

## Trainer's notes

### Unit No.13: Making it better in the home setting

#### Unit objectives

- To identify ways in which the home environment can support and sustain children and at school.
- To discuss strategies to develop a supportive and educationally rich environment in the home.

#### Outline of Unit

- Introductory activity
- PowerPoint presentation
- Large group discussion
- Presentation
- Small group activity and feedback

#### Resources required to deliver unit

- **Video clips:** Debbie Booth , John Borland,
- **Handouts :** *"What carers and social workers can do"* *"The five core skills"* *"How good is our school?"*, *"Supporting Children's Reading"* leaflets (primary and secondary) and *"Making the Most of Time with your Child"*, *"Core Tasks for Designated Managers'*
- **PowerPoint slides**

#### Resources required to support this unit

- Parentzone website [www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone)
- Play Talk Read website [www.playtalkread.org](http://www.playtalkread.org)
- Scottish Book trust website [www.scottishbooktrust.com](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com)
- Letterbox Club website [www.letterboxclub.org.uk/](http://www.letterboxclub.org.uk/)

#### Introduction to trainer

This unit focuses particularly on the role of adults caring for looked after children away from home. It is important in this session to acknowledge that foster carers, kinship carers, residential staff and social workers already do a tremendous amount to support the learning of the children in their care. It has to be recognised, however, that at times the numbers of children in placement and the complexities of their behaviours contribute to carers feeling under pressure and somewhat overwhelmed. Be sensitive to the fact that some participants

may feel somewhat defensive and others may want to focus on what other people, particularly those at school, should be doing. This is likely to be an issue if there are participants caring for children who have been excluded from schools or are awaiting a school place.

Trainers will need to strike a balance between allowing concerns to be voiced and moving on to the specific activities. The important message is that the significance of home support and providing an educationally rich and stimulating environment cannot be underestimated. Carers should be empowered to use existing routines to help with learning and encouraged to be creative about developing others.

### **Introductory activity: What or who supported our learning?**

Ask participants to reflect on their own experiences of school and the factors that helped keep them interested and involved. After a couple of minutes ask them to call these out and record them on flip chart.

Participants are likely to comment on:

- High expectations from their parents and other family members
- One or two subjects that particularly interested them or in which they achieved
- Praise for trying as well as succeeding
- A particular teacher who encouraged them
- A family culture of learning
- Threat of sanctions if they failed to attend
- Peer group support.

You should comment on any supportive factors that carers or social workers could use now with the young people with whom they are working.

### **Presentation (15 minutes)**

Use the PowerPoint slides 1-10 to remind the group how important children's experiences at home are for them to achieve well educationally. Draw particular attention to the comments of the children about how important their carers have been in their educational success. Incorporate the following video clips into your presentation.

#### **Video clips:**

Debbie Booth

John Borland

## **Large group discussion**

Give out the handout "What carers and social workers can do". Allow participants sufficient time to read this thoroughly and discuss the ways in which carers and social workers can support learning. Ask for further suggestions particularly if these are strategies that have worked with the children they look after or work with.

This is intended to highlight for foster, residential and kinship carers and social workers the importance of children being supported in their education. For younger children carers should be clear of the importance of talking to children about their learning, reading with and to children and incorporating basic mathematical ideas into their everyday lives. It is also important to remind participants that the first three years of life lay down the building blocks of learning. Adults caring for very small children should understand that the quality of their interaction with them can have long term effects on their engagement in learning and educational attainment. Reading to babies and infants can be the start of a lifelong involvement with books. Encouraging imaginative play, introducing the idea of sequencing through playing number games or helping children develop skill in sports, all build competencies that will be very useful in a formal learning environment as well as being fun for both adult and child.

Whilst carers and social workers may not have detailed knowledge of the subjects being studied by older children, there is much they can do to build confidence and self-esteem in them. This can be by taking an interest in their work, by looking out for and praising achievements, identifying others who might have skills and knowledge they can tap into, or by giving children an opportunity to practice and rehearse some of the activities they will be expected to perform at school. Even older children may be happy to listen to stories or read books with their carers if this is offered sensitively. It is important to remember that a significant number of children will not become engaged with reading through enjoyment. Reading does, however, remain an essential skill for successful adult life. If children are not enthused by reading for the intrinsic enjoyment it brings then carers need to find different ways of encouraging reading. It is important to find ways of demonstrating the functionality of reading. If a child can gain something or find out something interesting through reading they are more likely to develop fluency than if it remains a chore imposed by teachers.

Stress also the need for carers and social workers to work in partnership and that it is important to work out together the type of support each can and will provide. Hand out copies of the guidance issued by the Government on the role of the designated manager responsible for education within residential units and emphasise the importance of this new role in maintaining an appropriate focus on education.

## **Trainer's notes**

Carers and social workers may feel anxious about understanding some of the curriculum; for instance that child's knowledge and skill in maths or computing may outstrip theirs. It is helpful to reinforce the message that support is not about "knowing answers to homework questions". It is about providing encouragement and a home environment that is conducive to learning. Remind participants that it is not just children who are looked after away from home who need the support of their carers. Most youngsters find some subjects at school difficult and the completion of homework is an issue for many households. Participants may, with some justification, have concerns about whether their budgets or allowances are sufficient to provide all the identified support. Point out that many of the suggested strategies are free or not costly but, if necessary, get them to consider how they might advocate for change..

As appropriate refer participants to Education Scotland's Parentzone and Journey to Excellence websites.

## **Key messages**

- The most important social skills are learned in the home.
- Communication skills begin at home.
- Living with other people provides opportunities to ask questions, test ideas, learn about relationships.
- Home involvement in reading schemes will improve children's reading abilities.
- Regular homework completion throughout the school career has benefits equivalent to additional schooling.
- The support, encouragement and praise of adults with whom the child has a positive relationship is extremely powerful.
- Carers are in the unique position of being able to provide individualised attention
- All foster family or staff group members have a part to play, as does the birth family.
- The support, encouragement and interest of parents and carers is probably the most important ingredient in the educational experience of a child or young person.

## **Trainer's input and group discussion**

In this input the trainer should highlight the different ways in which individuals have abilities/skills/cleverness (Use the PowerPoint slide (11) "What kind of intelligence?"). People are often good at different aspects of learning. It is important to note all the different dimensions of cleverness and to seek ways of

identifying where a child is clever, to build on this and to create opportunities to develop skills in other areas. For instance, children who have had adverse experiences may have developed skills in 'reading other people' but conversely trauma may have inhibited their learning/cleverness in other areas, so they may be clumsy and out of touch with their body. Participants may like to give brief examples of the young people with whom they are living or working and how they are clever. This discussion can be used as a lead in to the core skills activity as it helps participants to focus on all the dimensions of intelligence which can be developed and supported within children's living environments.

### **Group activity: Core skills**

The purpose of this activity is to help carers and social workers to explore ways in which they can help children develop the core skills which underpin their educational experience. Emphasise throughout that this is not intended to be a school like experience for children. Children who do well at school are often those whose carers /parents have been able to maintain a sense that learning can be fun. As has already been highlighted much of the difference in educational attainment among children is to do with the experiences they have in their home environments. This activity should help carers to realise that almost every daily experience can provide opportunities for children to develop and practise these skills.

Ask participants to read "The Core Skills" hand-out and then complete the following task in small groups. Show the Core Skills PowerPoint slide (12) to provide a real example of the type of activity that might be suitable.

1. Participants should spend ten minutes discussing the particular difficulties looked after children may experience in managing to develop these skills.
2. Participants should then design a shared activity for staff and children in a residential unit or the adults and children in a foster family that will help children and young people to develop and practise these skills in their home environment. The group of children should preferably be of different ages and different ability levels. The activity should require involvement over a period of time. It should include research, planning, communication, implementation and evaluation. It must also be an experience the children would value and enjoy.
3. Participants should identify the potential learning opportunities for children and some of the difficulties that they may experience in undertaking the task. They should try and develop strategies to overcome these difficulties. If necessary encourage participants to identify any additional resources required for units or foster homes to create such opportunities.
4. Participants should create a joint presentation for feedback to the whole group. This should include specific detail about how individual young people might develop and enhance their skills across the five areas.

## **Trainer's notes**

If participants are unable to identify appropriate activities, suggest ideas such as planning a holiday, creating a newsletter or organising a special evening. Make sure that participants spend time thinking about the factors that prevent looked after children easily acquiring core skills. These may range from not having had a stable enough school experience to develop basic numeracy or literacy skills through to being unable to tolerate being part of a group or being too wound up to sustain concentrated effort on any subject. This awareness will be important when they try to identify potential difficulties in implementing their activity and begin to develop strategies to overcome these. Encourage participants to take their ideas back to their homes or work places and try them out with the children they care for.

## **Key Messages**

- Looked after children may struggle to develop the core skills required in school and work.
- Difficulties may be a result of disrupted school experiences, trauma or delayed or distorted development.
- Carers can use normal experiences and interactions to develop skills in a planned way.
- Fun and safety are essential ingredients for helping looked after children to risk learning and developing skills.