

BUILDING BLOCKS MARGATE

Report for families and partners



From April 2021 to March 2022, Save the Children UK were funded by the LEGO Group to deliver our Building Blocks research programme in Margate in partnership with the social enterprise and app, EasyPeasy.

Building Blocks aims to support the home learning environments of families with young children experiencing the challenges of poverty. In Margate, we worked with a network of professional services and referral partners to distribute grants of essential household goods or vouchers to 74 families. Alongside the grants, we provided our Early Learning Packs (sets of age-appropriate books and toys) and promoted access to the ideas, advice and inspiration available through the EasyPeasy app. Through this collaboration, we hoped to provide families with a digital resource which could complement the grant and pack and help families use these resources to support their child's development. We spoke with local families and partners through focus groups and surveys to find out:

1. If the grant element of Building Blocks and the Early Learning Packs played any role in enabling parents/carers to engage in supporting their children's speech, language and communication skills
2. What families identify as most important in terms of the content of resources and messaging that support positive interactions with their children, and how they like to receive this information
3. Whether a digital resource, like an app, could be a beneficial addition to our offer to support the home learning environment.

Here's what you told us

About the grant and Early Learning Packs

The grant element of Building Blocks helped families fulfil essential daily living needs, providing them with a better environment to support learning, including:

- household appliances, including a washing machine and an oven
- furniture, including a child's bed

- items for children, including winter clothes and a buggy
- food

The Early Learning Packs enabled families to support a range of activities which supported their child's learning and development. The items which families said their children liked the most included:

- The books, especially nursery rhymes book
- The CD
- Toys, especially the puppet figures, teddy bears and bath toys

Families felt the packs supported their children's early learning because:

- Their children enjoyed and engaged with the themes of the packs (for example, animals or superheroes)
- The characters (such as puppets and soft toys) enabled storytelling and sparked imaginative and role-play-based activities
- Packs which included counting activities, different colours, blocks and shapes were thought to support early numeracy
- Packs which enabled using sounds, naming and labelling of animals, colours etc. were all thought to support engagement and help children to learn new vocabulary
- The storybooks were interactive and contained repetitions and songs to support early literacy and could be adapted and explored in different ways.

Families thought that the Early Learning Packs could be further improved to support development through:

- Clearer and/or physical instructions (such as flashcards) on how to use the pack interactively
- More visual demonstrations, such as links to related online videos
- More support on how to adapt the content of the packs such as to create new and different games and to tailor them to different aged children.

"[The most useful item was] daughter's bed as this has helped her stop getting poorly and get a better night's sleep."

"Vouchers [were the most useful] so I could purchase a new oven. Now I can cook for my children instead of using microwave foods."

About resources and messaging to support learning at home

Some of the key information families identified as useful in supporting them with positive interactions with their children included:

- How to create activities which are low-cost
- How to tailor activities to children of different ages or with different needs
- Knowing which types of toys are best to support learning
- Knowing how best to support their children if they were having speech and language difficulties, and especially how play could be used to support this.

“Cheap accessible resources to make fun activities [would support the families to learn at home]”

Referral partner/early years practitioner, survey response

Parents/carers received ideas on how to support play from a range of sources including:

- From professionals, such as childminders and family support workers
- From their own childhood experiences / what their parents did with them
- From other parents and friends
- Through online sources

About using digital resources with the offer

Some families in the focus groups who had used the EasyPeasy app told us they found it easy to use and that it helped them find activities they could do with their children. They particularly appreciated that they could filter for different activities and age groups.

“I do go on EasyPeasy a lot, and I'll go on...the creative section.”

Family who received an Early Learning Pack, focus group participant

We invited the practitioners responsible for distributing the Building Blocks grants to information sessions which included guidance on how to support families using the EasyPeasy app, however not all practitioners attended. From the families we heard from who had received the Building Blocks grant and Early Learning Packs, none said that they were using a parenting app. Two families said that they were using other support, including friends and council early years support workers. When asked about why they didn't use parenting apps, families mainly told us this was because they didn't know of any. A few

said that they were not using them as they didn't want their child using their phone. This suggests that they believed the apps were providing online games that their children would use directly on their phone. These families may have been more likely to use the EasyPeasy app if practitioners had made them aware of it and explained that it provides parenting advice and tips.

“I need my phone, she would call people or mess it up!”

Family who received Building Blocks support, survey response

The practitioners who completed the survey were, overall, not using the EasyPeasy app with families. Most told us they were unaware of the app (likely the result of not attending an information session), while others were not using it as they said they were unable to demonstrate it to families because their work phones did not allow them to download apps.

“Because we have not got the ability to share this with families due to having older style phones where apps are not provided.”

Referral partner/early years practitioner, survey response

One of the practitioners surveyed who was using the app and showing it to families told us that families liked it.

“Families found it bright, colourful and easy to understand.”

Referral partner/early years practitioner, survey response

What we will do next



We will continue to work in partnership with the Margate community. We will concentrate our support and efforts on the early years' issues local families and professionals tell us are important to them, that are based in evidence and can be sustained.

The findings from this research will inform the support we provide to families directly in their homes. It will strengthen the tools and messages we use to enable fun, accessible and effective home learning environments.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to tell us their views.



For more information on Save the Children's work in the UK, visit www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/uk-work.