

## The United Kingdom: Digital Families- Bridging the Digital and Intergenerational Divides

### Organisation implementing the project

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### Context

The Digital Families programme was developed in response to some key challenges in England that are currently driving the learning agenda: There are significant attainment gaps between the poorest children and young people and their wealthier peers. The OECD published a report in 2010 that highlighted the UK's lack of social mobility. "The chances of a child from a poor family enjoying higher wages and better education than their parents is lower in Britain than in other western countries"<sup>1</sup> Policy reforms designed to remove obstacles to intergenerational social mobility and promote opportunities have focused on education and narrowing attainment gaps. The Coalition Government has introduced the Pupil Premium<sup>2</sup>, which gives schools additional funding for each child eligible for free school meals and created the Education Endowment Fund<sup>3</sup> to test approaches that increase attainment of disadvantaged children and young people and gather robust research evidence.

At the same time it was recognized that Digital Exclusion was a significant issue and nearly 10 million people in the UK did not have Internet access and most of these had never been on-line. A campaign called Race On-line 2012<sup>4</sup> was established to motivate people to 'get on-line'.

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1 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/mar/10/oecd-uk-worst-social-mobility>

2 <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/premium/a0076063/pupil-premium-what-you-need-to-know>

3 <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>

4 <http://raceonline2012.org/>

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## **Action**

The Campaign for Learning (CfL), an independent education charity, recognised the crucial role of intergenerational learning in supporting positive outcomes for children and the role of families and friends in supporting each other to use the Internet. CfL piloted an approach that integrated three key interventions to address educational disadvantage and support digital inclusion in one programme:

1. Learning to Learn: Approaches that support the development of knowledge, skills and dispositions for learning (particularly metacognition: reflective and strategic thinking about learning that supports knowledge and skills development, demonstrated in recent Sutton Trust<sup>5</sup> research to be highly effective in raising attainment.)
2. Strategies to extend and embed the teaching and learning in the home learning environment and provide parents, carers and grandparents with the skills and knowledge to effectively support children's learning and development.
3. ICT: Approaches that stimulate and support effective teaching and learning (including interactive software to promote essential feedback on learning outcomes and stop-motion/flip cameras to create compelling learning opportunities and record and evaluate learning)

This digital learning programme uses new technologies and software, for families to produce stop-motion animation films, talking photos and creating personal comic books. It involves writing stories, making the sets and characters, using animation software to take pictures, editing film, and adding sound, titles and credits.

Recruiting families involves working closely with each school, its staff and appropriate external partners. The most effective tool for engagement has been speaking at whole school assemblies about the project and giving them a demonstration. The children then

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/toolkit-of-strategies-to-improve-learning/>

go back to class to make 'wanted' posters to personally invite their chosen adult. This has proved to be significantly more effective than sending letters home in schools bag.

Activities have been delivered on school premises after school hours and during weekends.

Adults and children have been encouraged to learn together over ten hours of stimulating learning activities that they have enjoyed. Once completed, videos are uploaded on to YouTube, such as 'the computer swallowed grandpa'<sup>6</sup> film, for families to share and view in their own time. Andy, the Project Manager, and his team organise an end of project event for participants to celebrate the achievements and showcase all their films in front of an audience. Over 80% of the work targeted dads, granddads and male carers.

In addition to delivering sessions for families, the team train schoolteachers and local practitioners to ensure sustainability of the approaches after the programme ends. Staff receive training on how to ensure learning outcomes for both children and adults, how to use the software and how to embed learning to learn techniques. They are also given session plans, evaluation tools and relevant documents and resources to support delivery.

## Outcomes and impact

Observations revealed that fathers and grandfathers' interaction with their child or grandchild is often very different, from mothers' and grandmothers' but equally beneficial to the child's social and educational development. The project has helped to change cultural attitudes and perception of fathers and grandfathers' role in their child/grandchild's learning and development. One person noticed that his father is more approachable and interactive with his grandchildren than he was with his own children. On the other hand, grandchildren have supported their grandfathers' learning; for example the Director of the Surma Community Centre, not-for-profit organisation for Bengali ethnic minority community, observed that children were actively helping their grandfathers to learn the English language and use computers.

Impact evidence from one London borough demonstrated that the number of children that achieved the expected National Curriculum level for their age rose from 15% in the previous year to 73% after the project. This is a great achievement as over 90% of pupils were from significantly disadvantaged backgrounds. For nearly 80% of them it was the first time they had had the opportunity to learn with their dad or other family member in a school environment and for some families it was the first time they had ever used a computer.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvNGXCq6Fzq](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvNGXCq6Fzq)

It has changed the mindsets of fathers/male carers, grandfathers, practitioners and schools about how to encourage and improve learning outcomes of children and their families. The project has transformed interaction with their children and schools and has helped to create a supportive environment. As one participant states: “Before the project I wasn't involved and I didn't know the level of my children's education. I didn't know the teachers well. Now when my kids come home from school we come together, eat, and do homework.”

The ‘Digital Families’ project is now being further developed, in partnership with the E-Learning Foundation and funded by the Nominet Trust and aims to engage with over 14,000 families UK wide. A new peer-to-peer support programme has now been introduced and parents can volunteer to be Digital Champions to support other parents.

### Quotes

A granddad commented: *“The animation workshop was a natural extension to our normal engagement with our granddaughter.”*

One granddad noted: *“I tend to sit back and support my grandson's learning, whereas his dad prefers to get fully involved and sometimes lead”.*

The Deputy Head teacher at Stag Lane Infant School explains how the project encouraged parents to spend quality time with their children: *“Quality time is now part of their everyday routine with their children. We have particularly strong links with the dads who took part and have maintained their involvement through events held since. Last years' First National Fathers Story Week gave us the perfect platform to strengthen these links through an assembly which 128 dads attended.”*