

# Building early literacy:

## LEAP's approach to supporting language and communication development by strengthening the home learning environment



Carla Stanke, Jo Gordon, Jacqui McDermid, Catherine Keal, Herbie Hyndley

### Introduction

Good communication and language skills are an essential part of early childhood development. Children from the most disadvantaged groups have lower language skills than those in the least disadvantaged groups,<sup>1</sup> and children from non-White British backgrounds are significantly less likely to achieve expected communication and language development than their White British peers.<sup>2</sup> The importance of the home learning environment and its impact on child development has been well established.<sup>3</sup>

LEAP's Making it REAL (MiR), Sharing REAL with Parents (SR) and Supporting Babies' Next Steps (SBNS) services aimed to improve the home-learning environment through building parent/carer knowledge and confidence about what they do with their young children to build early literacy skills.

All three services were based on the four strands of literacy: oral language, environmental print, books and early writing/mark making. The ORIM framework provides the framework for embedding the four strands of literacy: Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Modelling.<sup>4</sup>

### Service delivery approach

Making it REAL trained practitioners in early years settings and children's centres to work with families in their homes. MiR was aimed at children aged 2–3 years old.

Sharing REAL with Parents was delivered to groups of parents for 4 weekly sessions in children's centres while their children attended creche. SR was aimed at children aged 18 months–3 years old.

Supporting Babies' Next Steps was delivered to groups of parents, with their babies, for 4 weekly sessions in children's centres. SBNS was developed by LEAP in response to increasing requests from parents to attend Sharing REAL with younger children and was aimed at babies from birth to one year old.

### Outcomes, reach and feedback

#### Making it REAL

- + 82% of families identified their ethnicity as Black, Asian or mixed
- + 74% lived in the LEAP geographic area
- + 94% lived in areas of greatest deprivation
- + Parents report an increase in naming things around them to help children learn new vocabulary more than once a day, from 54% at the first session to 83% at the last session
- + Parents report an increase in supporting their children to paint or draw at home more than 7 times a week, from 5% at the first session to 32% at the last session
- + Parents report an increase in teaching songs, poems and rhymes more than 7 times a week, from 36% at the first session to 67% at the last session.

#### Sharing REAL

- + 68% of families identified their ethnicity as Black, Asian or mixed
- + 57% lived in the LEAP geographic area
- + 93% lived in areas of greatest deprivation
- + 97% of parents reported that the service had a positive or very positive impact on their knowledge about early literacy
- + 97% of parents reported that the service had a positive or very positive impact on their confidence in supporting their child's early literacy development.

**"The course was very informative and gave me new skills and ideas about literacy. I felt like my needs were listened to and that the group was very supportive."**

## Supporting Babies' Next Steps

- + 34% of families identified their ethnicity as Black, Asian or mixed
- + 63% lived in the LEAP geographic area
- + 90% lived in areas of greatest deprivation
- + 100% of parents reported that the service had a positive or very positive impact on their knowledge about early literacy
- + 98% of parents reported that the service had a positive or very positive impact on their confidence in supporting their child's early literacy development

- + 100% said they were likely or very likely to read to their baby every day
- + 100% said they were likely or very likely to talk or sing with their baby every day
- + 98% said they were likely or very likely to use daily routines to support early literacy development.

**"I thought the sessions were brilliantly facilitated and so useful to me as a new mother. I've picked up some great tips and skills on how to help my baby develop, how to engage him and help him learn age appropriately."**

## Key messages

- + Making it REAL, Sharing REAL with Parents and Supporting Babies' Next Steps successfully reached LEAP's priority populations
- + Participating parents reported improvements in knowledge, confidence and motivation to support children's early learning in the home

- + Feedback from families about SBNS is overwhelmingly positive and there is often a waiting list to participate, which indicates an appetite for earlier communication and language support and advice for babies
- + Integrated working and clear signposting pathways with other early years services are important for recruitment, especially in areas with high levels of need.



**References:** **1** Law J, Todd L, Clark J, Mroz M, Carr J. Early Language Delays in the Europe - United Kingdom. London: Save the Children; 2013. Available from: [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/early\\_language\\_delays.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/early_language_delays.pdf/). **2** Luck G. Is communication and language development an inequalities issue for children in Lambeth?: Comparing developmental milestones of 5-year-olds in the LEAP wards with the rest of Lambeth. London: Lambeth Early Action Partnership; 2018. Available from: <https://www.leaplambeth.org.uk/files/documents/EYFS%20CLD%20LEAP%20poster%20.pdf>. **3** Department for Education, National Literacy Trust. Improving the home learning environment: A behaviour change approach. London: Department for Education; 2018. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-home-learning-environment>. **4** Nutbrown C, Hannon P, Morgan A. Early Literacy Work with Families: Policy, Practice and Research. London: Sage Publications; 2005.