

Bolton Literacy Trust

This is what we do...

Bolton Literacy Trust brings the chance to be 'A Winner in Life!' to hundreds of people each year who never thought that they could be. With poor literacy you are more likely to be in a low skilled job or unemployed, suffer ill health and have reduced life chances. Their children are less likely to do well in primary school and that disparity grows as they move into secondary school. There are likely to be no books in the home, but a big TV.

Here are some of the things we do and some of the stories of people we have influenced to enable them to become **'A Winner in Life'**.

We work in a bright green portacabin on an estate, but we also go out and about in Bolton to run sessions which range from learning to use computers to reading groups and arts and crafts.

The people we support have had poor experience of education themselves and feel they lack the skills to help their children learn; they are not likely to go to a school or college course because they lack the confidence and are very conscious of their inability to read well.



1 • Storysacks and Treasure Chests

Storysacks and Treasure Chests can bring a book to life for a child. A typical Storysack such as 'The Hungry Caterpillar' contains the storybook, a non fiction book on nature, an audio tape or CD of the story or nursery rhymes/songs, the associated soft toys such as caterpillar and butterfly, a jigsaw, card game or other game and an activity sheet for the parents/carer which we design giving ideas on how to tell the story, play the game and do some follow up activity such as going on nature walk or bug hunt. Storysacks can be made for children from toddlers to 8 years old with the appropriate level of reading books, some topic - e.g. based on dinosaurs, fantasy, machines or princesses. For children who are looked after in care we make Storysacks based on their interests when we hear from the carer what the child likes and will also make them 'About Me' Treasure Chests as a way of maintaining and fostering the identity of a child. Some looked after children have no photos of themselves, for example and no books. For children with special needs we can make special multi sensory bags.

We aim to create our own library of 100 colourful and creative Storysacks that we can use in our projects, use again and again in storytelling and loan out to parents but we will donate the Storysack or Treasure Chests to any looked after child. We will also use recycled books and materials from charity shops so we can encourage parents to make their own.

Janey is in care in Bolton. Her carer said "She just loves pink things so they made her a bright pink sparkly princess bag jam packed with things to spark her imagination. She will never let it out of her sight at home and it has got her into reading."



Another said:

"Tom has started to read and love books. He has a Thomas the Tank Engine Storysack and nags me to go and hear another story. They helped me put together a flatpack bookcase and he has his own shelf where he puts his Storysack. I have made him a book myself on the course and they helped me laminate it so it will last. He loves it because I made it for him and it is the only book in the world I will write!"



2 • Family Learning

Family Learning is all about having fun with your own children - and learning at the same time! Sessions are based around a fun learning activity that you can then use with your child at home such as making activity books, matching and sorting activities, letter, number, colour and shape recognition. For parents with young children we run **Little Learners** which explores early literacy skills including rhymes, drawing, using puppets, music and storytelling.

Tracy's story

"Before starting the Share family learning course with Bolton Literacy Trust I was not very confident and would only join the group with a friend because it was small but the tutor was so calm and friendly, everyone was welcoming and relaxed. I had left school as a machinist and hadn't had much education. 'Share' gave me the chance to meet other mums and learn about activities to do at home, it introduced me and my daughter to new and exciting ways to learn and more importantly spending fun, quality time together.

When I finished the course I got a certificate. I felt fantastic that I had achieved something and it gave me the confidence to go to college and do childcare and other courses relating to children. I would never have thought about doing this had it not been for Bolton Literacy Trust and Share. I have never looked back. I applied to work at a nursery and became a teaching assistant. I feel I have benefited in so many ways. I feel parents need to know the long lasting benefits of attending Share as well as helping to support their children."



A Little Learners group in action

Beth's story

Beth went to hear Storysacks being used for storytelling and it gave her lots of ideas for activities to do with her children and because she enjoyed what she had done, she felt confident to move to other BLT courses. Beth has passed her love and appreciation of books on to her children - they all adore reading and reading is an important part of all their lives.

"It made me realize the importance of spending time and doing activities with my children and having fun with them and understand the importance of early reading - that it is never too early to share books with your child."

It also helped her overcome feelings of isolation in being at home with young children and enabled her to mix with other parents/adults who she otherwise may not have done and to make new friendships.

"I read to my younger children and reading has become a very important part of our lives. I was given a life changing opportunity."

Parents who were very reluctant to engage and lacking in confidence when we started and not really understanding or recognising the importance of sharing stories or singing nursery rhymes, now really look forward to the singing and storytelling,



A Little Learners group in action
Parents at Clarendon School planting seeds
as part of a 'Share Healthy Families' course.

even suggesting ideas themselves for ideas of activities linked to the letters of the alphabet...

The children too look forward to singing and participate enthusiastically. Most have also learnt to sit quietly and listen to the story, rather than running around etc.



Parents at a Share 'helping your child learn' class



Families from Johnson Fold enjoyed a family learning visit to Smithills Farm

3 • Community Classes

The remarkable knitting group sums up our approach to learning. 'Nightingale Knitters' started with six ladies - six complete strangers with four nationalities between them. Five are widows, one swears that the group literally 'saved her life' as she was very depressed at home but she has gone on to do both IT and cookery classes. Together they knitted 1000 woolly hats for Save the Children's 'Knit One Save One' campaign to help new babies in Third World countries, and are set to make soft toys for the storybook characters in our Storysacks.

These are six ladies for whom the activities and friendship have led to renewed engagement in their communities, and a new role and meaning in life.

The group, led by volunteer Pauline, has now swelled to 14 and meets weekly in a community centre. Pauline word processes the patterns in a larger type face which is put into their individual file with a digital photo of the finished article or particular stitches so they are building up a profile of skills.

One member comes from a nursing home and has to be accompanied. Joy is so keen to come that she had physiotherapy twice a week until she could manage to walk the 5 steps necessary to get into the centre and onto the chairlift. She had been bedridden for 6 months.

The lady now runs a film club at the nursing home and advertises it in reception. The activities and friendship have led to a new understanding of their respective religions and cultures. They enjoyed the Learning Revolution lunch at a gardening centre at Christmas.

Another lady has started coming to an IT class. Her son moved to Ireland and she was spending £100 on phone calls to his mobile. He had told her about Skype and that she could order her shopping online now that he wasn't there to help her with the groceries. Although she hasn't transport and is disabled on crutches she has managed to get to our family learning centre, started coming to IT and is very happy in the friendly class learning new skills that will make her life easier.

Residents of Mill View have had a **weekly book group**. We started out reading aloud short stories, poems and reminiscences. 8 or 9 attend regularly. The activities organiser at the home has been observing their attention and says they are completely absorbed and all manage to make a contribution.

She has been very pleasantly surprised that some have even talked about bringing a favourite book or poem along and have remembered it next week and were able to read it out aloud, which was very moving. One carer got so engrossed in the 'who dunit' she had to come back.



It's never too old to take new opportunities. Barbara is over 80. She went along to the ICT class because she wanted to know more about computers. Through this, she heard that the Trust was starting a writing group, so she went along to that too. And before she knew what was happening, a woman in the group said she was going to do a University degree and would Barbara like to come along. The Literacy Trust encouraged her, and in October 2008 she started a BA (Hons) in Creative Writing at the University of Bolton.

Barbara wants to share her story so that other people know what they might achieve. She thinks that a lot of people sit at home because they are worried they are too old to do something new, or that they might get laughed at. Everyone needs to know that doing something different could be a source of so much pleasure.

Barbara says...

"It's unbelievable and fabulous. I'm mostly with young ones, and at first they didn't know how to treat me. But then a couple of the girls said one day 'aren't you coming to have a cup of tea with us?', and things just took off and it's been fine. They don't go tip-toeing around me any more - I'm just one of them. It has given me a whole new look on life. It feels as though I'm starting again."

4 • Parenting

“I enjoyed getting out and not feeling alone”

“It was good knowing other parents are in the same boat as myself”

“I can’t tell you how much I have enjoyed these sessions”

The parents who are referred to are on a Positive Parenting Programme. They are usually struggling to cope with their child’s behaviour.

Prior to the parenting programme, many parents have very high levels of depression, anxiety and stress. Other factors have an impact of the behaviour of children and many of the parents attending have or have had drug and alcohol problems, some are single parents and many are unemployed. It is proven that family risk factors such as poor parenting, family conflict and marriage breakdown strongly influence children’s development. Common behaviours displayed by children include physical violence and threatening behaviour to parents and property, truanting from school, bad language, a general lack of self control and respect for others.

For those parents who follow the full 8 weeks of Positive Parenting Programme, the results can be dramatic – their relationships with their children are often greatly improved

“I feel I’ve got my daughter back”.

Confidence and self esteem are greatly improved, two parents were successful in getting a job, another gained enough confidence to return to her doctor to seek advice on a long term health issue. Above all, parents feel empowered to assert themselves, to make new family rules and, above all, to stick to them. Change can also been seen in many of the parents’ appearance. Two parents in particular, were very withdrawn and quiet at the beginning of one course and had made very little effort with their appearance. By the final week, they had been to the hairdresser, bought new clothes and were confident to speak proudly in front of other group members about how much better they felt about themselves and their relationship with their children.

Above all, most parents report that their home is now a much happier and relaxed place in which to live and they are able to communicate with their children, which previously, had become almost impossible. Many group members have become friends as a result of attending and remain in contact after the sessions have ended, which has provided them with a valuable support network.



5 • Digital Inclusion

Computers are a big part of what we do and we have developed and delivered a number of IT-based projects to get people online and reduce the digital divide that exists in many wards of our town. We consider that BLT has had a major impact on digital inclusion and has contributed markedly to awareness-raising in this field and been effective in contributing to skills & learning.

Whilst tackling social and digital inclusion, we have helped people gain a host of ICT-qualifications – from Equal-Skills to ECDL. More importantly in some cases, we have **given people computer-confidence** using a range of products such as 'First Time Online', Webwise, MyGuide, dyslexia-friendly software and alternative input devices.

We have facilitated outreach sessions at local venues to engage the most people feasible/limit barriers to participation as much as possible. We now work in partnership with **UKOnline Centres** which have funded much of our recent work towards digital inclusion. Using MyGuide courses, we have worked with a range of 'hard to reach' groups including parents in schools, elderly people in sheltered accommodation, people living in areas of deprivation and attending UCAN centres, women in local refuges, single-parents, males with low skills, people with mental health problems, ethnic minorities, victims of abuse, asylum-seekers and refugees and teenage parents. We have seen well over 150 people a year benefit from getting online and learning about the many benefits of the internet.

A 'Learning Revolution' project enabled us to use new broadcasting technologies, learn more about social networking and video-sharing and engage a whole new generation of learner - eager to keep up with modern technological life. We set up digital and acoustic based music workshops in which participants learnt how to use DJ equipment, mix CDs, create a website to showcase music or record their poetry over a backing track. We set up a new website www.learningrevolution4bolton.co.uk on which we have a weekly blog which records our activities.

A number of our learners progress to become volunteers and ICT champions - helping others to take those first important steps on a digital journey. Others have pursued further local courses, gone on to local FE/HE institutions as well as into employment.



Young people at a music technology class with RhythmfX

6 • Helping the Unemployed

Sean is an unemployed male urgently seeking employment after being made redundant in 2009. He first came to the sessions we were offering having heard about them from his friend. He has welcomed with open arms being able to come to a centre close to his house as he used to have to travel to the Jobcentre to do any computer related activity. He welcomes the free internet access we offer as he would otherwise be a digitally excluded member of this community.

Sean has been a regular attendee at IT drop-ins and courses. He has also been a regular user of our 'anytime PC' which he is now able to use independently.

He has gone from never having used a computer/mouse to now being able to do so with confidence to improve his CV, look online for job vacancies and send and receive documents via email.

He has progressed from beginner to improver level and, along with the skills noted above has gained confidence, typing skills and, in his own words

“...a reason to get out of the house to get out of this depression.”

He continues to attend classes, his spirits much higher than they were at the start of his learning journey, his skills improved and his employability better.

“I think everyone should make use of the free facilities at centres such as this in Great Lever at the Literacy Trust. You can do all sorts of free activities there and they're on your doorstep, it's great. The people are so kind and help me. I will get a job in the end and they know that.”

Reemer Bailey, Officer from Bolton at Home, observed:

“I saw one person come in and watched as staff not only assisted him with his job search efforts but also with his skills in CV building and one step further, people talked with him about remaining positive and kept his morale up.”



7 • Volunteers

Business volunteer Paul from BT said:

“It was inspiring to see how you and the team supported and encouraged your ‘customers’. Under the guise of IT and literacy support, some of the people I saw were truly gaining life skills - I could see a real difference being made to their lives.”

Paul offered to continue researching the tools and resources available for a new whiteboard, creating an initial document which provides “hints and tips” and useful resources.

Volunteer Fehmida has two children at university and a daughter in primary school. She saw the advert for volunteers required for the Learning Revolution project and came along for training. She speaks community languages and very quickly picked up on how she could support the vulnerable women that come into the centre. One such woman had only come in the centre because her daughter had told her to. Fehmida realised that she was isolated and depressed and went to visit her at home to encourage her to join a cookery or arts and crafts class.

She supports in the IT and ESOL classes in which there are adults from as many as 25 countries. She saw that some needed more help than class time and individual help and started what has become a thriving reading group meeting weekly.

She understands that many are struggling with family problems and being able to communicate better in English helps them to become more independent and to seek sources of help such as making an appointment at their child’s school, legal or benefits or health advice.



We have had to look for a volunteer to support her as a volunteer running it as there are so many in the group now.

Fehmida says:

“It is brilliant. When my children ring from university and ask how I am, I have lots of news to tell them about my volunteering instead of just the housework. I love putting something back into my community and helping people with the language barrier.”

One of the women helped by the reading class is a mother of two young children. She was very unhappy that she could not help her children with any home work or simple reading.

She also found it frustrating that when her children brought any letters from school she always had to ask other family members to read them for her. Coming to the ESOL reading classes she is now able to read simple English and understand what she is reading.

She feels she has gained a lot of confidence now that she knows how to read simple words and make sentences. She feels she is able to fill in forms, learn how to drive a car because she will be able to read the signs but, **most of all, help her children with their school work.**

Coming to the ESOL classes has encouraged her to try new classes e.g. Computers for beginners.