**Case Study - Vale of Glamorgan Council - Engaging foster carers with education**

**Context**

In 2015, the LACE team in the Vale of Glamorgan delivered a successful education forum to engage carers with the education of the looked after children in their care. The rationale behind the forum was to address the underachievement of looked after children. To build on the success of the education forum, the LACE team decided to provide more specific training for carers in 2017. The focus was improving reading.

**Summary of the Reading Programme**

The educational attainment of the children was gathered from their Personal Education Plans (PEPs). The PEPs informed the planning of the programme. The activities the carers had to do with the children were matched to the reading needs of their child. The reading activities on the course were designed to incorporate the books from the ‘Letter Box’ scheme as well as school based reading schemes.

The LACE team designed a scheme of work, course book, and work book for carers to complete as a formative a summative assessment of their learning. The overall aim of the programme was to up-skill carers to work more effectively with schools, especially in terms of reading skills. The aims of the programme were as follows:

1. deliver a correct and consistent approach to supporting a child with reading;
2. promote an enjoyment of reading;
3. ensure that support from home is consistent with how reading is taught in schools; and
4. enable carers to understand how the child can meet the objectives and achieve the targets on their PEP.

**Outcomes**

The children benefitted from their carers attending the training. The evidence from the evaluations reported that the aims and objectives of the programme were exceeded. This was because:

* children in their care made progress in reading and enjoyed reading;
* carers are confident to discuss the child’s level of reading with the teacher so that they can guide the child towards appropriate books;
* carers felt more confident in using reading strategies which make reading fun;
* some carers had volunteered to support reading in the child’s school;
* carers understand how reading is taught in schools;
* carers understand how they can work in partnership with schools to meet the objectives and targets on the PEP; and
* carers are more confident to meet with the designated teacher to actively contribute to the child’s PEP.

**Progression and Opportunities**

Before the training, the carers had a limited understanding of how to help children improve their reading. By the end of the course, the carers had a better understanding of how to identify the best strategies to support and develop their child’s reading skills.

The course identified future learning opportunities for the carers. They started to gain a better understanding of how reading skills can develop numeracy and other literacy skills, including writing. The next step is to deliver a programme looking at reading skills for key stages 3 and 4. This will help carers to support the young people in their care studying the GCSE curriculum.

**The following are quotes from carers who attended the course:**

“He really enjoys practicing his phonics with me now, especially as I asked him to teach me the actions.”

“We had so much fun with the phonic resource … the kids ask to play it all the time and playing the games with them helps me to see where they need extra support with blending.”

“I loved the session on skimming, scanning and detailed reading…it made such sense and I now know that this is where he needs the support.”

“I asked the older child to read to the younger child to help me on this course. This means that I can discreetly listen to her reading aloud. She loves reading to the younger child now, which is all good practice for her… so they both benefit from this”

“We loved the picture book and we each took a character to read…we had so much discussion about the book and the characters…There were so many possibilities for learning and you get to use so many different reading skills…we love it!”

“He was actually giggling to himself reading this book…which means he is developing his comprehension…this is huge for him.”

“I have placed the book shelf on the landing outside their rooms and they actually take a book to bed…even the older child in placement is borrowing the books”

“I always ask questions and talk about the book to develop her comprehension. Her reading has improved in school… she loves taking this book to school as it is age appropriate but at a level she can read independently.”

“Regular reading and playing a game with the high frequency words has really helped his confidence with reading…he loves to use the dice and track game for the high frequency words and he gets to put stickers on the words he can read.”