

## All Wrapped Up – reaching out to families

**Armley Moor Children's Centre in Leeds** set up a small, targeted project to reach out to children and families. The key aims were to encourage certain family members – particularly fathers or other male carers – who were not already involved in their child's learning at the setting to develop confidence, share observations and make more use of free local resources.



The project involved six families. In each family, the father or another significant male agreed to take part, along with their child. Some of the fathers do not live with their children, so time spent together is especially precious. The name of the project – All Wrapped Up – is intended to signify the emotional security and relationships that everyone hoped to foster and develop – between families and the centre and between children and families.

Some of the children involved in the project were included because they showed relatively low levels of well-being and involvement. The centre uses Laever's\* signs and scales of involvement and well-being and this has been shared with parents.

The Children's Centre worked in partnership with The Royal Armouries, a museum in Leeds, to which entrance is free. The six families visited the museum over a period of six weeks to explore materials and resources. Each visit had a theme – such as 'Fur and Feathers' or 'Metal'. The families and two practitioners travelled to the museum together once a week on the museum's mini-bus and then came back on public transport. The return journey helped to highlight to families that travelling independently is possible, and it was hoped that this would increase their confidence to undertake repeat visits alone.

Initial discussions took place with families, explaining the project, encouraging them to take part, and ensuring that individual needs and circumstances were taken into account. Most parents were very pleased to be asked to be part of something special. These initial preparatory discussions proved useful in themselves – they established real commitment and interest in the project and helped staff to begin to form relationships. They also helped practitioners appreciate the challenges some of the families face, as well as helping them to learn more about the children's interests and behaviour at home.

After each outing, parents and children were supported to do follow-up activities. The centre has purchased three digital cameras and a printer. These enable parents, children and practitioners to record the visits to the museum, and return to the centre to print out photos, where they are helped to use the technology.



The children have been involved in making a large display of all the photos, and each family has an individual 'memory box' and book. This enables them to collect small items, photos, the child's drawings etc. and build a record of the project over time.

The families are also invited into the centre to join in creative activities related to the visits and these sessions are open to other families who are not directly involved in the project. The sessions have included: building a large castle out of cardboard, with the help of a local arts group; making shields and costumes; and a workshop that introduced weaving after a visit exploring textiles at the museum. Weaving appealed to many children, who showed deep involvement in the activity – and their interest continued over a period of weeks.

There have been marked benefits for the children involved in the project. Their confidence has increased, they talk more and they show more involvement in activities within the setting. The four boys involved have been observed in more small-world and high quality role-play. They have particularly enjoyed making up stories with horses and toy knights, purchased to match their interests. These positive outcomes have been shared and discussed with their parents.

The children were often waved off by their peers and welcomed back excitedly on their return from the museum. This has raised their self-esteem and helped them to develop relationships with other children.

The project – originally targeted at a small number of families – has had an impact across the centre. Other families have become interested, asked questions and joined in the creative activities. Some have visited the museum independently. The cameras and printer are used more widely within the centre. The intention is for all families to make increasing use of the cameras, taking them home to record observations of learning and development, and sharing these with centre staff on a regular basis.



\*Laevers, F. (ed.) (1994) *The Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children*. Manual and video. Experiential Education Series, No. 1. Leuven: Centre for Experiential Education.

Laevers, F. (2003) *Experiential Education: Making care and education more effective through wellbeing and involvement*. Belgium: Leuven University.