

# REPORT OF FAMILY LEARNING SEMINAR

7 March 2018 - NICVA

The N.I. Impact Forum Chair (Trevor Neilands) welcomed everyone and explained that this event uniquely had three sponsors. It was the first meeting of the N.I. Impact Forum in 2018; it was supported by EPALE UK; and it fell in the week of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Belfast Festival of Learning. He commented that it was wonderful that all three could come together to celebrate and promote adult learning and to build networks between more stakeholders.

(Slightly later in the morning Michele Markin – Chair of the Festival Organising Group – also welcomed everyone).

Trevor then introduced the theme of the day and the keynote speaker from the Learning & Work Institute (manager of the UK EAAL programme), Susan Easton.

## SUSAN EASTON

(slides of Susan's presentation will be circulated, but you may also be interested in the Family Learning page of the L&W website which has many useful videos and links to reports and resources - <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/family-learning/> )

Susan first ran through definitions of family learning (FL) and the role of L&W.

Only a couple of the recommendations found in the *Family Learning Works* report have been implemented by Government.

Definition of FL is that it's not just a medium of learning for adults, but is an approach that impacts on the wider family – from early years to late teens. It also helps break cycles of intergenerational deprivation.

L&W is developing various resources in FL (see webpage above).

FL is a great way to engage adults in learning – e.g. when literacy is packaged as primarily for the children then adults don't feel embarrassed to engage. FL engages adults because all parents want something better for their children.

Susan presented stats from a 2015 survey which showed the positive impacts of adults engaging in FL.

The Family Learning Matters report found that FL can improve attainment by as much as 15% for children from disadvantaged families.

FL falls between stools in Government in England and Wales – there is no cross-Government policy although there are policies for adults that should be linked.

There are 2 Forums for FL – the National Family Learning Forum and the FLLAG.

Over the next 2 years L&W will be looking at a comparison of FL across all 4 nations of the UK.

Policy makers don't like FL because of the small cohorts involved despite the evidence of how well it works – so there is a need to collect more evidence and LW has devised a common model for collecting this.

The L&W with regard to FL identifies 3 priorities: a call for a cross-departmental strategy group – to make FL integral to school strategies – and for FL to be a key element of adult skill strategies. L&W believes that Family Learning can close the attainment gap and help end the 'life-chance lottery' by creating a culture of aspiration in every family.

### **GERALDINE NOLAN (NMNI) AND ROISIN CASSIDY (St Bernadette's Nursery School)**

Geraldine described NMNI and why it is involved in Family Learning. This is because of the core commitment of the museums to reach out to all. These FL progs include free entry to those museums where there is normally a charge – and there is evidence that this leads to repeat visits (a win for everyone).

NMNI work in partnership with the Education Authority. The EA identifies the schools for the programme. Its staff work with NMNI to ensure that the programme links to the curriculum - although parents usually don't realise this because of the informal approach.

The schools involved have families from top 10% areas of multiple deprivation.

Geraldine then described the different programmes: Berkeley Bear – which includes a book sent out in advance to prepare the children for the visit –participants are given a free family pass; Time Travellers which builds digital skills – the children get to show their parents how Ipads work; and Craft in Mind where there are opportunities to learn different traditional activities e,g, forge work or willow working.

Evaluations from parents regularly cite that they got to spend quality time with their child – some precious 1-2-1 time.

Roisin spoke of the impact on parents. She has been involved in FL for about 15 yrs. and has seen a growth of commitment from parents. In early years the teachers were not so keen on the idea of working with parents, but now it is one of the highlights. The school has a family support worker who has made a huge difference. Roisin said how many people don't go out of their area at all (partly because of cost) and so these trips are a real eye-opener. Having run the programme for some years she has witnessed how parents are much more engaged now and their confidence is really boosted. There are many benefits for the school too - like better attendance and timekeeping for example.

### **JUDITH SEARLE (Barnardos)**

*(N.B. there is a lot of information in Judith's slide which are attached so these notes are minimal)*

Judith described her organisation's key aims and why Barnardos are active in FL. All parents want to help their children, but often are not sure how – they often feel intimidated by schools because of their own past experiences – so they need guidance on how to support their children's learning development.

Need to work with children and with parents both separately and together – and need to link into their communities

Barnardos has a partnership with Stranmillis College and use graduate teacher interns in their programmes.

Working with parents Barnardos seeks to build capacity and confidence – to help them see themselves as educators; they also deliver bespoke sessions for parents' literacy, numeracy etc.

Staff work closely with parents including visiting homes to demonstrate how programme activities can be continued there – this has the benefit that parents start to view the home as a learning environment.

Evaluations show that parental confidence rises significantly through participation in the programmes – see stats for children and also quotes from parents on Judith's slides.

### **Some additional points arising from the Q&A session**

- Family support workers essential for making FL work in schools - some teachers are not always well placed to do this role
- Progression is important – for both children and adults – but projects are not usually funded to trace parents' progress so this is only collected anecdotally – but definitely the spark of confidence and interest in learning is given through the FL progs
- LW has developed a common outcomes framework for FL
- over the years the numbers of men and grandparents in FL schemes have increased – the is key to work with the adult most closely connected to the child. Male only programmes have been tried but no longer seem necessary.
- Neither of the NI examples include substantive provision of learning for the adults – the funding is focused more on the children. So in terms of the parents the key is getting them hooked into learning. In Barnardos many parents do volunteer and gain experience that way.
- embedding FL into Government strategies is slow and suffers from there being no dept champion – individual civil servants, many who have had no exposure to FL, can be won over and shown how it can impact positively in their area of responsibility – but no-one works to build inter-departmental collaboration or cross-cutting policy.

### **LAUNCH OF THE HEALTHY, WEALTHY & WISE REPORT – TREVOR NEILANDS**

Trevor introduced the 2 reports – the main report and the short NI specific publication.

The accompanying slides describe the background to the creation of the report – the research, the relationship to the GRAL report, the inputs from the Impact Forums etc.

In NI we know that considerable impact is being made (as was illustrated by the various local case studies that were presented to the Forum), but a significant weakness is that no stats are collated. We have seen that there is considerable good practice across all sectors, but the potential impact that could be made is lost because of an inability to make best use of available money, difficulties in building links between sectors and a widespread silo mentality. It is time now that Adult Learning becomes explicit in terms of the contributions that it can make (as the IF pointed out in its response

to the draft PfG). Adult Learning could contribute across a huge range of the PfG's desired outcomes –it would be a key facilitator.

An important aspect of the report is the strength of the 4 national contributions – this project has enabled us to learn from one another.

Trevor then talked about the NI section, particularly the 7 Actions Required which will form the basis of the Impact Forum's lobbying going forward.

## **LEARNING DREAMS – PAUL SMYTH, JERRY STEIN, KAREN BOS AND JENA BRUNE**

Jerry – we have a school centred approach to education and we see the world through this model, however the actual way people learn is more complex – a web – where school is included but is not the centre. Learning Dreams is about growing a way of life where parents make links for their kids to the multitude of possible sources of learning.

When you ask - *what was the most important learning in your life* - only about 5% of examples will be school based. Another key question to ask is – *who made the link that helped change your life?* – and grannies are probably the most often mentioned. By making parents part of the culture of learning you create a huge impact on their kids – they then have someone to support and connect them.

All parents/adults have learning dreams– even if these are old and neglected. Jerry much prefers learning rather than education as the descriptive word. At the core of the project the key objective is making links between people and resources that can help make their dreams a reality. His open model allows for a multitude of options where learning might take place –you can always source someone even if you don't have a direct link. Dream acknowledgment can release people to become helpers to others – he gave the example of a librarian that showed how those who might 'just' be seen as learning connectors need support to identify their learning dreams too.

Jena – what's different with the programme is that people are treated with respect and that builds confidence to engage in new things. By acknowledging every little success kids realise that a failure at school is not the end of the world. Jena then described an example of a family she has worked with – when the dream of one family member is shared and supported then this spreads out to the others.

Karen – Learning Dreams in the Hague – the city has a large number of disadvantaged families, many immigrants/asylum seekers, who struggle around learning in school and out of school. There is a big challenge of how to engage women in learning. There is a need to build links that extend learning outside families. Have built up a network of volunteer connectors who work to build trust, going to schools to link to parents. Learning Dreams Mums Clubs allow women to support one another – these mums have lost their personal dreams only concern for children, so it is a revelation and an awakening to have supportive space to think about their own learning.

Paul – here in NI we need to learn to do things differently as we're not making real changes in lives of many people that have remained stuck, critically in areas which have been deprived for generations. He is currently trialling Learning Dreams in Belfast thanks to smalls grants from CRC secured by groups in Oldpark and Divis. Jerry has delivered training to staff and explored the model with them –people are now trying out the model in their communities. There has been a positive response so far but he is not sure how to ramp it up. Funders are so risk averse – there is no support

for innovation. Communities that have no culture of learning have difficulties engaging with others – other coms, agencies etc. - so there are important Community Relations implications. We need capacity building work in communities before we try to engage them in hard conversations re the future.

Paul is confident of growing Learning Dreams - perhaps developing a manual and writing up stories of what has been achieved. Like Jerry he believes it is important to use learning not education – because otherwise people think it a trap to have to be pushed into accreditation or to go on vocational education etc.

Jerry – few school principals can understand what LD is about – that ownership of learning should lie with families, with communities This is a complete reversal of the traditional view where communities expect schools to educate their kids.

We need to take fear out of concept of learning – learning should be fun!

### **CLOSE**

Trevor – there are clearly links to the changes that the Impact Forum is seeking to develop. We very much agree on the need for learning through and for life. We need an explicitly stated commitment to Lifelong Learning from the Government as that would give us all a huge boost both in Family Learning and Adult Learning.

Thanks to all today's presenters and the event's sponsors.