impact on families as a result of the project. The following are ways settings have reported the impact the project has had on families:

- Owl mascot – the owl goes home and accompanies families on outings at the weekend to local parks etc.
- Families visited the exhibition and also took their children to other exhibitions in their locality or when they were away on holiday.
- Families are asking children about outings they have been on and are engaging more with the nursery staff.
- Information about what to do and where children could be taken at the weekends is often shared with families in a range of ways.
- Families have taken their children to events where the organisations who provided the experiences have been featuring since so much enjoyment had been gained from the setting opportunity.
- Closer links with families and a better understanding of the lives children lead outside the setting has resulted from experiences gained on the project. This ranges from jobs family members do to commercial opportunities family members own.
- Families are taking their children to look at the barges on the canal

One particular example has had a profound effect on a family. At the beginning of the project one setting were really worried about taking a child out because he had no boundaries and regularly ran away on his way to and from nursery. The staff had witnessed several near misses with cars. The setting practiced walking in the outside area and laid down clear and consistent expectations for all children. This particular child had to hold onto a responsible adult’s hand at all times. He had frequent reminders and re-enforcement on a regular basis. After the last holiday period the mother thanked the staff for setting the expectations of how to behave as they had had a great week off. They were no longer trapped in the house because the mother could trust the child and they had enjoyed each other’s company and gone to lots of places that they would never normally have been able to go to.

The project has also had an impact on an educational resources supplier. During the course of the project, conversations were had with the supplier about the variety of farm animals settings could buy from their catalogue. One of the strands is to talk about similarities and differences and this is difficult to do if variety isn't available in catalogues. Some children may well know that there are Friesian, belted Galloway or Hereford cattle but this wasn't reflected in the resources available. This educational catalogue now has a selection of various sheep and cows.

In addition to these packs and following the feedback at the celebration event, this catalogue company are planning to provide playmats based on the Ordnance Survey Map, similar to the ones that were produced by us for the project.



Example entry from the catalogue produced for the Exhibition:

Brook Cottage

'Reclaimed'

The objective of this project was to teach the children about their local area and their local industry. We also wanted to get across the notion of how manmade industry eventually reverts back to nature.

We took the children on a local expedition to find a dis-used railway track. We used a homemade picture flip book of landmarks, enabling the children to navigate their own route. We told the children stories of how it used to be in years gone by, how people had to travel by train to get to work and how the things made in the factories were often transported by canal boat. The children took time to listen to the stories, to study the scenery and the plants etc.

We then took the children on a trip to Burslem to look at the old buildings and factories, we played 'eye spy' looking for the buildings with plants, trees and Buddleia growing out of them. We talked about how the buildings were old and no-longer in use and that nature had now started to 'reclaimed' them.

Following the outings, we showed the children pictures of people walking to work in the pot banks, of the old transport methods used and of the factories where they worked. We introduced the children to clay,

natural homemade paints and 3d materials such as willow withies.

As we are a very small setting with a wide variety of aged children in our care, therefore, we found it the ideal plan to make a large frieze as a group. The older children were responsible for the more challenging stages of the project and the younger children were able to do the simpler tasks.

We created a large piece of work to illustrate our local town and its rustic beauty, being 'reclaimed' by nature. We used red clay slip, paints and charcoal for the brick work. The children's painted footprints were then covered with PVA and white tissue paper collage was used to create the sky. The children painted flowers and grasses for the foreground. The dragon flies and butterflies were made of sculpted willow withies by our 4 year olds and school children. They were then covered with tissue paper soaked in PVA and decorated by our 2 years old children.

The children have also made individual artwork on framed canvas using paints made from natural resources such as turmeric, paprika, beetroot, blackberries, grapes and flowers. They then used a variety of pastels and charcoal to complete the work.

The only adult input made to any of this work was to construct the 4 collage layers for display and to fix together the insect wings on the 3D models.

We hope that you enjoy our illustrated journey of nature reclaimed Burslem.



Collaborative

Reclaimed
Mixed Media Painting



Appendix – summary of evaluation responses

We had a data return from 44 settings including 15 May starters, 21 September starters and 8 January starters.

Number of staff in the 44 settings who were impacted by the project	Number of children currently and who left in July 2019	Number of families who were included in outings	Number of outings undertaken across the project
369	2953	107 from 17 settings	942

Number of outings that have taken place:			Increase in staff confidence levels for taking children out		
Same	Increase	Decrease	Same	Increase	Decrease
8	36	0	8	36	0
18%	81%	0%	18%	81%	0%

Outcomes for The World			Outcomes for People and communities			Outcomes for CLL			Outcomes for Maths		
Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease
34	10	0	30	14	0	28	16	0	18	26	0
77%	22%	0%	68%	31%	0%	63%	36%	0%	40%	59%	0%

Changes in understanding levels for The World for staff			Changes in understanding levels for People and communities for staff		
Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease
30	14	0	30	14	0
68%	31%	0%	68%	31%	0%

Some photos illustrating outings as part of the project:



Articles about the project

The Nursery World articles about the project which have been published to date are at:

<https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/opportunity-areas-stoke-on-trent-out-and-about>

<https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/eyfs-training-part-12-uw-world-view>

A third article for Nursery World and one for the Foundation Stage Forum are awaiting publication.

Early Childhood Outdoors also published an article:

<https://www.earlychildhoodoutdoors.org/stoke-goes-out/>

Project resources

An online version of the project handbook is available at

<https://www.early-education.org.uk/exploring-the-wider-world>

Further information

For any enquiries about the project or support from Early Education on similar professional learning opportunities, please contact us at the address below.

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