

Story sack library



Woodside School and Children's Centre in **Waltham Forest** has just started using story sacks with children and their families.

The Centre is attached to a large primary school in a diverse area of London. It is a vibrant and exciting place to work, with over 30 community languages spoken by families.

The Centre aims to encourage parents to engage in their children's learning by joining storytelling sessions. Staff recognise that storytelling is a powerful and fun way for children to learn, and an activity that children can share at home with their families. Children already borrow books to take home, but parents had commented that they were unsure how to maintain their child's interest and develop ideas.

The Centre developed a project that involved storytelling sessions using story sacks and a linked, creative or practical activity.

The Centre wrote to parents describing the project, but they received a greater response by approaching individual parents and having face-to-face discussions. By the second week of the project, parents were telling other parents how good the sessions were and how much they enjoyed them. Parents proved to be the best communicators – raising awareness and increasing participation.

Parents and children attend storytelling sessions led by a member of staff. Storytelling is modelled, as is the use of associated toys and props.

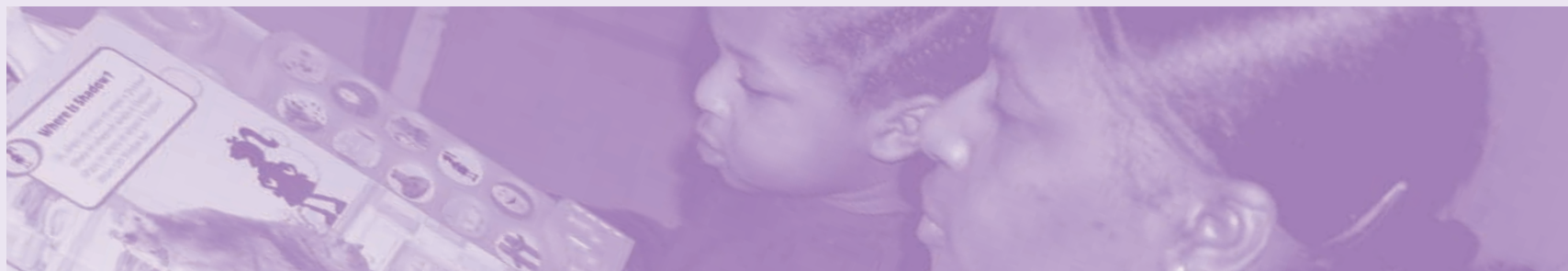
Parents and children (and sometimes younger siblings) participate through using the props or joining in with parts of the story. A creative or practical activity follows the story. For example, after sharing the story *Handa's Surprise* the group made fruit salad; after *Owl Babies* the group made owl puppets.

The story sacks are lent to different families each day and returned the following session. Parents enjoy using the sacks at home and have reported that the whole family joins in. The staff believe that parents

"I really enjoyed it. It's a different way of telling stories, with play."

"I found watching the teachers very helpful."

are more confident and children are clearly excited to take the story sacks home. This excitement has given a real momentum to the project.



Story sacks can be made with colourful material and a range of props and toys connected to the story. Plastic zip-up wallets can also be used.

Some contain cards with ideas for follow-up activities – such as recipes, shopping activities, instructions for making masks or puppets. Some bags include glue, paper, scissors and other equipment.

At the start of the project staff bought story sacks as a starter provision. However, they soon added their own props and toys to the sacks. One staff member also made picture cards that 'tell' the key events of the story. Children are encouraged to re-tell the story using the picture prompts. To help parents talk about the story with their children, a card is included in the bags with ideas for comments and questions.

The story sacks are generally well cared for by parents when they take them home, but it takes commitment by the staff to check the sacks on return and refurbish the contents if necessary. Having an inventory of contents in each bag has helped this process.

Some of the storytelling sessions have been delivered in other languages – one in Urdu and one in Turkish. Target families were invited but speakers of all languages attended. The staff and parents translated key phrases into the relevant languages. A session in Somali has also been planned.

The sacks are now being incorporated into Stay and Play sessions run in the Centre and at storytelling sessions held in the local library. They are also being used on home visits.

Future plans include a session aimed at fathers, and working with parents to develop their ideas and make new story sacks.

The enjoyment of the children and the response of the parents are very encouraging and motivating. The staff team feel they have a lot to keep working on!



“It’s a family time for us – the older girls join in too.”