

# Parents experiences and views on supporting early learning and development (at home)

*Invitation to Tender*

February 2023

# INTRODUCTION

This invitation to tender sets out the scope and requirements for research Save the Children Scotland is commissioning. We are seeking proposals for a qualitative research project to understand how parents with experience of poverty or low income experience early support (from pregnancy to 3 years, with particular focus on pregnancy and the first year of their child's life) for creating a positive 'home learning environment'.

**The deadline for proposals is Friday 17th March 2023.**

## OVERVIEW OF SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children Scotland aims to help end to child poverty and to reduce the impact of poverty on children's development and learning in early childhood (the 'early learning gap'). We do this through influencing national policy, empowering communities and amplifying children's and parents' voices, supporting families in financial crisis, and sharing learning to shape services that support the home learning environment. We build strong partnerships to help us create more impact.

We think it is unacceptable that family incomes determine children's outcomes. We know that the vast majority of early learning takes place at home in the family unit and that where parents are responsive, nurturing and attuned to their children, as well as provide a language rich environment, children do better regardless of family income. However, we also know that poverty oppresses the early learning space: lack of money means parents cannot afford resources and activities with and for their children, while financial hardship causes stress, which in turn has a negative impact on being able to provide the nurturing and responsive parent – child interactions that enhance early learning and play. We focus on the youngest children because we know how important that stage of childhood is for development and that when children experience poverty early in life, they are at an increased risk of being impacted long term and not being able to realise their potential.

We want to ensure that parents have access to the best support in ways that enhances their knowledge, skills, and confidence to develop their babies and children's foundational skills. There is a lack of evidence about how to best deliver services and support to families living on lower incomes. This research aims to understand what works, what can be improved, and where there are gaps or barriers in support, from the perspective of parents and carers.

# RESEARCH SPECIFICATIONS

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to understand how parents with experience of poverty or low income experience support - during pregnancy and in the first years of their child's life - for creating a positive 'home learning environment'.

The home learning environment is the combination of everything families do and the spaces children have access to that affect children's development and learning. This includes the opportunities your child has to play and interact with books, objects and everyday experiences to help make sense of their world. The most important feature is the interactions with people who provide love, security, encouragement and conversation and positive role models to help children thrive.<sup>1</sup>

A good home learning environment provides a combination of interactions, activities and resources that creates a playful, language rich environment. It relates to the quality of parent-child interaction, play, play resources, home and community environment, and activities children participate in within the home and their communities, including outdoor play, visiting museums or libraries, and other activities aimed at babies. It also includes parental confidence and knowledge about how to support early child development, as well as ensuring families have their essential and basic material needs met.

We want to understand parents/carers in Scotland views and experiences on what support for creating a positive home learning environment was helpful, what could be improved, what is missing, and what barriers parents may experience. We want to better understand the ways in which the support and information received impacts on parenting behaviours, skills, and confidence.

Previous commissioned research conducted by EdComs in 2019 for Save the Children examined similar issues in one local authority area and explored the views of parents and professionals. It established that both the emotional and physical impact of living in poverty can restrict the opportunities children have to enhance their early learning and development. It also identified that access to support for parents is not consistent and often passive, with both parents and practitioners not always aware of existing initiatives or an understanding of their relevance and practical application. We are now keen to understand what has changed post pandemic, and across Scotland, to understand more deeply the experiences of the earliest support for families from pregnancy to when their child turns three, with particular emphasis on the first year of life.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/learning-at-home/home-learning-environment/>

## POLICY CONTEXT

The Scottish Government is committed to both closing the poverty-related 'attainment gap' and reducing child poverty. A number of interventions have been implemented that may support the home learning environment of children, especially in the first six years of their lives. There have been numerous evaluations about progress and impact of individual interventions. However, there is a lack of evidence about how to best deliver support and information to families experiencing poverty, and the extent to which the combination of support is joined-up and adds up a holistic package of support.

The following support provided by the Scottish Government is aimed at, or could have a positive impact on supporting parents to create positive home learning environments (this list is illustrative rather than exhaustive):

1. Health Visiting
2. Baby Box
3. Financial support through Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grants and Best Start Foods
4. Book Gifting
5. Bookbug/Bookbug in the home, Play Read Talk Bus
6. Information (online and booklets/leaflets): Parent Club, Off to a Good Start, Ready Steady Baby, play@home, Play Read Talk, Bookbug online resources
7. Peer support (community based, such as Home-Start, formal or informal parent-baby/toddler groups)
8. Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

There are different methods of providing support. Existing research points to role-modelling and peer support as being more successful in supporting parents to create positive home learning environments. **We want to better understand what methods work best for parents living on lower incomes:**

- written information: e.g. leaflets, booklets;
- online information: e.g. parent club;
- peer support (parent support groups, volunteer peer supporters);
- modelling of adult-child interactions by professionals (e.g. how to share books, how to engage in serve-and-return interactions, how to use items from the baby box, how to play with baby etc, this may be in combination with written information).

Scottish Government has identified 6 family characteristics that makes families more likely to experience poverty. These are:

- single parent families
- families with a disability
- families with a child under one
- families with three or more children
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic families
- families where the mother is under 25

**We are keen for the research to identify if there are differences in experiences due to family characteristics and if different approaches may work better for specific groups. We also want to explore if there are “micro-cultures” – parenting values, attitudes and behaviours which are influenced by immediate peer groups which may impact on how support/information is experienced.**

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research will seek to answer the following overarching research questions.

- 1. What do parents living on lower incomes in Scotland need and consider to be the best way to support them to create positive home learning environments in early childhood (pre-birth to age three)?**
- 2. To what extent is the combination of existing Scottish Government initiatives and policies supporting parents living on lower incomes in Scotland to create positive home learning environments in early childhood (pre-birth to age three)?**

**We are particularly interested in understanding:**

- the experiences of support and information received which aim to support a positive, responsive, and nurturing home learning environment and how this impacted on parents' behaviours (activities and interaction with baby), choices, skills and confidence;
- what good practice looks like and what has or has not worked well for parents, what barriers and potential gaps exist, and improvements that could be made to, support that is provided, both in what and how this support is provided;
- how parents perceive support and how they understand the impact it is meant to have on their child's early development and learning;
- how parents understand and value their role in supporting their child's early learning and development and what this understanding has been influenced by;
- the changes to how parents are being provided with support and information that they would find most helpful to have a positive impact on the home learning environment

The findings will be used to inform our key messages and policy calls to Scottish Government and opposition parties to influence national policy,

The research findings may also contribute to our work to support practice development and developing new projects that support this.

## **PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH**

We value participatory approaches in all we do. This means that we deeply value knowledge by experience, give participants the opportunity to feedback on any outputs, as well as aiming to empower participants to voice their own ideas and develop their own solution. We have

avenues of further involvement with our work on ending child poverty and making sure every baby and child has equal opportunities to play and learn.

We welcome proposals that

- identify how parents would be meaningfully involved in the research and which appropriate methodologies will be used. It is important that families are able to make sense of the research findings;
- demonstrate experience of participatory research and working with families from different backgrounds;
- outline an approach to recruiting parents for this research. We would be happy to explore how we can help support and facilitate this but proposals shouldn't rely on recruiting parents through Save the Children's work;
- include an allowance for appropriate remuneration of parents who participate in this research and share their expertise by experience by voucher;
- consider how participants in this research could be involved at key stages of the project in a meaningful way, including giving them advance view of the report in an accessible way and with an opportunity to feedback, and review of key outputs that involve their specific circumstances, e.g. anonymised case stories or creative outputs. There could also be opportunities for involvement throughout the research project duration and in Save the Children's work beyond if this is of interest to participants.

**The proposal should outline ethical considerations and the proposer's approach to ethics.**

Save the Children aims to have the highest standards in safe and ethical qualitative research practices. Our Ethics Committee will support the selection process. We Would share key documents with the Committee at key stages during the research. This would include consideration of risk and data handling and would require accessible participant information sheet, consent form and the completion of our research ethics application form.

## **INDICATIVE TIMETABLE**

We would hope to work towards project completion and launch of the final report in September 2023. We invite proposals to contain a detailed timetable that works towards this deadline.

## **SCUK NOT BOUND**

The Invitation to Tender does not constitute an offer and Save the Children Scotland does not bind itself to accept the lowest price, or any, proposal. Save the Children reserves the right to accept a proposal in part, rather than in full.

## CONTRACT

A contract agreement will be drawn up by Save the Children with the successful provider. Copyright and ownership of outputs will be agreed as part of this process but please set out your views on this in your proposal.

## OUTPUTS

We would like the provider to produce outputs which will make the findings of the research accessible to a number of audiences, including national policy makers, including Scottish Government and politicians, and other stakeholders who support families, and parents.

The outputs for this research should include, but are not limited to:

- a final report of approximately 40-50 pages with an executive summary, including key findings. This should be written in a clear, accessible and engaging tone and meet all of the research objectives. We intend to publish and disseminate the final report and use the findings to influence policy and practice;
- the transcripts of interviews/focus groups with families;
- at least 3 anonymised short case studies to be included in the publication which illustrate the views and lived experiences of families;
- creative presentations/visualisations of key findings which may aid accessibility and be used on social media platforms, presentations or similar would be welcome additional and optional outputs. This could include social media assets, infographics, etc.

We will publish and disseminate the final report and use the findings to develop Save the Children's policy recommendations with a view to influencing policy and practice.

Save the Children would like to be able to use the final report, other outputs, and anonymised quotes from transcripts for their own internal and external outputs.

## NOTES OF INTEREST

We invite interested parties to share a note of interest via email by 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023 to [s.keir@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:s.keir@savethechildren.org.uk).

We also ask interested parties to get in touch with any questions by this date and we will aim to respond to all queries by 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

# YOUR PROPOSAL TO US

## GENERAL COMPANY INFORMATION:

Please provide the following information

1.1	Name of your organisation:	
1.2	Address: Post Code:	
1.3	Telephone number:	
1.4	E-mail address:	
1.6	Company/ Charity Registration number (if applicable): Company D&B number (if applicable):	
1.7	VAT Registration number:	
1.8	Is your organisation: (Please tick one)	i) a public limited company?
		ii) a limited company?
		iii) a partnership
		iv) a sole trader
		v) other (please specify)
1.9	Name of (ultimate) parent company (if this applies):	
1.10	Companies House Registration number of parent company (if this applies):	

Please declare any contracts or connections with companies at potential conflict of interest with Save the Children.



## PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Please set out your proposed methodology, setting out the work you propose to undertake, and showing how you will meet the requirements in the tender, and the added value your proposed approaches will bring.

### Additional requirements

Please also include:

- A risk register with clear mitigation measures
- Details of your approach to ethical and safeguarding matters, including how to obtain informed consent, how you support participation and how you will manage the risk of over-consultation
- Details of your approach to Health and Safety and GDPR and your insurance cover

Bids should be no more than 15 pages in length, not including examples of work.

Please include in your proposal how you would propose to work with Save the Children throughout the project.

## EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

Please provide three examples of recent work which demonstrate your expertise and track record. Where possible please provide example reports. Please confirm the team who will be working on the project, their roles and demonstrate their suitability.

We are open to providers submitting a joint proposal.

## COST PROPOSAL

The price and rates quoted shall be the fully inclusive value of the service, with VAT itemised separately if due. Please provide your proposed costs in the table below.

The indicative value of this tender is up to £35, 000. There may some flexibility depending on the nature of the proposal and we would invite providers to reach out to discuss.

Work stage / activity	Daily* rate	Proposed number of hours/days	Total cost GBP
TOTAL staff costs (GBP)			

Other costs (please itemise – e.g. incentives, travel expenses, transcription costs)	
TOTAL other costs (GBP)	
TOTAL COSTS (GBP)	
VAT	

\* *minimum of 7.5 hours per day.*

If there are any further costs or expenses that you propose charging such as travel expenses, please detail these. Save the Children will not be liable for any additional costs that are not set out in the proposal. Please also indicate whether your services would be subject to VAT and if so include VAT in the table above.

### ***Assumptions***

Please set out any assumptions you have made in determining your proposed costs.

### ***Every £ Counts for Children***

SCUK's financial vision is that every £ counts for children. We are committed to reducing the charity's operating costs so that maximum resource can be spent on programmes which directly benefit children.

Should you be willing to provide any element of the products or services on a pro bono basis, offer a cost reduction, service enhancement or any other charitable support to the organisation, please set this out in your proposal.

### ***Scoring***

Your bid will be scored against the scoring criteria as outlined below. Each criteria will be given a rating out of 5 (5 being excellent) and subsequently multiplied with the weighting percentage.

Criteria	Weighting
Knowledge and experience that indicates the ability to meet the research requirements of the specifications as set out by Save the Children	30%
Proposed methodology and ability to implement a creative and comprehensive approach to the research that includes participatory activities for engaging with parents, careful consideration of ethics, informed consent, and assessment of risks	30%
Ability to meet the timescales set out by Save the Children, including a clear and realistic delivery plan	10%
Ability to manage multiple relationships with stakeholders involved in the research to ensure a positive experience for everyone involved	10%

Ability to demonstrate added value	10%
Ability to demonstrate value for money, acknowledging that Save the Children is a charity. We have a draft budget of £35, 000 for this research.	10%

## TIMEFRAME

The proposed timeframe for completion of the report is September/October 2023. We have some flexibility with regards to this timeframe and invite proposers to reach out to us to discuss.

Activity	Date
Tender issued	w/c 06/02/2023
Notes of interest and answers to questions by prospective bidders received	w/c 20/02/2023
Answers sent out to prospective bidders	w/c 27/02/2023
Submission of tenders	17/03/2023
Assessment completed	24/03/2023
Interviews with shortlisted bidders	w/c 27/03/2023
Bidders notified of outcome and successful bidder appointed	6/4/2023
Inception meeting	tbc
Work starts	tbc
Update meetings	tbc (monthly)
Interim report	31 July 2023
Final report	September/October 2023

### ***Further information***

For any questions regarding this tender and to submit your proposal, please contact Steffi Keir, Policy and Practice Impact Adviser, Save the Children on [s.keir@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:s.keir@savethechildren.org.uk).

**Deadline for submission: 17 March 2023**