

MLA EAST OF ENGLAND LEARNING NETWORK PROJECT

Background Information

Service name	Essex Libraries
Description of activity / project	<p>Daddy Cool</p> <p>Daddy Cool groups usually run on Saturdays aiming to reach dads on their days off and give them the opportunity to spend time outside the home with babies and toddlers. They run for 30 minutes and include a mixture of rhymes, songs and short stories. Dads are encouraged to come along by the use of the title “Daddy Cool “ but mums and other family members are welcome too.</p> <p>There are 8 Daddy Cool sessions running in libraries mainly in West Essex. I visited 4. However one of the sessions had no participants so this research is based on 3.</p>
Timescale (or ongoing)	On-going – Research completed Jan-March
Main audience /user focus	Dads and their children
Partners	
GLO and GSO piloting objectives	<p>Essex County Council has made clear its commitment to improving the quality of life for the people of Essex. Quality of Life is a long term strategy but is often linked to well-being and happiness. The Generic Social Outcomes (GSOs) which provide a tool for measuring social outcomes have given us the opportunity to conduct some research into two very different types of on-going group initiated and delivered by libraries to explore whether we can provide evidence of the way in which our libraries contribute to community well-being.</p> <p>The groups studied were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Ongar Booktalk group based in the public library in the small town of Chipping Ongar in West Essex ▪ Daddy Cool sessions offering baby and toddler activities targeted specifically at Dads (although mums are welcome too)

	<p>I wanted to find out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What, if anything, being part of these groups meant for the members ▪ Whether being part of the group provided something greater than the members would enjoy as individuals ▪ If GSOs could be used to assess the outcomes in a way that would be robust enough for the library service to share with corporate partners as part of the Quality of Life and Wellbeing strategies.
Contact details	<p>Sarah Mears Essex Libraries Goldlay Gardens Chelmsford Essex CM2 0EW</p>

1. What were the key outcome(s) measured

Table 1: indicating the generic social outcomes demonstrated by the Daddy Cool Sessions mapped against NEF's¹ "Well-being within personal, social and place framework" (which ECC were considering adopting)

Daddy Cool Sessions			
Well Being Framework		GSOs	
PERSONAL	Engaging activities and achievements	Health and Wellbeing	Helping children and young people to enjoy life and make a positive contribution
SOCIAL	Family and relationships	Stronger and safer communities	Familial ties and relationships
	Sense of belonging and community cohesion		
PLACE	Safety and security	Strengthening public life	Providing safe, inclusive and trusted public spaces
	Access and opportunity		
	Quality of local area		Improving the responsiveness of services to the needs of the local community, including other stakeholders

¹ NEF New Economic Foundation

2. How you measured the extent to which the outcome/outcomes were met (include any of the following developed for your project: questionnaires; interview or focus group guides: observation schedules)

How the research was carried out

- Observing 3 sessions
- Interviews with 9 dads
- Email questions to staff

Visits

Epping 02.02.08

1 mum and dad together
1 grandmother on her own
3 dads on their own
5 children

Saffron Walden 09.02.08

10 Dads on their own
1 mum on her own
13 children

Old Harlow 16.02.08

2 dads on their own
2 mums on their own
2 mums and dads together
6 children

The questions I asked dads were

- What made you decide to come to Daddy Cool today?
- How does your child respond to the sessions (this didn't really provide information for this project but was interesting for the dads perception of their child)
- How long have you been coming to the sessions?
- Do you talk to other parents when you are here?
- Do you share rhymes with your child back at home?
- How do you feel about events like these targeted mainly towards Dads? (this was a change of question after the first session)

The question I asked staff was

- Do Daddy Cool Sessions differ in any way from the regular weekday baby and toddler times?
- And if so how – I'm thinking of levels of participation, types of rhymes parents and babies respond to best, how you actually run the sessions.
- And how do you build dads confidence to join in?

3. Who you collected the evidence from

9 dads attending Daddy Cool sessions and two members of staff who deliver the sessions

4. Who collected the evidence?

Sarah Mears (and a member of library staff at Epping Library)

5. How you analysed the evidence

I pulled all the quotes and comments into a grid and then matched them against GSOs. Comments and quotes which didn't match a GSO were included but left blank. I also noted where my observations supported the comments and quotes of participants. I then recorded how many quotes supported a particular GSO

6. How you presented the findings

(include a summary of the findings)

I have written a full report for the libraries strategic leadership team.

1: Stronger and safer communities

Encouraging familial ties and relationships The dads' comments indicate how much they value being given an opportunity to spend time with their children within a community setting, especially at weekends when there are not many provisions available for under fives.

- *Most activities are much more mother- oriented – so nice to have something targeted at dads. Nothing else for Dads at weekends provisions available for under fives.*
- *Very good – makes you make more of an effort. If it wasn't targeted at dads we would be more inclined to let mums do it*
- *Good idea, nice on Saturdays to have time to take them to the library*
- *Very good. We are choosing books then going to a café for lunch- staying out as long as possible to give mummy a break*

2: Heath and Well-being

Dads' involvement in children's early learning has been shown to be a vital part of children's long term achievement. The following quotes are taken from a National Literacy Trust publication called "Getting the blokes on board"².

"Shared literacy activities can also strengthen the bonds between fathers and children. Indeed it has been suggested that the lack of male role models involved in reading and other literacy related activities during children's early years is one of the possible causes for the declining rates of school achievement for boys"

"involving fathers in their children's literacy activities not only benefits their children. There are also numerous benefits that have been reported for the fathers themselves, including greater skill acquisition, greater confidence and self esteem, a better father-child relationship, and increased engagement with learning. "

Daddy Cool sessions include rhymes, short stories and songs, dads are encouraged sit with their children on the floor and help their children do the actions – during observation both dads and children enjoyed being very physical with actions - picking babies up and bouncing them about for example – the interaction between stories, songs , rhymes and physical activity all stimulate both the left and right hand side of the brain helping prepare children for later learning, so any dad bringing their child to Daddy Cool and helping then to fully participate is evidence of Daddy Cool

² Getting the Blokes on Board, National Literacy Trust; 2007 www.literacytrust.org.uk

supporting *Helping children and young people to enjoy life and make a positive contribution.*

- *“Lovely being around singing –still a bit self conscious –takes a bit of time – we are singing the songs at home so she knows them”*
- *“Enjoying it as time goes on –gets more involved with the songs”*

3: Strengthening Public Life

The testimony of the staff at two of the libraries describe the strategies they use to build the confidence of dads and ensure that they and their children feel safe to participate *Providing safe and inclusive and trusted public spaces* and how they build in flexibility to meet the needs of the group

- *To begin with, the dads who participated were unsure how to interact with their children; they were also a bit wary about their children running off if they lost interest in the session. After a bit of reassuring, telling them that it is ok if children are running off to look at books, they became a bit more relaxed. (We got over the interaction problems by using a teddy to demonstrate actions as well as doing the actions ourselves (as Liz does in Baby time). We always have words to lesser known rhymes and songs on a board so that dads find it easier to join (Member of library staff Saffron Walden Library)*
- *I think that in order to build up dad’s confidence, we have to make sure that they feel comfortable with the action rhymes etc as long as we and the children are doing the actions for songs, the dads will follow as they realise that no-one is going to laugh at them if they are having a go! (Member of library staff Saffron Walden Library)*
- *Because we don’t know which age groups are going to attend Daddy Cool, it is a bit harder to plan for. We tend to write down a list of possible songs to use and will collect a variety of books to suit different ages. We do find however that older children still enjoy the picture books and younger stories. We don’t have a format like baby and story time but tend to see how it’s going as we deliver the session. (Member of library staff Saffron Walden Library)*
- *Some dads don’t like to sing in front of other men –I try to make it a relaxed friendly atmosphere. Letting the children move around and having a laugh with them if I muck up – which I do” (Member of library staff at Epping Library)*

When comparing this group with the other group studied for this project - the Ongar Booktalk Group, the GSO that is not demonstrated is *Improving group and inter-group dialogue*. There was very weak evidence of the group communicating, perhaps not surprising as Daddy Cool sessions are drop-in and participants transient as children grow.

7. How you used or plan to use the findings (for example to inform service development or for advocacy)

1: For advocacy –with corporate partners and to ensure that libraries are recognised as an organisation which clearly evidences its contribution to community wellbeing and its place within community well being strategies

2: To demonstrate to partners that libraries have a good track record in providing opportunities to build positive social outcomes as a basis for developing new projects with partners

3: To use as evidence when approaching agencies who can help us to reach people who are disengaged from community life that we can provide opportunities for people to reengage with an aspect of community

4: As an evaluative and developmental tool– looking at these services and how we can improve them to better support and involve the community or change the services to meet communities needs

5: As a training tool for staff

8. Comments on the piloting process

(Including, what you learned, what went well and any challenges or problems)

I learned that this research does indicate that it is possible to demonstrate social outcomes among groups which use the library service. This information is very small scale and more would need to be done to corroborate the evidence and make it robust. We are aware that this research has been carried out with groups whose participants by and large are those already very engaged within the community for whom these groups are just another way of building on this engagement. The Daddy Cool sessions took place in relatively affluent areas where dads are very aware of the need to share rhymes – nearly all the dads said they shared rhymes at home with babies. It would be interesting to test whether the Daddy Cool model would work in one of areas of more need within the county. This research does however show us what might be possible if we reach those less engaged within the community.

Designing the questions to ask dads was very difficult. I tried a range of questionnaire styles but ultimately designed a very informal list of questions. I asked the questions and jotted down the answers rather than asking dads to do it as they had their hands full with toddlers. It was very difficult to avoid leading questions and I changed the last question after the first session. The final question once revised provided the most useful information. It was also quite hard to get dads talking.

9. Finally, please give details of anything that surprised you about the piloting process

I wasn't sure whether I could demonstrate GSOs from a drop in activity, and I was surprised that I could provide evidence using the format I devised

Sarah Mears March 2008

Appendix 1: questionnaire given to dads (see ideas bank)

Appendix 2: summary of outcomes against the GSO and Well-being framework (below)

Appendix 2: indicating the generic social outcomes demonstrated by Daddy Cool (With evidence) mapped against NEF's³ Well-being within personal, social and place

Daddy Cool Sessions				
Well Being Framework		GSOs		Comments from the research
PERSONAL	Engaging activities and achievements	Health and Wellbeing	Helping children and young people to enjoy life and make a positive contribution	Daddy Cool sessions include rhymes, short stories and songs, dads are encouraged sit with their children on the floor and help their children do the actions – during observation both dads and children enjoyed being very physical with actions - picking babies up and bouncing them about for example – the interaction between stories, songs , rhymes and physical activity all stimulate both the left and right hand side of the brain helping prepare children for later learning, so any dad bring their child to Daddy Cool and helping them to fully participate is evidence of Daddy Cool supporting <i>Helping children and young people to enjoy life and make a positive contribution</i> .
SOCIAL	Family and relationships Sense of belonging and community cohesion	Stronger and safer communities	Familial ties and relationships	<p>Most activities are much more mother- oriented – so nice to have something targeted at dads. Nothing else for Dads at weekends provisions available for under fives.</p> <p>Very good – makes you make more of an effort. If it wasn't targeted at dads we would be more inclined to let mums do it</p> <p>Good idea, nice on Saturdays to have time to take them to the library</p> <p>Very good. We are choosing books then going to a café for lunch- staying out as long as possible to give mummy a break</p>

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Well Being Framework		GSOs		Comments from the research
PLACE	Safety and security	Strengthening public life	Providing safe, inclusive and trusted public spaces	<p>To begin with, the dads who participated were unsure how to interact with their children; they were also a bit wary about their children running off if they lost interest in the session. After a bit of reassuring, telling them that it is ok if children are running off to look at books, they became a bit more relaxed. (We got over the interaction problems by using a teddy to demonstrate actions as well as doing the actions ourselves (as Liz does in Baby time). We always have words to lesser known rhymes and songs on a board so that dads find it easier to join</p> <p>I think that in order to build up dad's confidence, we have to make sure that they feel comfortable with the action rhymes etc as long as we and the children are doing the actions for songs, the dads will follow as they realise that no-one is going to laugh at them if they are having a go!</p>
	Access and opportunity			
	Quality of local area	Improving the responsiveness of services to the needs of the local community, including other stakeholders	<p>Because we don't know which age groups are going to attend Daddy Cool, it is a bit harder to plan for. We tend to write down a list of possible songs to use and will collect a variety of books to suit different ages. We do find however that older children still enjoy the picture books and younger stories. We don't have a format like baby and story time but tend to see how it's going as we deliver the session.</p>	