

Case Study

Oldham REAL Beginnings Project

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Oldham Council, the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Bridgewater Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust enlisted researchers from the ESRC LuCiD Centre to evaluate the Oldham 0-2 REAL Beginnings project

Background

Making it REAL is a family-orientated literacy programme, sharing knowledge and practice with caregivers to support their child's learning at home. The aim is to improve children's early educational attainment with a particular focus on boosting early literacy and language development so that children are school-ready.

The 0-2 REAL Beginnings in Oldham Project

The 0-2 REAL Beginnings programme was funded by the Government's Opportunity Area (OA) programme, launched in 2017. Data showed that young people in Oldham were less likely to have access to high quality education and employment opportunities than children from other areas of the country. The REAL Beginnings programme was provided for families of under-2s. LuCiD researchers evaluated the effect of the programme on children's development and parents' and practitioners' confidence in supporting them. Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust was commissioned to deliver the programme through their Right Start service.

The project

Families were randomly allocated to receive the REAL Beginnings programme (N = 30) or the usual universal offer (N = 13). The children were aged between 12 to 21 months (average = 15 months) at the start of the study. Measures that assessed children's development and parent and practitioner confidence in supporting early literacy were taken at the beginning of the study and approximately 12 months later to compare progress.

Findings

Children in the REAL group made greater developmental gains in areas of pre-literacy targeted by the programme, although no differences in language were observed. All parents were very positive about their experience and felt in a better position to support their child's communication and language, with parents in the REAL group reporting increases in behaviours to support

communication & language post-programme.



Conclusions

The variability in family engagement with the programme, the small sample size and some potential degree of non-random variability between the groups means that we cannot draw solid conclusions about the effectiveness of the REAL Beginnings intervention. However, there are some indications that aspects of the programme may be having a positive impact on the families involved. In comparison to families in the Control group, children in the REAL group appeared to make greater progress on aspects of development related to the intervention and caregivers reported greater increases in certain types of supportive home learning activities and behaviours.

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Further Information

The full evaluation report can be accessed [here](#)

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Oldham OA

Find out more about the Opportunity Area Programme: <https://oldhamopportunityarea.co.uk/post-16-2/>