

# Increasing the Employability of Parents/Carers

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Black

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*In January 2016, NIACE and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion  
merged to form Learning and Work Institute*

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Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We strive for a fair society in which learning and work helps people realise their ambitions and potential throughout life. We do this by researching what works, influencing policy and implementing new ways to improve people's experiences of learning and employment. We believe a better skilled workforce, in better paid jobs, is good for business, good for the economy, and good for society.

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- Peepie
- Skills and Learning – Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset
- York Adult Learning

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	5
Pilot models .....	5
Successful outcomes .....	5
Conclusions and recommendations.....	6
1. INTRODUCTION.....	7
1.1 Context .....	7
2. METHODOLOGY .....	9
3. PILOT MODELS.....	10
4. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND HOW THEY WERE OVERCOME .....	11
5. SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES.....	11
5.1 Outcomes for learners .....	12
5.1.1 Employment and employability .....	12
5.1.2 Attitudes towards learning.....	14
5.1.3 Self-efficacy .....	16
5.1.4 Relationship with their children .....	18
5.2 Outcomes for providers.....	19
6. CASE STUDIES.....	21
6.1 People .....	21
6.1.1 How it worked .....	21
6.1.2 Outcomes for learners .....	22
6.1.3 Outcomes for Peep in Derby.....	22
6.2 Skills and Learning Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole .....	23
6.2.1 How it worked .....	23
6.2.2 Outcomes for learners .....	23
6.2.3 Outcomes for Skills & Learning.....	24
6.3 York Learning .....	25
6.3.1 How it worked .....	25
6.3.2 Outcomes for learners .....	26
6.3.3 Outcomes for York learning .....	26
7. CONCLUSION .....	27
7.1 Recommendations.....	27

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. Between September 2015 and March 2016, L&W worked with three Family Learning providers to develop, pilot and evaluate Wider Family Learning models which would increase the employability of parents/carers whilst also equipping them to support their children's learning and development. Funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the project aimed to gather evidence of the impact that Wider Family Learning programmes can have on the employability of parents/carers, and the contribution this provision can make to improving local partnerships and joined-up working between services. This report presents the findings of the pilot evaluation with key recommendations for policy and practice.

### Pilot models

The three pilots worked with parents/carers and families who were at different stages in their attitudes towards work and employability, and so each took a different approach to embedding employability within their Family Learning programmes.

**People** worked with parents/carers who had very small children and were not intending to return to work until their children reached school age. They supported learners to recognise the skills, competencies and values that they were gaining as parents and through Family Learning and how these can be applied to the world of work. Learners also gained an accredited qualification to formalise this expertise and which they could put on their CVs.

**York Learning** supported parents/carers who were looking to return to work once their children started full-time at school. They supported learners to identify their transferable skills, develop clearer career plans and gain qualifications and skills would enable them to look for employment as soon as they were able. They also offered learners one-to-one careers advice and ran events with learning providers and employers to build strong progression pathways for parents/carers.

**Skills & Learning** worked with parents/carers who were already actively searching for employment. They adopted a partnership working approach and co-located their Family Learning programmes, a local job club and employability support within the same children's centre. This centre then acted as a 'one-stop-shop' for parents/carers who were on Family Learning programmes and looking for work, enabling tutors and other staff to share information about learners' needs and tailor their support accordingly.

### Successful outcomes

The pilots achieved a range of positive outcomes for learners and the providers involved in the project. For learners, the pilots resulted in:

- Improvements in their **employment and employability**:
  - One in six learners got a new job;
  - More than one in five learners started volunteering on a regular basis;
  - Over half of learners felt more confident about getting a job and applying for jobs;
  - Learners also felt better able to identify their relevant job skills, were more confident to search for jobs and had a clearer idea of the types of jobs they wanted to do.

- Improvements in their **attitudes towards learning**, with over three-quarters of learners feeling more confident in their ability to learn; more than half of learners signing up for another course and over three-quarters wanting to do further learning;
- Improvements in their **self-efficacy**, with the majority of learners increasing their self-confidence; almost three-quarters reporting that they had a better social life; and almost three-quarters also feeling more satisfied with their life as a whole; and
- Improvements in their **relationship with their children**, which almost three-quarters of learners reported had improved.

Providers also found that the pilots had improved or increased their **partnership working** with different local organisations; made their **support for learners more holistic** which enabled them to achieve better outcomes than usual; and encouraged their tutors to look at **different ways of embedding employability** into their provision.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The findings the pilot evaluation suggest that Wider Family Learning can be an effective vehicle to help parents/carers to develop their career aspirations and employability skills, whatever stage they are at in their search for work.

Below are five key recommendations drawn from the findings of this report:

1. Focussing on **identifying parents/carers' transferable skills** is an effective way of encouraging learners to start considering their employment options. This approach also avoids a deficit model of learning. Family Learning providers could use this as a starting point to embed employability in their programmes.
2. Partnership working is crucial to embedding employability in Family Learning. **Providers should consider working with partners** such as children's centres, information, advice and guidance services, Jobcentre Plus, other learning providers and employers to co-deliver programmes and develop strong progression pathways for learners.
3. **A toolkit or set of resources should be developed** to support curriculum managers and tutors to embed employability into their Family Learning programmes. This would include case studies of effective models, lesson plans, and resources which embed employability with very little additional work for curriculum managers or tutors.
4. Although this report contributes to a growing evidence base, **more research is needed to gather robust evidence** of the ways in which Wider Family Learning programmes support parents/carers to improve their employability skills and employment prospects.
5. As unemployment rates continue to decline<sup>1</sup>, more targeted support is needed for adults who are further away from the labour market. **A second phase of pilots** should be delivered to explore how effective Wider Family Learning provision can be in supporting Employment Support Allowance claimants to improve their employability skills and increase their chances of securing employment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/april2016>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We strive for a fair society in which learning and work helps people realise their ambitions and potential throughout life. We do this by researching what works, influencing policy and implementing new ways to improve people's experiences of learning and employment. We believe a better skilled workforce, in better paid jobs, is good for business, good for the economy, and good for society.

Between September 2015 and March 2016, L&W worked with three Family Learning providers to develop, pilot and evaluate Wider Family Learning models which would increase the employability of parents/carers whilst also equipping them to support their children's learning and development. Funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the project aimed to gather evidence of the impact that Wider Family Learning programmes can have on the employability of parents/carers, and the contribution this provision can make to improving local partnerships and joined-up working between services. This report presents the findings of the pilot evaluation with key recommendations for policy and practice.

### 1.1 Context

Family Learning refers to any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family. In general, Family Learning courses are grouped under two different categories: Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy courses – which focus on developing families' English and maths skills – and Wider Family Learning – which covers a huge range of activities and subjects.

Family Learning can be delivered in a variety of different ways, some of which involve only adults or children, but all of which aim to secure impacts and outcomes for both groups. The following model from our Family Learning Works report describes the different kinds of activity that Family Learning can entail and that contribute to the development of a culture of learning within the family<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> NIACE (2013) Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning.



Many of the activities delivered by the pilots involved in this project only involved parents/carers, but all were closely linked to Family Learning programmes and contributed to the development of a 'learning family' as described in the above diagram. This blurring of the traditional boundaries between Family Learning, Community Learning, and other forms of informal learning is likely to become ever more common as the skills system in England moves to Adult Education Budgets and local skills funding and commissioning. In this context, combining different funding streams and types of learning may enable commissioners to respond to local needs and deliver provision which is of the most value to learners and other stakeholders.

Gaining employment and skills for employment is a recognised key benefit and progression outcome for parents and carers who engage in Family Learning programmes<sup>3</sup>. Parents often progress into paid roles, such as teaching supervisors, frequently starting from very low

<sup>3</sup> Ofsted (2009) An evaluation of the benefits of Family Learning for participants, their families and the wider community. [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning)



levels of confidence and qualification. Recent research<sup>4</sup> also confirms that learners who undertake Family Learning courses develop work related skills, confidence in progressing their career or feel more confident about looking for work.

As this research becomes more widely accepted, Family Learning providers are increasingly of the view that they can have a role in developing more specific courses targeted at parents and carers who wish to return to work, education or training, but who often lack confidence in their existing skills and abilities. These programmes are seen as way of positively encouraging parents and carers to think about their future employment and, by the same token, raising aspirations for their children and family as a whole.

Despite this shift in the focus of Family Learning, there is currently little evidence which demonstrates the impact that Wider Family Learning programmes can have on the employability of parents/carers. Because Wider Family Learning has less emphasis on improving parents'/carers' English and Maths skills, it is even more fundamental to explore how its softer, less tangible outcomes contribute to the development of parents/carers' career aspirations, employability and prospects for employment. This project aimed to fill this gap by producing robust evidence of the impact of Wider Family Learning and disseminating findings to practitioners, providers and policy makers.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, combining the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The data aimed to capture the views of all stakeholders involved in the pilot programmes, including the Family Learning providers, tutors and learners.

Telephone interviews with the key contact from each pilot site were conducted at the beginning of the project. These interviews explored the aims of the pilot programmes, how and why the delivery models were developed, and providers' plans for delivery. Providers that carried out initial assessments or screenings were asked to share anonymised data on learners' skills levels and previous learning/achievement at the beginning of their programme. Baseline data were collected through paper-based questionnaires completed by learners at the beginning of their pilot programme. The questions related to learners' employability, attitudes towards working and attitudes towards learning. The initial questionnaire also collected information on personal characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity and employment status.

During delivery, the project team at L&W had regular Keep In Touch (KIT) meetings with pilot providers to ensure they were kept updated on pilots' progress, any challenges encountered and subsequent alterations to pilot models. The information gained from these meetings were included in the evaluation.

At the end of delivery, learners completed the same questionnaire that they completed at the beginning of the programme. This evidenced any difference in their employability, attitudes towards working and attitudes towards learning. The end questionnaires also asked learners

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<sup>4</sup> BIS Research paper number 180 (2014) Community Learner Survey: additional analysis of participants following Family Learning courses.

if they had experienced a range of outcomes. In order to evidence any changes in learners' skills, providers which carried out final assessments or screenings and were asked to share anonymised data on learners' skills levels at the end of the programme. Pilots were also asked to share anonymised learner destination data. Case study visits were undertaken with each of the pilot sites in order to gain a detailed insight into their delivery models, successes, challenges and key lessons learnt. The visits comprised of qualitative face-to-face interviews with the pilot lead and tutor(s) and a focus group with learners.

In total, we received 82 pre-programme questionnaires and 65 post-programme questionnaires, 60 of which matched. In order to analyse the questionnaire data, each response to a statement was allocated a numerical score, with six indicating that a learner gave a very positive response and one indicating a very negative response. All quantitative data were entered into SPSS, a statistical analysis software package, for analysis. To evidence distance travelled and the difference made by pilots, learners' mean scores at the beginning and end of the programme were compared. The difference between learners' mean scores at the beginning and end of their programme were also calculated, in order to determine the size of any changes reported.

### 3. PILOT MODELS

The three pilots worked with parents/carers and families who were at different stages in their attitudes towards work and employability. As a result, each took different approaches to embedding employability within their Family Learning programmes, tailoring this to the needs and situations of the families they engaged.

For example, Peeples worked with parents/carers who had very small children and were not intending to return to work until their children reached school age. As a result, their learners were focussed on their children's development and were not particularly motivated by the prospect of gaining employment. In order to help parents/carers start their journey back into work, Peeples supported them to recognise the skills, competencies and values that they were gaining as parents and through their Family Learning programme. Through this, they aimed to enable parents/carers to realise how these skills could contribute to their employability and long-term career goals, and also to gain an accredited qualification to formalise this expertise and which may be useful in future employment.

In comparison, York Learning's pilot programme supported parents/carers who had slightly older children, many of whom were due to start school within the next year or so. As a result, many of these parents/carers were starting to consider their employment options and what they could do once their children started at school full-time. York Learning therefore made the employability element of their Family Learning programmes quite explicit, dedicating a number of sessions to looking at learners' career aspirations and what they needed to do to achieve them. Their pilot also offered learners one-to-one careers advice and ran events with learning providers and employers to build progression pathways for parents/carers. By offering this additional support, York Learning aimed to help parents/carers develop clearer career plans and gain qualifications and skills which would enable them to look for employment as soon as they were able.

In contrast with both of the other two pilots, Skills & Learning worked with parents/carers who were already actively searching for employment. Through their pilot, Skills & Learning aimed to develop a more holistic approach to supporting parents/carers to find employment, enabling them to tailor their Family Learning programmes and other activities to suit learners' needs. They adopted a partnership working approach and co-located their Family Learning programmes, a local job club and employability support within the same children's centre. This centre then acted as a 'one-stop-shop' for parents/carers who were on Family Learning programmes and looking for work, enabling tutors and other staff to share information about learners' needs and tailor their support accordingly.

Detailed case studies of the three pilot approaches can be found in section 7.

#### **4. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND HOW THEY WERE OVERCOME**

Overall, the pilots were hugely successful and encountered very few challenges in developing and delivering their Family Learning and employability programmes. However, the providers did encounter a few issues towards the beginning of implementing their pilots. One found that the initial referrals through to the programme were much slower than they had anticipated and had to work closely with managers in other departments and partner organisations to establish strong referral routes through to the pilot. However, once they had got other colleagues on board, they had a steady and consistent stream of learners engaging with their programme throughout the course of the pilot.

Another pilot also found it a challenge to deliver their Family Learning and employability programme within the pilot timeframe. They again overcame this by involving a wide range of colleagues in engaging learners, supporting delivery and working with partner organisations to make the programme a huge success.

Two of the pilots also found that learners had practical barriers which made it difficult for them to engage in their programmes. For one, this was related to the provision of childcare, and they had to have many conversations with parents/carers about whether they needed childcare and what could be put in place to enable them to attend the programme. This pilot also found that the location of some of the sessions meant that learners were either unable or reluctant to attend as they were based in a different venue. Similarly, the other pilot was located in a rural area and some learners found that a lack of public transport occasionally prevented them from participating in the programme. The provision of childcare and location of sessions were therefore two issues which these pilots will take into consideration when planning successive programmes.

#### **5. SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES**

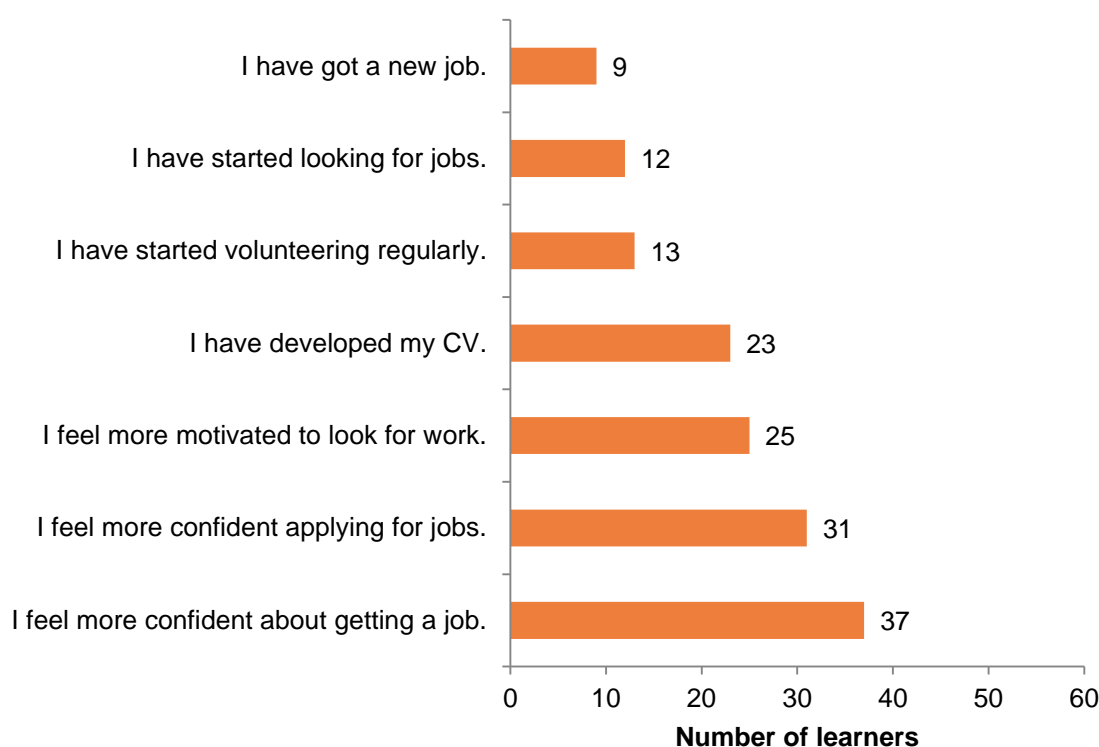
This section describes the outcomes and impact experienced by the learners and providers who took part in the Family Learning and employability pilots. For learners, these centred on employment and employability; attitudes towards learning; self-efficacy; and relationships with their children. The main outcomes for providers included improved partnership working, more holistic support for learners and lessons learned which can be embedded into their other provision.

## 5.1 Outcomes for learners

### 5.1.1 Employment and employability

All of the pilots were highly successful in supporting their learners to achieve outcomes related to employment and their employability. Figure 1 below shows the employability outcomes which learners self-identified in their end of programme questionnaires. Almost one in six learners (nine) got a new job as a result of participating in the project and more than one in five (13) started volunteering on a regular basis. A number of learners at Skills and Learning had found paid or voluntary work in local schools as a result of participating in their Helping in Schools programme; one learner in York had secured a job at Primark and others had started volunteering in schools and local parents groups; and learners at Peeples had taken up volunteer roles in a range of organisations, including children's centres, nurseries and schools. In addition, over half of learners felt more confident about getting a job (37) and applying for jobs (31). This was particularly important for learners as many were starting to consider returning to work after a break, and this boost in confidence was much needed in helping them to start this journey.

**Figure 1: Employability outcomes experienced by learners**

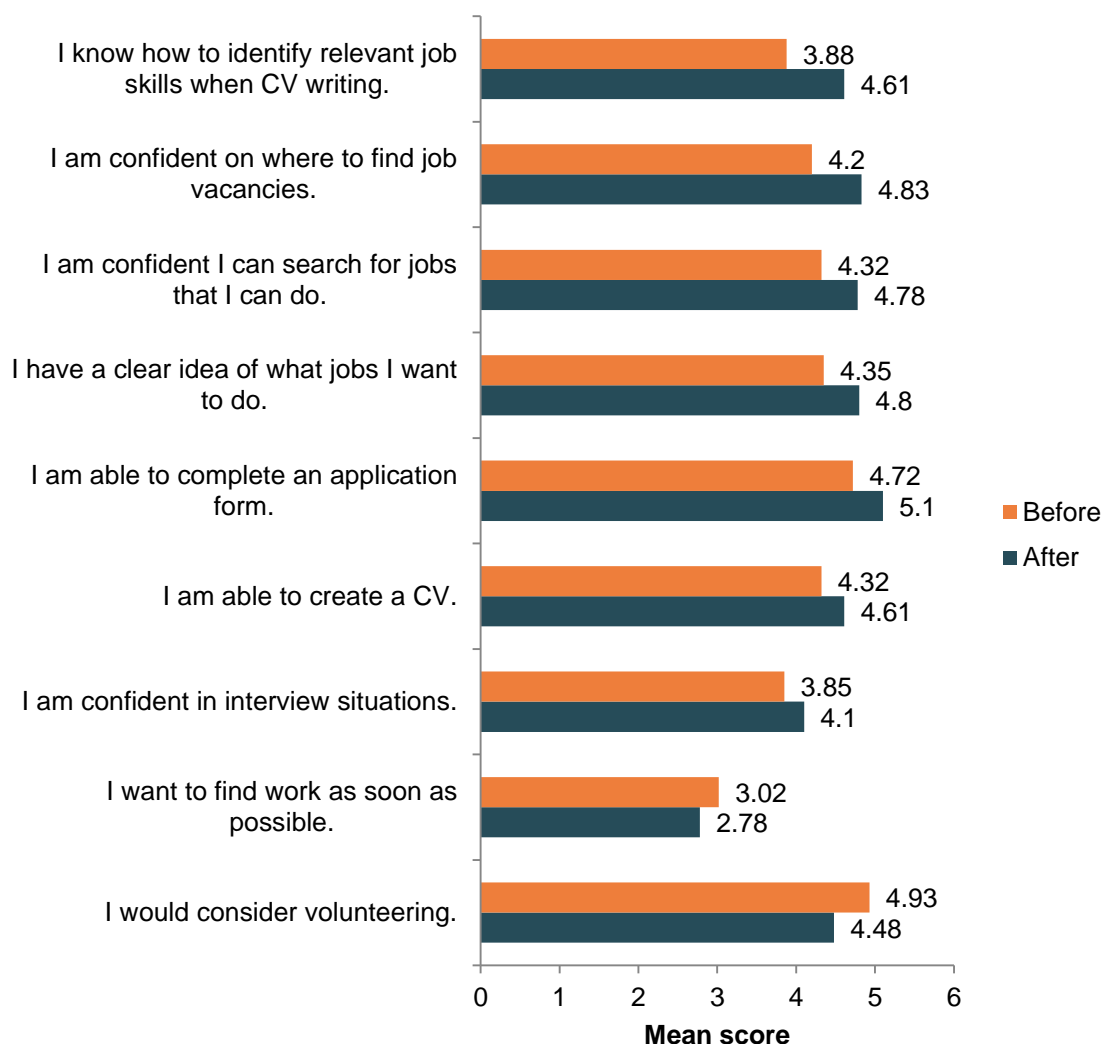


The pilots also had strong impacts on learners' attitudes towards their employability. As Figure 2 below shows, learners were more positive about almost all aspects of employability measured through the pre- and post-programme questionnaires. In particular, learners felt that they were better able to identify their relevant job skills, were more confident to search for jobs and had a clearer idea of the types of jobs they wanted to do<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly, learners

<sup>5</sup> All three of these changes were statistically significant to a P value of 0.007 or less.

appeared to be less concerned with finding work as soon as possible by the end of their programme; this may be due to them having a more realistic idea about the training and qualification requirements for the particular careers they want to pursue, and realising that they would not be able to find meaningful work straight away. In addition, learners appeared to be less likely to consider volunteering at the end of the pilot, although this may be due to the fact that more than one in five had started volunteering regularly as a result of their programme, and therefore were no longer just “considering” volunteering.

**Figure 2: Learners’ mean employability scores before and after their programme**



Base: All matched questionnaires = 60

In their interviews, learners were very positive about the difference their Family Learning programmes had made to their employability. Learners at each pilot discussed how the programme had enabled them to recognise the skills that they had developed as parents and through their Family Learning programme, such as time management, organisation, communication, caring, cooking, and health and wellbeing. In turn, this had made them more confident about progressing onto further education and raised their aspirations about the types of careers they could pursue.

*“I can't stand this I'm just a mum thing that we get or I'm just a dad, or I'm a stay at home dad. You're not, you're a manager, and you're doing all these things and spinning all these plates. I think once people realise that they start getting much more ambition for themselves and that's invariably got a knock on, on their ambition for their children as well, which I think is where Family Learning is really strong.”* (Pilot lead)

The programmes also supported learners to gain new skills and qualifications, and to fill gaps in their knowledge which they felt were preventing them from accessing employment. For example, many of the learners at Skills and Learning needed support to develop their digital skills and be able to search and apply for jobs online. Their tutors therefore signposted them onto the digital learning hub which was also located within the children's centre and enabled learners to practise using computers, laptops and mobile devices. Learners on People's pilot also had the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised qualification which formalised the skills they had developed as parents.

*“If you are not very good with computers that's where this place is good. This is where a place like this is very helpful - if you are not computer literate as many of us aren't.”* (Learner)

For learners who were closer to the labour market, the pilots offered practical employability support and advice on creating CVs, searching and applying for jobs online, and how to prepare for and behave in an interview. This was particularly valuable for parents/carers who had not looked for work for some time, and needed to update their job searching and application skills.

Finally, all of the pilots raised learners' awareness of the types of jobs available in their locality and the steps they would need to take to access these. This not only helped parents/carers to identify new and more ambitious career goals, but also gave them clearer and realistic plans to achieve them. As a result, learners felt more confident that they could find meaningful and sustainable work and were more likely to take steps towards this than they had been prior to engaging in the programme.

*“I've got one learner who had children very young and she's very, very capable and she wants to go and do psychology at university. I think actually having these discussions as part of the class it's almost made her think about it a bit more and hopefully has focused her a little bit... Instead of thinking 'well one day I'd really like to', I think it helps them to think 'okay, well I need to get my Level 2 English and maths and then the next step is going to college' or whatever... [it] just becomes a bit more concrete.”* (Tutor)

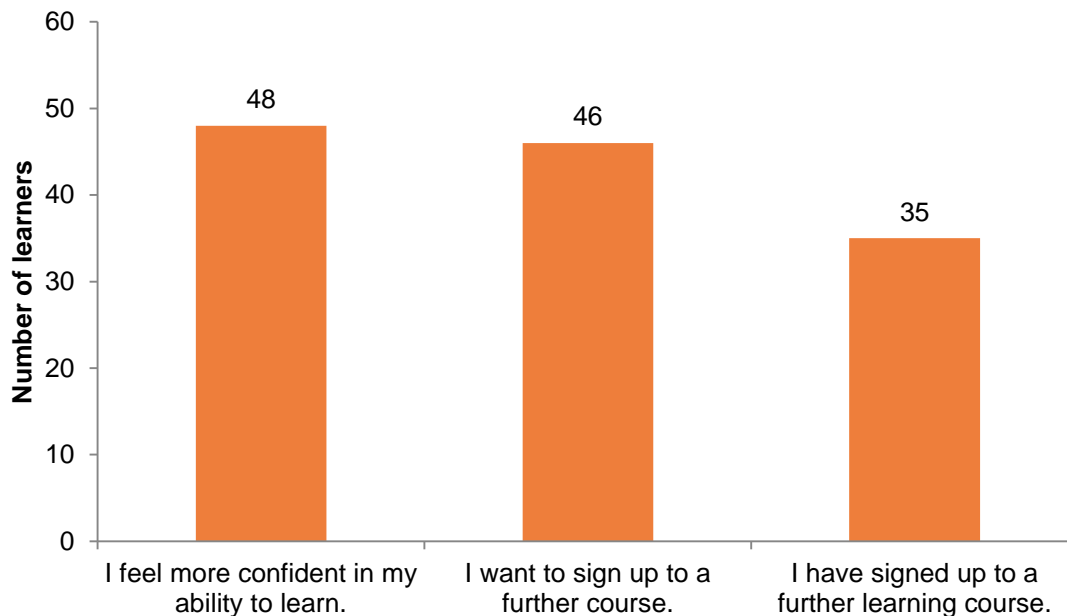
### **5.1.2 Attitudes towards learning**

Learners on all three pilots reported huge improvements in their attitudes towards learning and their confidence to engage in education and training. Over three-quarters of learners said that they felt more confident in their ability to learn and a similar proportion wanted to sign up to a further course (see Figure 3 below). In fact, over half of learners (35) had already signed up for another course. In their interviews, many learners spoke about feeling more confident to engage in accredited learning in particular, and had already or were looking to sign up for English and maths courses or more vocational programmes, such as

Teaching Assistant or administration courses, which they hoped would lead onto a career in the near future.

*“I’m just continuing with English at the moment because I’ve passed my Level 2 maths and working towards my Level 2 English. As I said that I’m doing voluntary work at Burton Green School and that’s also going towards an admin course as well. I’m doing a voluntary admin course as well - an admin qualification, Level 2.”*  
(Learner)

**Figure 3: Outcomes related to attitudes towards learning experienced by learners**

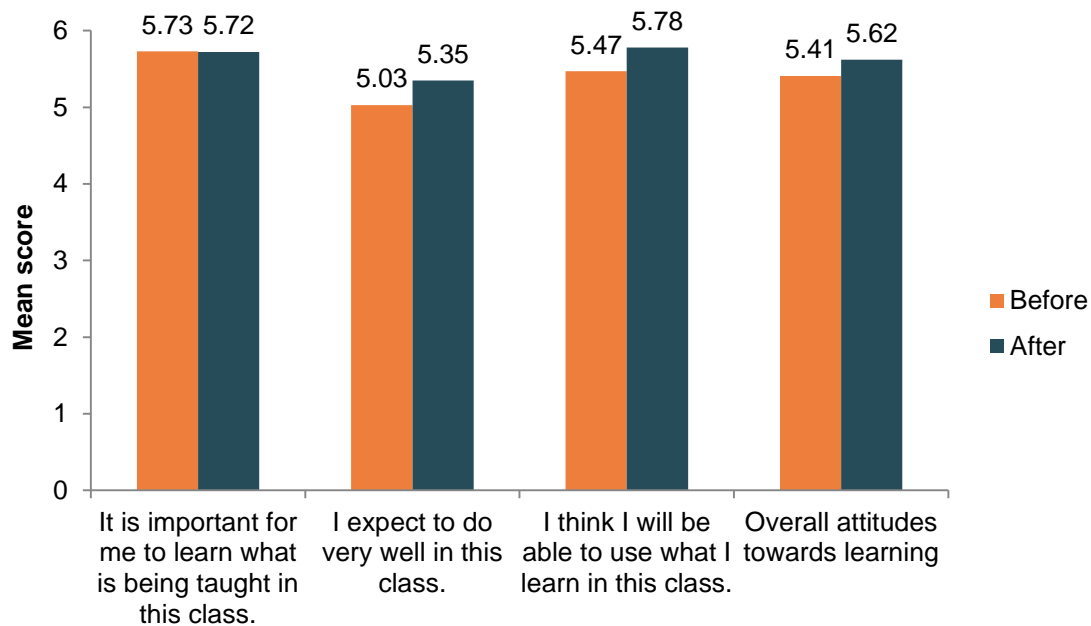


Learners’ scores in their pre- and post-programme questionnaires also suggest that they improved their attitudes towards learning and their confidence in their ability to learn. As Figure 4 below shows, many learners recognised the importance of what they were learning at the beginning of their programme and this changed little throughout the course. However, learners did make quite large and statistically significant improvements in their expectations about how well they did in the class and in their attitudes about how useful the learning would be<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> These changes were statistically significant to a P value of <0.000.



**Figure 4: Learners' mean scores on attitudes towards learning before and after their programme**

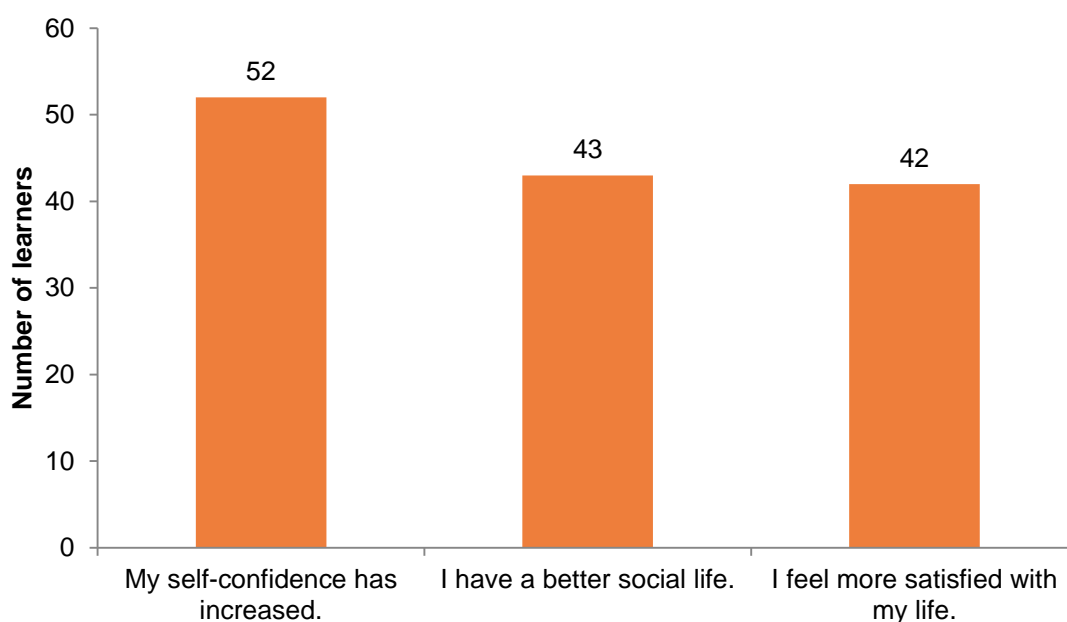


Base: All matched questionnaires = 60

### 5.1.3 Self-efficacy

Learners also experienced a range of positive outcomes related to their self-efficacy. The majority of learners (52) felt that their self-confidence had increased and almost three-quarters (43) reported that they had a better social life as a result of participating in the programme (see Figure 5 below). A similar proportion (42) also said that they felt more satisfied with their life as a whole at the end of the programme.

**Figure 5: Self-efficacy outcomes experienced by learners**





In their interviews, learners and tutors alike spoke about the huge improvements in the self-confidence of parents/carers. For many, this was the result of recognising that they had developed a strong set of skills through becoming a parent and this knowledge had given them a stronger sense of self-worth. Learners also felt that the programme had helped them to develop clearer personal goals which made them more positive about their future opportunities.

Many learners involved in the pilots developed the confidence to interact with others and had built strong friendships with other parents/carers on their programmes. For many, this was a crucial link to the outside world and they appreciated the opportunity to get out of the house and engage with the community. Some learners had taken this engagement further and had started volunteering at local schools; one parent had become a school governor as a result of Family Learning.

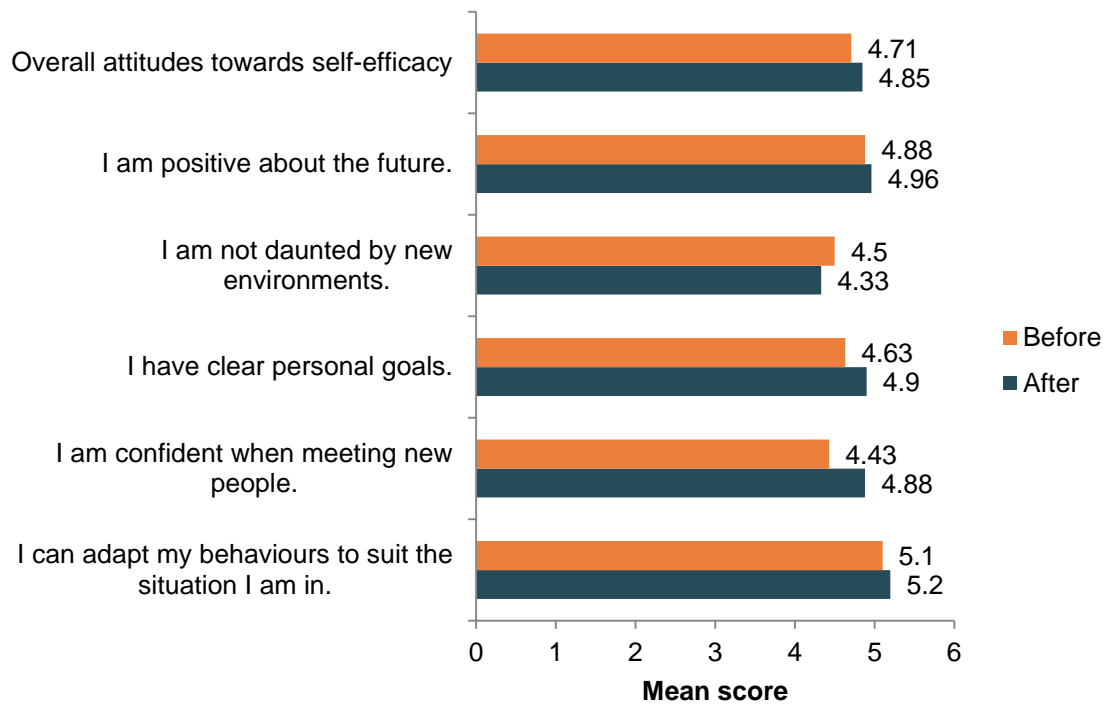
*“Since I've done the Family Learning I've also gone on to be a parent governor at school. I've been doing that for a year and I have two groups which is like community groups for the parents in a café - that's Mondays and Wednesday... I do volunteering as well so it's just really busy!” (Learner)*

These impacts on learners' personal goals, feelings about the future, and confidence when meeting new people were all reflected in their questionnaire scores (see Figure 6 below)<sup>7</sup>. Interestingly, learners appeared to feel more daunted by new environments by the end of their programme. This may be because some learners were about to move onto new activities, such as an accredited course at college or a new job role, and were feeling slightly anxious about this change and how they will cope with it. Nevertheless, overall learners experienced a considerable improvement in their attitudes towards self-efficacy.

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<sup>7</sup> The change in scores against the statement 'I am positive about the future' was statistically significant to a P value of <0.000; the change in scores against the statement 'I am confident when meeting new people' was statistically significant to a P value of 0.015.

**Figure 6: Learners' mean self-efficacy scores before and after their programme**

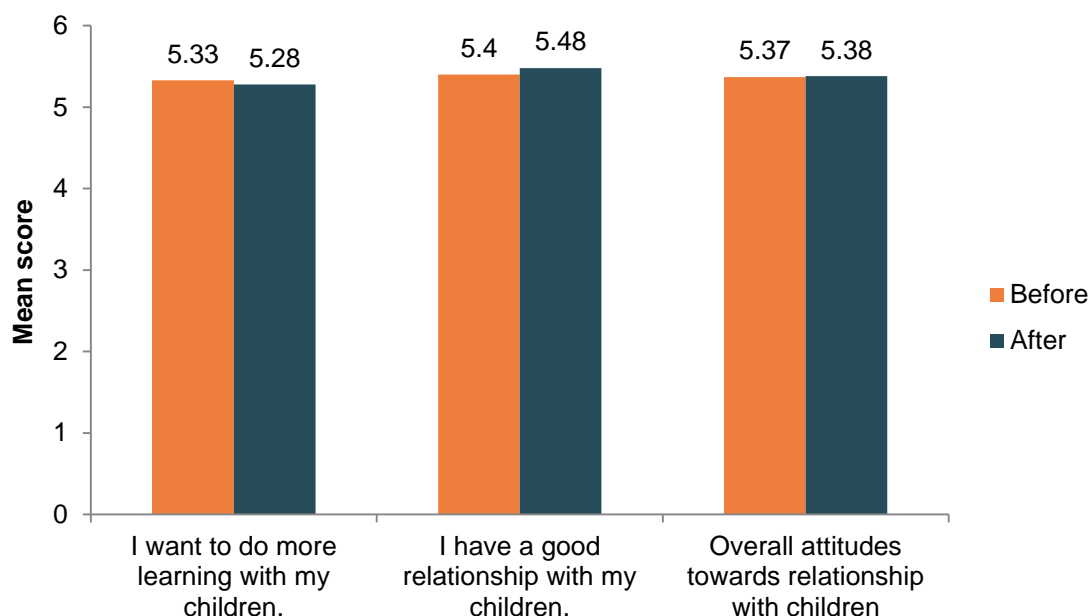


Base: All matched questionnaires = 60

#### 5.1.4 Relationship with their children

As Figure 7 below shows, learners already felt very positive about their relationships with their children at the start of their programme and this had changed little by the end. However, almost three-quarters of learners (44) reported that their relationship with their children had improved in their end questionnaires. Many learners also spoke about feeling more confident to embed learning within the day-to-day activities they did with their children, such as going to the park and cooking, and that this encouraged them to pay extra attention to how their child was developing. This suggests that the programmes supported parents/carers to carry out more meaningful activities with their children, and this in turn improved the relationships within their families.

**Figure 7: Learners' mean scores on relationships with their children before and after their programme**



Base: All matched questionnaires = 60

Learners at Peeples and York Learning found that their programmes had given them a better insight into how their children learn at school and what stage they should be at in their development. As a result, they felt more empowered to discuss their children’s learning with their teachers, nursery workers and children’s centre staff, and felt more confident to support their children’s development.

*“Once they become more aware of their children's learning, they say to us they become empowered to discuss their children's learning more. So they discuss that more when they come into the Children's Centres, they might be involved in stay and play sessions. So they're discussing their children's learning with the staff. If their children go to nurseries, they feel more confident to talk to the nursery staff about their children's learning.”* (Tutor)

In addition, many of the tutors commented that they had seen an improvement in children’s attitudes and ambitions around learning as a result of their parents/carers being more positive about education.

*“I think through the programme; it influences the children's learning as well. Because the children see their parents as learners.”* (Tutor)

## 5.2 Outcomes for providers

All three of the providers involved in the project felt that they had gained valuable outcomes from piloting their Family Learning and employability programmes. One of the main positive outcomes of the project was improved or increased partnership working between different organisations in the three pilot areas. For example, Skills and Learning successfully brought together a range of partners, including the children’s centre, Jobcentre Plus, and a local

housing association, to build strong referral routes into and out of their programme. Similarly, York Learning worked closely with the local information, advice and guidance service to deliver their pilot, and successfully brought together a range of learning providers and advice services to run an employability event at the end of the pilot. Peeples also built on their strong partnerships with the local authority and children's centres which host their programmes.

These stronger partnerships enabled each provider to put more holistic support in place for their learners and tailor their programmes according to their individual needs. This enabled parents/carers to achieve even better outcomes than normal, particularly in relation to employability, and also provided good progression routes onto further learning and employment opportunities.

*"It means that we can share information and data with children's centre staff, and they can share information and data with us. So that all the time the knowledge is shared so that we can give the best learning experience to the person involved. So if there is a complex problem going on, or a difficulty with a parent that the Children's Centre staff are aware of, they can alert us and make sure we tailor the learning we deliver to accommodate that particular issue."* (Pilot lead)

Finally, all of the pilots found that the tutors involved in the programme were looking at ways they could embed the lessons learned into their other courses and provision. This was particularly the case for York Learning, whose tutors recognised the value of embedding employability into their programmes, rather than running short courses explicitly focussed on the topic, and were keen to try this in other areas of the city.

*"I think there is a difference between the way that we've done it in Family Learning and the way that we've done it in the city centre courses, where up until now we've had an employability short course followed by English... I have to say, doing it in Family Learning and particularly if I can tick that box of doing that speaking and listening discussion on an employability theme in a way that's helped people talk about their fears and their dreams and everything, that has worked really well. So if we can do more of that in other areas of provision actually I think we could learn from Family Learning in that way."* (Tutor)

Similarly, Peeples has found that the tutors who deliver their courses bring elements of the programme into other areas of their work.

*"The practitioners that we have that deliver PEEP, some are family visitors. So they do group work but they also carry a caseload of families that they work with in the home. So PEEP, if you spoke to any of our practitioners, they would say it permeates the whole of their work. They take the PEEP ideas into homes, working with families... So all the time, they link PEEP with the rest of their work."* (Tutor)

In summary, the pilots found their approaches to be highly effective in enabling families to achieve a range of outcomes related to employability, and all three were exploring the ways in which this could be rolled out and embedded into the other Family Learning courses or types of provision they offer.

## 6. CASE STUDIES

### 6.1 Peep

Peep is a national charity which aims to support parents/carers, babies and children to learn together by valuing and building on what families already do. Their Peep Learning Together Programme supports practitioners and families to share information and ideas about how to make the most of everyday learning opportunities. The programme covers 74 topics under five key strands of learning: personal, social and emotional development; communication and language; early literacy; early maths; and health and physical development. Peep practitioners can combine these topics and strands to suit the needs of their learners and the developmental stage of babies and children. They use the ORIM framework (Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Modelling) to help parents create the best start for their children. The Learning Together Programme incorporates nationally recognised units at Entry Level 3, Level 1 and Level 2 for which parents submit a portfolio of work on their child's learning and development and how they support it.

For their Family Employability project, Peep wanted to demonstrate how their Learning Together Programme supports parents to develop skills and competencies which contribute to their employability and long-term career goals. They worked closely with the Peep Coordinator in Derby to develop and deliver their pilot.

#### 6.1.1 How it worked

The Peep Learning Together Programme has been delivered in Derby since the introduction of Sure Start children's centres in 2001. The council took the decision to train all of their children's centre workers as Peep practitioners, and have successfully embedded the approach in their children's centre early years provision.

The Peep Coordinator analyses the city's early years foundation stage profile data at the beginning of each academic year, in order to identify areas within the city which have low-scoring areas of learning or general development for under-fives. This then informs the strands and topics of the Peep programme which their practitioners deliver across the city. For example, if it is identified that a particular area of the city has low scores in communication and language, the Children's Centre Service Manager will work with the centre's Peep practitioners to embed this strand into their programme for that year.

Once the overall strands have been decided for a programme, Peep practitioners can then access the session plans, topic cards and topic handouts on the Peep website to plan the content for their programme. The variety of session plans and suggested activities mean that practitioners can choose the most appropriate content to meet the needs of their families. The sessions can be adapted according to different learning styles, the needs of individual parents, and the level at which parents may be working.

Generally, families in Derby attend Peep programme for either one or two terms, and attend on a weekly basis during term time. Each session lasts for an hour and a half and involves talk time around the topic for the day and then activities to think about how it can be embedded into everyday activities, such as songs and rhymes or books and stories.

The content of the sessions maps onto the requirements for the NOCN Certificate in Supporting Early Learning at Home. Peep practitioners are able to train to deliver the Peep

Progression Pathway, enabling parents to develop a portfolio which can be submitted for assessment and can enable them to gain a qualification which provides formal recognition of the skills they gain through the Peep programme.

### 6.1.2 Outcomes for learners

In Derby, the Peep Learning Together Programme was highly effective in enabling learners to identify the huge range of skills and competencies that they had developed as parents. People's approach of helping parents to recognise the ways in which they already support their children, then enabling them to build on this through a tailored but structured programme, helped parents to improve their self-esteem and confidence in their abilities.

*"We support parents to recognise what they're already doing, then we offer ideas for them to do more through everyday routines and activities. Once they become more aware of their children's learning, they say to us they become more empowered."*  
(Peep Coordinator)

The majority of parents engaged with the programme in order to support their children's learning, but soon recognised that they are learning as well. The opportunity to gain a qualification through the Peep programme was also valued by learners, as it formalised the skills they had gained as parents and they could put it on their CV.

The recognition of their skills as parents helped many learners to start planning their future careers and the steps they can take to achieve these, so that they can be ready to enter employment when their children reach school age. The Peep Coordinator in Derby also found that the Learning Together programme helps parents to realise the wide range of job opportunities available to them, and this often leads them to progress onto further formal courses after completing the programme.

*"For many, it opens their eyes to what other opportunities there are out there. They might have been doing one job before they had their children and then they come along to a PEEP session and they realise that there are other job opportunities... We've got parents who've gone onto college and gone into employment working with young children."* (Peep Coordinator)

Alongside their employability-related outcomes, learners also reported feeling more satisfied as parents, having stronger relationships with their children, feeling more confident to support and talk about their children's learning, and improving their social relationships.

*"Everyone has seen a massive change in [my son]. He loves, laughs, reads books and has lots of positive attitude... I have made loads of friends and am more confident and happy than ever. I wish there would be more certified groups like this!"*  
(Learner)

### 6.1.3 Outcomes for Peep in Derby

Many of the Peep practitioners in Derby have other roles within the council – such as children and family support workers - and they often embed the principles of the Peep programme into all of their work. This helps other families across the city to start thinking about the ways they can support their children's learning and raises awareness of People and their programmes amongst a wide range of parents, professionals and organisations.

## **6.2 Skills and Learning Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole**

Skills & Learning Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole provides a range of formal and unaccredited learning across the county of Dorset. They work with a wide range of partners across the county, from children's centres to Jobcentre Plus, to deliver a variety of different programmes to meet the needs of local people. Traditionally, Skills & Learning's Family Learning provision has focused on developing learners' parenting skills. However, this has developed in recent years to reflect the Government's emphasis on employability skills and employment outcomes. As a result, Skills & Learning have embedded employability skills into every one of their Family Learning programmes. Their Family Employability pilot aimed to roll this approach out to the provision on offer at Bridport Children's Centre.

### **6.2.1 How it worked**

Skills & Learning has signed a memorandum of understanding with Bridport Children's Centre, which enables them to deliver a number of different Family Learning and adult education programmes. Their Family Employability pilot aimed to complement this provision with a job club, which would enable tutors to refer their learners for specialist support to develop their employability skills and get advice on careers and further learning opportunities.

The job club runs on a drop-in basis for two mornings a week and is delivered by two tutors. Each learner had an initial informal interview with one of the tutors so they could establish their short and long-term goals and any barriers they may face in relation to gaining work. This enables the tutors to tailor their support to learners' individual needs and goals. Each learner also takes a BKSB assessment in English, maths and IT to identify any skills gaps which they may need to address, and tutors can signpost them onto the courses available at the centre if needed.

Following their initial interview and assessment, tutors work closely with learners to develop their employability skills. For example, they may support learners to search for jobs on the internet, develop master and tailored CVs, write cover letters, complete application forms and practise interview techniques. This may be delivered through one-to-one support or group sessions.

The tutors from the job club also run employability sessions with learners on the Family Learning and adult education programmes which Skills & Learning deliver in Bridport Children's Centre. One example of this is Helping in Schools, which is part of Skills & Learning's employment pathway for parents to work in education. Towards the end of the programme, the tutors from the job club run a session to help learners think about the career they want to progress into and what they need to do in order to achieve their goal. Many of the learners from this course go on to attend the job club to further develop their employability skills, and tutors from the job club can refer their learners onto the course if they express an interest in working in education.

### **6.2.2 Outcomes for learners**

The job club has been hugely popular with parents attending the centre and Skills & Learning's Family Learning programmes. Tutors have found that learners tend to progress on from their support very quickly, often only attending the drop-in sessions for around six weeks. Following this, learners feel equipped with the skills and knowledge to continue their



job search independently and only return for additional advice and support on particular applications.

*“People come in and initially you’ve got this rush of having to help them. And then they get all their little eggs in a row, if you like, and they’re off, and they just come back and see us occasionally when they need bits and pieces of help.”* (Tutor)

One of the main benefits for learners attending the job club is an improvement in their digital skills and ability to apply for jobs online. This is one of the main barriers that parents and grandparents face in relation to gaining employment, and so the access to laptops and the internet provided by the job club is crucial in helping them to develop their employability skills. For many of the older learners, this has also helped them to improve their relationship with their grandchildren.

*“I can really annoy my four year old grandson. I am picking up his tablet, Playstation, I can beat him at that... I get [my grandson] to spell and things, and I learn as well and we’re learning together and it’s really good. I wouldn’t even have bothered if I hadn’t started doing this.”* (Learner)

Similarly, learners on the programmes offered at the centre have benefitted from the additional advice and support offered by the job club. Of the 12 learners who attended the Helping in Schools programme, 11 are now working or volunteering in schools. In addition, four learners have progressed onto Level 2 Functional Skills English, and all 12 want to progress onto the formal teaching assistant course and are clear about the steps they need to take to get a job in the sector.

*“I started this course and hopefully it’ll lead on to being a teaching assistant... It is what I actually trained to do when I was 18, but I didn’t use it. So like everything I kind of know is a little bit out of date. I need to build the skills to update myself.”* (Learner)

### **6.2.3 Outcomes for Skills & Learning**

By establishing a job club in the same location as their Family Learning programmes, Skills & Learning have developed strong referral routes between their Family Learning programmes and individualised employability support. As a result, their tutors in Bridport Children’s Centre have been able to embed employability into all of their Family Learning and adult education programmes, improving the employment outcomes for their learners. This arrangement has also strengthened the partnerships between Skills & Learning, Bridport Children’s Centre and the local Jobcentre Plus, which provides opportunities to further develop and enhance their future learning and employability offer to learners.



## 6.3 York Learning

Since 2013, York Learning has brought together the experience and expertise of three different organisations: Adult & Community Education, Future Prospects and York Training Centre. As a result, York Learning delivers a wide range of programmes, including apprenticeships, Functional Skills, community learning and Family Learning. Alongside this, York Learning works with partners such as Jobcentre Plus, libraries and children's centres to deliver specialist programmes which support individuals to access and progress in work.

### 6.3.1 How it worked

York Learning sees Family Learning as an important model of learning which has multiple benefits for the families involved. However, they feel that Family Learning is often viewed as the “soft option” and the real impact and “harder”, skills-based outcomes of these programmes tend to be overlooked. To overcome this, York Learning has worked with other local authorities over the last three years conducting a survey to collect information and data on the impact of Family Learning. One of the key findings of this work so far is that, within a year of doing a Family Learning programme, around one in five adults had gone into full or part-time employment, and a large proportion of others had started volunteering or progressed into further learning with employment-related goals.

Through their Family Employability pilot, York Learning hoped to support this increase in parents' aspirations by helping them to recognise the transferable skills they gain from Family Learning, think about their long-term plans, and support them to progress onto further learning and volunteering opportunities. Alongside their pilot, York Learning worked with an intern funded by the Higher York Partnership to explore the issues parents face when accessing further learning and work. The findings from this activity fed into York Learning's Family Employability pilot and gave them a better understanding of the support parents need to take steps into jobs and career paths which match their skills and aspirations.

York Learning's pilot embedded employability activities and discussions into their existing Family Learning provision. In each class, the pilot lead and tutors ran a session on employability and transferable skills, encouraging learners to think about the different skills they were developing through their Family Learning programme. This boosted the confidence of the learners and helped to start a discussion about careers and life goals. The pilot lead then left the tutors with Family Learning CV templates for their learners to complete. These were designed so that individuals could gather evidence of building the skills they discussed in their Family Learning classes, at home or as a volunteer. The tutor could then revisit these conversations throughout the course, and also focussed the speaking and listening assessment of the Functional Skills qualification on careers and jobs. As a result, employability was embedded throughout the programme.

Alongside this, learners were offered one-to-one careers advice sessions, which helped them to focus on their own career goals and the steps they may need to take in order to achieve these. At the end of the term, York Learning and Higher York also ran a careers event targeted at parents who were looking to get into further or higher education. The event brought together a wide range of different partners, including colleges and universities, to help learners think about what they would like to progress onto next. Learners were also invited to attend a jobs fair taking place the following month, where they would be able to meet a range of local employers.

### 6.3.2 Outcomes for learners

As well as the many benefits that Family Learning can provide for learners, such as increased self-esteem and wellbeing, improved social networks, increased confidence to support their children's learning and engagement with their children's school, the parents involved in York Learning's Family Employability pilot experienced a range of benefits related to employment. Learners commented that they had clearer and higher career aspirations as a result of the activities they had done on the programme, and this was echoed by the tutors and the pilot lead.

*"...they start getting much more ambition for themselves and that's invariably got a knock-on effect on their ambition for their children as well, which I think is where Family Learning is really strong."* (Pilot lead)

The programme also increased parents' confidence that they could get a job once their children reached school age, as they realised that they had gained the skills and qualifications needed to progress into employment.

*"I think we're all at the same point where we're looking at our future because obviously our children are at school, or she's going to school full time in September, so it's nice to know that you're going to hopefully get a job."* (Learner)

Providing time and space within an existing programme also enabled learners to give advice and support to each other, as they had already established friendships within the group.

*"One learner who is already an HCO in a hospital is advising another learner on how to get into nursing... There were some really useful conversations like that but very, very informal... I think it's a discussion that might happen anyway but doing this means you've actually made some space for it in the sessions as well."* (Tutor)

By the end of the programme, one of the learners had successfully secured a job, while many of the other parents had already progressed onto further formal courses, including Functional Skills maths and English, a Teaching Assistant training course and a Business Admin course. Learners had also taken up a range of volunteering opportunities, often in their children's schools, but also as coordinators of local parent support groups.

*"It's just an all-round package isn't it? People come and then they get the bug and - I don't know one person that's done one course and nothing else. Everybody just goes on to do more and more and more."* (Learner)

### 6.3.3 Outcomes for York learning

The success of their Family Employability pilot has reinforced York Learning's views of Family Learning as a hugely effective model of improving parents' employability and also in reinforcing the vital, transferable skills they need to support their children and manage their lives. The pilot also helped tutors to realise the impact that Family Learning can have on parents' employability, and they are now keen to take this forward and embed these activities into their other courses. By focusing explicitly on employability, York Learning has been able to highlight, record and demonstrate the impact Family Learning has on the development of transferable skills, and how it increases the ambition and aspirations of parents and carers.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The findings of these pilots suggest that Wider Family Learning can be an effective vehicle to help parents/carers to develop their career aspirations and employability skills, whatever stage they are at in their search for work.

Wider Family Learning programmes can help parents/carers who are further away from the labour market recognise the skills, competencies and values they have developed as parents and how these can be applied to the labour market. This can raise parents/carers' aspirations and help them to start considering the different types of jobs they could do when they return to work.

For parents/carers who are considering returning to work in the near future, tutors can build explicit employability sessions into their Wider Family Learning programmes which support learners to develop clearer plans for their careers, recognise their transferable skills and gain new qualifications and skills which will help them to gain employment as soon as they are able.

For parents/carers who are actively looking for work, Family Learning can link with other programmes and employability support to improve learners' job searching and application skills, gain qualifications to improve their chances of finding work, and start on pathways which will help them to secure higher quality and more sustainable work.

### 7.1 Recommendations

Below are five key recommendations drawn from the findings of this report.

1. Focussing on **identifying parents/carers' transferable skills** is an effective way of encouraging learners to think about their employment options and start making plans for their future careers. This approach also avoids a deficit model of learning which focuses on what parents/carers are lacking. Family Learning providers could use this as a starting point to embed employability in their programmes.
2. Partnership working is crucial to embedding employability in Family Learning programmes. **Family Learning providers should consider working with partners** such as children's centres, information, advice and guidance services, Jobcentre Plus, other learning providers and employers to co-deliver programmes and develop strong progression pathways for learners.
3. **A toolkit or set of resources should be developed** to support curriculum managers and tutors to embed employability into their Family Learning programmes. This would include case studies of effective models, lesson plans, resources and ideas for assessments which embed employability into Family Learning with very little additional work for curriculum managers or tutors.
4. Although this report contributes to a growing evidence base, **more research is needed to gather robust evidence** of the ways in which Wider Family Learning programmes support parents/carers to improve their employability skills and employment prospects.
5. As unemployment rates continue to decline, more targeted support is needed for adults who are further away from the labour market. **A second phase of pilots** should be

delivered to explore how effective Wider Family Learning provision can be in supporting Employment Support Allowance claimants to improve their employability skills and increase their chances of securing employment.