

Home visits with story sacks

Camrose Children's Centre in Northampton decided to set up a story sack corner for children, parents and staff.

A specific project was then planned to introduce the sacks to families, to promote reading and play activities at home and develop closer links between home and the centre.

The project was planned to tie in with World Book Day and support the work of Bookstart. Parties were held at the centre to celebrate the day and Bookstart treasure chests were distributed to all children who will be attending school the following year. Younger children received a book bag.

The story sack project

Home visits were arranged at a convenient time for families. Children chose a sack when they arrived at the centre for the session and then, when parents returned to collect their children, the child's key worker accompanied them home with the sack where the story and contents were shared together. The sacks contain picture books, rhymes, props, puppets, games, factual books, CDs and jigsaws – all related to the theme of the story book.

The story sacks were left at home with parents so that the story and activities could be repeated. Each sack has a card detailing the contents so that parents can readily know what items are contained in the sack when returning them.

Families across the children's centre – from the nursery, baby and toddler room, and drop-in and play centres (whose ages range from eight months to four years) – have been visited.



Centre staff say that they have really enjoyed being able to share special time with the children's families. One worker reported how excited a parent had been about the visit – she felt really pleased to be included.

The visits have helped to forge links between learning at home and at the centre. One little boy chose the story sack 'Little Polar Bear'. On reaching home, Mum informed the worker that he had this story on DVD – it was a clear favourite and she felt it would be good to share the book with him and do the supporting activities. It really made a connection for him.





“She loved ‘The Very Hungry Caterpillar’ bag so much – she was up at 5.30am this morning, playing with the bugs in the sack!”

Another key worker reported that the home visit had really enabled a parent to chat about her child more: ‘Usually she is in and out quickly but now we share lots of positive comments – without me always having to initiate the conversation and question her.’

One family needed a lot of reassurance from two members of staff before accepting the home visit. It was, however, completed successfully and the mum then wanted to know if she could borrow more sacks.

Themes from the sacks – those that have particularly interested individual children – are included in future planning. This reinforces the enjoyment and gives the children an opportunity to recall events and extend their thinking.

Future plans

A series of workshops for parents is being planned. Six sessions will be offered around play activities in the home and nursery. They will be delivered by staff and will build on the relationships started by the home visiting project. It is hoped that more parents will feel confident about attending, having been visited at home.

Find out more about Bookstart at www.bookstart.co.uk

“He enjoyed it so much – and he has learned the names of all the animals.”

Story sacks can be bought commercially – and some settings make their own. This can be an exciting project in itself with parents becoming involved in making the fabric bags and collecting items to include.

For example, a bag for ‘Dear Zoo’ might contain all the animals in the story, a truck to bring the animals from the zoo, some envelopes, stamps and paper to write letters, a game of animal snap and an information book about animals.

Digital cameras or/and Post-it notes can be loaned with a sack to help record observations.

“It made a real change to have something so different to do.”

