



Creative and cultural connections: An Aimhigher partnership working with families



'Connect 5': The inter-relationships between Young People, Families, Education, Careers and their World: Aimhigher Lancashire 3rd National Conference, 2007

This information sheet outlines a creative family learning project developed the LJMU Parents and Carers Project funded by Aimhigher Merseyside and the Halton Creative Action Zone. It outlines participant responses to a practical activity focusing on communication with parents and offers links and resources for others to work with museums.

Workshop Facilitators:

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Workshop Context:

Working in partnership has many advantages and this workshop explored some of the benefits from the partnership between LJMU and Halton Creative Action Zone.

The LJMU Parents and Carers Project aims to help families to realise their learning potential by running family learning sessions linked to a creative theme. The programme includes:

- ✓ informal learning opportunities in a local cultural or leisure venue (strand 1)
- ✓ a themed family visit to LJMU (Liverpool John Moors University) (strand 2)
- ✓ providing IAG leaflets for parents and carers including leaflets relating to subjects and careers associated with the theme.

The Halton Creative Action Zone

Halton Creative Action Zone is a local government run initiative that works with 15 schools in the Runcorn area of Merseyside. They aim to raise attainment and aspirations, include family liaison, and provide opportunities for cultural arts based experiences.

A case study Art and emotional literacy

Tate Liverpool – Strand 1

Session 1: for parents about Art and Family learning with lunch provided

Session 2: parents only trip to the Tate to show how they could work with their children on different activities connected to modern art. The group had a talk from an Information

Assistant about some key pieces, and were told about informal learning opportunities at the gallery that were free.

Session 3: Parents and children visited the Tate. As a group they took part in a bespoke Art trail and tried out the activities that the parents had done the week before.

Session 4: Parents only an art session and overall evaluation

Walker Art Gallery and Liverpool John Moores University – Strand 2

This built on evaluative feedback from parents. It focused on art and emotional literacy, involved children in all sessions and included:


2 family learning sessions in school

1 visit to Walker Gallery


1 visit to the University


For families who may have negative images about the university as well as those who may have reservations about visiting a university, it can be beneficial to use the University simply as a venue, with the visit theme of something that they are already interested in rather than having the university as the focus of the visit.

TOP TIPS AND KEY ISSUES


 **Working in partnership** was beneficial for both projects because it allowed pooling of funding resources and brought added value for each partner. The key organisers had already worked together and the aims of the projects were complementary so that there was a genuine partnership. For example,

- ✓ Halton was able to provide staff to support the classes to reassure the parents (some schools use learning mentors or parent mentors)
- ✓ Aimhigher was able to provide the university venue and access to university staff
- ✓ The project also involved the local museums who have their own remit to work with families.

 **Practical non-threatening sessions** with trips out and refreshments provided the hook and were seen by parents as a 'treat' for them. The process enabled parents to become 'experts' so that they could share ideas with their children. It was easy to include extra information for them to take away and follow up if interested.

 The programme **raised awareness** of local learning environments including the university.

- ✓ Parents did not realise museums were free and they were allowed to go.
- ✓ The themed approach allowed Aimhigher partner to introduce HE subjects and possible graduate careers naturally.

 **Sustainability and continuity** for projects like this is an inevitable challenge. As part of its project Halton was able to provide families with art boxes to encourage them to carry on family art activities at home.

- ✓ The themed approach allowed Aimhigher partner to introduce HE subjects and possible graduate careers naturally.

Challenges



It is **important not to underestimate the logistics of co-ordinating a complex multi-partner project**. For example, in this project there were challenges in getting the schools to agree to children being able to come to every session.

Some topics are more suitable than others. Finding the right theme that attracts parents and children, connects with the school curriculum, university specialisms, and interests of external partners; however where this combined approach can be achieved there are many benefits.

Communicating and marketing materials

The following check list of issues to consider when communicating with parents. The ideas emerged from workshop participants who considered the suitability of a 'draft' parent letter.

Practicalities









- Is there a start and end times on publicity?
- Is the time suitable? When thinking about time – think about audience e.g. if parent only after school how will parents sort out childcare, if during school hours then what about parents who work.
- Is the venue suitable for all participants? e.g. entrances, toilets and the actual room being used
- Are other members of the family welcome to attend – grandparents or older / younger siblings?
- Who are the target audience? The language used can sometimes be off putting. Some felt that carers signalled people in receipt of support from social services or parents with a disabled child needing 'caring'. Labels can encourage and discourage.
- Do leaflets answer all the basic questions? who, where, what, when and how
- Are the leaflets written in plain English and jargon free? To help prepare leaflets we recommend the plain English Writing website and A-Z of Alternative Words
 -  <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>
 -  <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/alternative.pdf>
- Where are leaflets and posters being displayed? Different locations are likely to be seen by different groups?
- What other ways can be used to publicise an activity? Experience suggests that people respond better to face to face and personal invitations
- If sending letters home, who will sign them? Some evidence to suggest this can impact on attendance, a letter from the school and the university, or two letters can work well.
- Will refreshments be provided?
- Is there a charge for the event? Free is not always perceived as quality, especially for a course that runs over a few weeks.

Although not exhaustive the above list includes some of the more obvious practical questions. As a guiding principle when thinking about working with families Jan Gibbons recommends the acronym **SEA**:
Support **E**ncourages **A**chievement



MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES






The following resources provide further information and contact details for planning activities and working with families in museums.

-  Museums and learning: A guide for family visits
-  <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Museum/index.html>
-  Family learning at national museums, Liverpool
-  <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learning/familylearning.asp>
-  Museums, Libraries and Archives, Northwest. This site provides links to NW museums, newsletters of exhibitions, and staff development on family learning
-  <http://cecollect.com/ve/ZZVKz31609861iWMCd>
-  Aimhigher Careers Guidance Sheets: A day in the life of a museum curator.
-  http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/careers_guidance/archives/2007/a_day_in_the_life_of_a_museum_curator_Jun.cfm

Some universities also have museums you can visit

-  Lancaster University's Peter Scott Gallery
-  <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/peterscott/index.htm>

FURTHER READING:

-  Briefing Sheet 2: Engaging parents within a school setting to address parental concerns on accessing HE
 -  Briefing Sheet 7: Working in partnership with Community Voluntary Service
 -  Information Sheet 7: Working with families through the Extended Services Agenda
 -  Aimhigher Lancashire Families Website
- Aimhigher Lancashire Families website includes a selection of Briefing Sheets, conference Information Sheets, Staff Development Activities that allow staff to explore in more detail ways of engaging families through school and the community voluntary sector
-  <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/index.htm>


Prepared on behalf of Aimhigher Lancashire



For other Information Sheets

This is one of 5 Information Sheets prepared following the 'Connect 5' Aimhigher Lancashire National Families Conference. For further details see:

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/Conference07.htm>

For further information about working with families, or copies of other resources, contact:

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 <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/families/index.htm>



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