



Helping My Child to Learn Programme

In June 2009, a pilot of the UFA Helping My Child to Learn programme was conducted in conjunction with Playing for Success at Durham County Cricket Club.

The Context

County Durham is situated in north-east England and covers a large geographical area. A significant proportion of the population is deemed to live in the top 20% of wards of deprivation nationally and there are major problems of economic inactivity/joblessness, health-related issues and poor levels of educational attainment and skills. Although academic attainment at age 16 has been rising steadily in recent years and now lies just below the national average, adult levels of literacy and numeracy are low. There are 262 mainstream schools within the county, 36 of which are secondary schools. There are around 80 schools with less than 100 pupils on roll.

The Programme

The Helping My Child to Learn programme was delivered as part of a family learning project, alongside Playing for Success activities. This was the first time that Durham PFS had catered for parents and their children together, and the UFA programme was identified as providing complimentary activities to the collaborative learning offered by the PFS curriculum.

The cohort of children was identified by the school – St John's C of E Primary School in Shildon – according to PFS selection criteria. For the first session, there were 10 children, (including a set of twins), accompanied by an adult. Attendance at each of the subsequent sessions was reasonably good; if one parent could not attend, another member of the family (including grandparents and older siblings) replaced them. By the end of the course, there were seven children and their parents in the group.

Sessions were held on a weekly basis and incorporated into the standard PFS programme. Durham PFS is unique in that, in addition to the core curriculum activities which focus on literacy, numeracy and ICT, children also benefit from an hour of sports coaching. Whilst the children were engaged in this, their parents participated in the Helping My Child to Learn Programme.

The programme itself followed the framework published by the UFA, with the majority of activities selected from the 'menu' in the trainers' handbook. Additional activities selected from the UFA Fellowship materials were also included. As there were six sessions in this instance, an hour titled 'Using Memory Tools' was added. The outline programme is provided below:

Session 1: Getting Ready To Learn

Session 2: My Amazing Brain

Session 3: Learning in Different Ways

Session 4: Making the Learning Stick

Session 5: Using Memory Tools

Session 6: Deepening the Learning

As the parents were attending the course voluntarily it was important to make the activities interesting, relevant and interactive. Care was taken to reassure parents that the focus was not on parenting skills, but on the things they could do to help their children to learn more effectively. There was also sufficient time built in for breaks and discussion.

Outcomes

All of the parents agreed that the course had been beneficial in terms of understanding more about how they could motivate, reward and encourage their children in a learning context. Parents gained confidence in talking about learning and sharing their experiences with each other. The activities were enjoyable and continually added to

their bank of knowledge, so that they felt better equipped in helping their children with homework etc and in engaging with the school.