

# **Evaluation of the Bring Your Baby Project**

**October 2008**

**Dr Richard Woolfson  
Lyndsay Dick  
(Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service)**



**Renfrewshire  
Council**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks to the Renfrewshire Arts and Museums Department for their cooperation with this study. Thanks also to the coordinators, staff members and parents/carers for their cooperation in interviews and assistance with organisation.

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE NUMBER</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SMMARY</b>	1
<b>PART 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	2
(a) Background	2
(b) Joint Planning	3
(c) Evaluation	3
(d) Ethical Approval	4
<b>PART 2: METHOD</b>	5
(a) Semi-Structured Interview	5
(b) Stakeholder Interviews	5
<b>PART 3: RESULTS</b>	6
(a) Parents/Carers Perceptions	6
(b) Staff Perceptions	9
(c) Coordinator Perceptions	
<b>PART 4: DISCUSSION</b>	11
(a) Overview	11
(b) Limitations	11
(c) Project Strengths	11
(d) Future Challenges	12
(e) Suggested Improvements	12
<b>PART 5: RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	13
<b>REFERENCES</b>	14

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Bring Your Baby (BYB) project was designed as an early intervention tool, using culture to re-engage disenfranchised families into the community. Pre-school children and their parents/carers, living in areas of multiple deprivation, were invited to take part in a variety of workshops and events. The BYB workshops took place in local authority libraries, and were provided weekly on a drop-in basis. Additional monthly events were available to all members of the BYB groups, and included trips to the theatre and to pantomimes.

Perceptions of the project were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with the parents/carers who had attended BYB events, with the project coordinators and with project staff. The results demonstrate that the BYB project has achieved its aim of re-engaging disenfranchised families into the community. Stakeholders report that the project has had a positive impact on many aspects of their lives in relation to increased confidence, learning new skills and enhancing family relationships.

Based on these findings, a number of recommendations for developing the effectiveness and sustainability of the BYB project are offered.

## **PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

The Arts and Museum department of Renfrewshire Council designed a project in alignment with the Pathfinder Projects criteria to examine Cultural Entitlement and Cultural Planning in the community. Pathfinder projects aim to engage under-represented groups in the community, through the use of culture. Renfrewshire Council's 'Bring Your Baby' (BYB) project was developed with the specific aim of re-engaging disenfranchised pre-school children and their parents/carers in the community. By stimulating an interest in the culture of their community and of issues surrounding whole community processes, it was hoped that families would feel more engaged with community life and feel better equipped to take advantage of all that they are entitled to within their areas.

Research suggests that it is important to encourage community involvement not only to allow parents/carers to become more integrated in their community but also in enhancing children's development and quality of life (Batorowicz, McDougall and Shepherd, 2006). For this reason it has been considered important to attract people into community facilities, such as museums (Nyangila, 2006) or libraries (Conder 2002). It is thought that bringing individuals together in these community meeting places can enhance integration (Conder 2002). The importance of these community facilities is reflected in Scottish Government funding for such provisions, for example, £16 million capital funding for refurbishment of Scottish museums was released in January 2007. However, despite the suggested role that community facilities play in enhancing community integration, there appears to be limited research investigating this relationship directly.

The BYB workshops take place in community libraries throughout three council areas. The three councils involved are East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. The areas targeted within each council were chosen for their high levels of multiple deprivation. Initially a steering group, consisting of three coordinators from the three council areas, was set up to plan and oversee the project. Families within these areas were targeted as they typically have low rates of engagement with cultural activity, and are poorly represented in community planning processes. There could be numerous reasons for this, but in many instances public agencies experience difficulty in establishing meaningful and open communication with these vulnerable groups. As well as this, families living in areas of high deprivation are most at risk of experiencing social and financial problems, which further remove them from community planning processes.

The project provided opportunities for families to become involved in a range of cultural activities through the medium of crafts, story telling, drama and visual arts. During art sessions, families were encouraged to work and learn together, promoting family communication and confidence.

Parents were able to create their own programme of activities by selecting activities from a program available. Therefore, the detailed content of the project changed as the needs of the users, and potential users, changed. This ensured that each family could design an agenda which both suited their needs, and which they were

comfortable with. Activities on offer varied depending on individual demands. However, the program supports key initiatives such as literacy, healthy lifestyles, ICT and Bookstart, which were deemed to be most important in terms of reducing exclusion and encouraging active participation in the community; for example, literacy skills can be key to accessing support and advice. These provisions were available at weekly intervals in two areas of each of the three councils.

In addition to the weekly meetings, there was also a programme of external events which took place outwith the libraries. These included trips to the theatre, to pantomimes, and other community centres. These events took place monthly, and were open to all BYB members, providing opportunities for both parents/carers and children to interact with unfamiliar adults and children in familiar surroundings.

### **Joint Planning**

The project was managed by Renfrewshire Council's Arts and Museums Service in partnership with the Cultural Services of East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Council. The project was developed in consultation with a steering group comprising of officers from these three council areas. Joining-up the expertise of these authorities and taking a multi-agency approach within each authority aimed to facilitate engagement between individuals and public agencies, to promote learning, life skills, literacy and healthy lifestyles in non-threatening community environments.

### **Evaluation**

Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service was approached by the Department of Arts and Museum, Renfrewshire Council, to evaluate the BYB project. It was agreed that a formative analysis would be carried out to investigate how successfully the aims of the project have been met. The views of parents/carers, project staff and project coordinators were gathered to examine key stakeholders' perceptions of the programme. Future recommendations and improvements were also considered.

The evaluation has the following aims and objectives:

#### ***Aim:***

To elicit stakeholders' perceptions of the project and their suggestions for future improvements.

#### ***Objectives:***

- to elicit a sample of parents' views of the BYB project
- to elicit a sample of project workers' views of the BYB project
- to identify, from the views and suggestions made by these stakeholders, the ways in which the BYB project might be improved
- to provide guidance to enable the project to build on strengths and further develop a framework to deliver meaningful cultural activities.

## **Ethical Approval**

The methodology and procedures for the study were subject to approval and supervision by Renfrewshire Council's Educational Psychology Service Research Ethics Board, which requires all research projects to meet the standard set by, firstly, the British Psychological Society (2000) *Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants*, and secondly, the Joint Committee on Standards (1994) *Programme Evaluation Standards*. The Ethics Board has extensive experience of considering ethical issues in connection with research involving children, parents and other stakeholders, particularly regarding informed consent. In addition, all responses and data will remain anonymous and confidential, in line with the Data Protection Act.

## **PART 2: METHOD**

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather stakeholders' perceptions of the BYB project. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with an open framework which allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication. Unlike the questionnaire framework, where detailed questions are formulated ahead of time, semi-structured interviewing starts with more general questions or topics. Relevant topics are initially identified and the possible relationship between these topics and the issues become the basis for more specific questions.

Questions for the semi-structured interviews focussed on key elements of the project. Interviews were carried out with parents/carers, staff members and coordinators. Stakeholders provided signed consent forms prior to participation, and were informed that all information would be kept confidential and be anonymised. Interviews took place face to face and lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. The majority of parents/carers who took part in the workshops were either regular library users or had learned about BYB through advertisement in the library.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

- **Parents/carers.** A representative sample of parents was obtained from the three local authorities. The BYB program was held in two areas in each authority: Thornliebank and Barrhead in East Renfrewshire, Port Glasgow and South West in Inverclyde, and Ferguslie and Gallowhill in Renfrewshire. Parents were randomly selected from the list of those who attended ten or more of the weekly events, and at least one of the external cultural events. In total, 12 parents participated in semi-structured interviews, two from each of the individual areas. Interviews focussed on experiences and opinions of the BYB project for both their family and their children, with particular focus on community involvement.
- **BYB staff.** Interviews were conducted with the four staff members involved in running BYB events. One member of staff organised, and was present at all of the BYB areas, and an additional three staff members assisted on alternate days. Interviews focussed on individual input, experiences and views about the impact of the project.
- **Project coordinators.** Interviews were conducted with the three project coordinators, one from each of the councils involved. Renfrewshire Council was the lead authority, therefore had the most involvement in organising the project. Interviews focussed on implementation and experience of the project.

## **PART 3: RESULTS**

### **Parent/Carer Perceptions**

Detailed analysis was carried out on the parents/carers interviews, and the following key themes emerged.

#### ***Social Involvement***

Parents/carers stated that they have met new people through coming to the BYB events, and have kept in regular contact with them. The weekly contact with individuals in similar situations to themselves has provided an opportunity for them to share problems and socialise. Parents/carers also felt their children benefited socially from meeting others in their peer group and from meeting unfamiliar adults:

*"I have met a lot of nice friends through coming here."*

*"I have met the whole group and we share problems, it is very good for us too."*

*"He (my son) has got much more interaction through coming here."*

#### ***Relationships with Children***

Many parents/carers reported that attending the BYB sessions strengthened their relationships with their children. This was mainly by increasing their confidence which in turn encouraged them to interact more with their children. They also stated that the one-on-one time that they have enjoyed with their child at the BYB meetings has enhanced their relationship. Finally, many parents/carers noted that they have learnt from staff about the different ways to play and interact with their children which they have used in the home setting:

*"Yes I really feel it has, shows you how to interact with your child."*

*"Coming down has strengthened the relationship between us (parent and child)."*

*"Got a bit more one on one time with her."*

#### ***Family Impact***

Parents/carers reported that the BYB events have made a positive impact on their family. Aspects considered to have contributed to this include the external cultural trips which target whole families. Parents/carers also mentioned that the skills and confidence that they and their children have learnt through attending events are transferable to home life e.g. children are eager to show family members crafts they made, and songs they have learnt:

*"We send pictures to all the family; they admire how many things she is able to do."*

*"We were able to go as a family."*

*"They (family) have noticed that (child) has got better at talking and more confident."*

### **Cultural Influence**

Attending BYB events has helped develop cultural awareness through workshops focusing on cultural festivities, such as Chinese New Year and Diwali. Parents/carers also commented that by attending BYB events they have become more interested in cultural events, such as theatre and music, although many indicate that time hinders their ability to explore these avenues:

*"I have learned about cultural things that I was unaware of."*

*"I think it is great that (child) is learning part of her culture."*

*"(I find it hard to attend) due to time restraints, but I am more aware of things going on."*

### **Community Involvement**

Some parents/carers reported that meeting new people and being part of a community project has made them feel more involved in the community. Involvement has also made many of them interested in other community provisions, such as visiting the library and organised children's events. It was also mentioned that the project has contributed to the integration into society for some families, by introducing them to new people and enhancing their confidence:

*"Coming to the group has made me feel more involved in this community."*

*"This has helped us integrate and join the community."*

*"It has been an eye opener."*

### **Staff Involvement**

Project staff were consistently regarded as a very positive aspect of the project. Parents/carers felt that their sensitivity and professional skills contributed significantly to the success of the project. They also noted that project staffs' enthusiasm and relaxed manner helped engage the children, while at the same time providing support and advice to the adults:

*"The interaction of (member of staff) and (member of staff) is great."*

*"A lot of thought has been put into the events and whole programme."*

*"I think the (staff) that do it are really good, good with the children."*

### **Project Strengths**

One of the key strengths of the BYB project was the friendly and casual setting of group meetings, which allowed parents/carers to drop in when it was convenient for

them. Additional strengths mentioned include the ways in which events integrated learning and play. The social interaction which both parents and children are exposed to was also seen as a benefit, as well as the social skills that children have developed from the groups:

*"I can mingle with other mothers and interact with the children too."*

*"Now he's becoming much more involved and will sit and join in."*

*"They do not just play but are getting taught how to behave and be sensitive."*

### **Improvements**

Many parents/carers felt that the project runs well in its current format and are unable to identify potential improvements. However, some commented that an increase in space where the events are held would be useful; others mentioned they would like the weekly meetings to be longer:

*"It's pretty good the way it is, I wouldn't do anything to improve it."*

*"Only that there could maybe be a bigger space for us to work in."*

*"I suppose the time could be longer, you seem to get here then it is over too quickly."*

### **Additional Comments**

Parents/carers were aware that continued funding for the BYB project was not guaranteed. On account of the project's positive impact, many parents/carers expressed anxiety about it stopping. Some raised the possibility of participants paying a small fee to keep it running. Parents/carers regard the project as extremely beneficial for the children, themselves, and their families, and are very keen for it to continue next year:

*"Just that it is a shame that it's stopping."*

*"The fact that it is going to shut soon is the only fault I can see."*

*"I just hope that they can last (the workshops); I wouldn't bother if parents had to pay."*

### **Staff Perceptions**

Staff members are employed by Arts and Museum Departments and libraries, based in Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. Detailed analysis was carried out on the staff interviews, and the following key themes emerged:

### **Community Involvement**

Staff members considered that the aim of the project, to encourage pre-school children and their parents/carers to access cultural activity, has been successfully

achieved through provision of weekly workshops based around the cultural calendar, and monthly events outwith the libraries. Staff also stated that community involvement has been heightened through the design of the workshops:

*"The (aim) has been met by the different cultural activities."*

*"A broad emphasis was maintained throughout the project on different religion etc."*

*"I think the adults' arts/craft and reading confidence has greatly improved."*

### **Project Strengths**

Staff noted a number of strengths of the BYB project, including provision of the actual activities, the informal nature of the workshops which promotes a relaxed atmosphere and good relationships between the staff, parents/carers and children, the flexible nature of the programme which they feel empowers parents/carers, and the active involvement of parents/carers with their children to complete a variety of tasks. In addition, staff observed that libraries have also benefited from BYB through encouragement of new members, and demonstrating all that libraries have to offer:

*"A major strength is that it is not prescriptive, participants are not passive."*

*"There is a relaxed and easy going atmosphere at each group."*

*"The library has also gained, it is good to get people in and using the libraries."*

### **Improvements**

Staff identified a number of areas of possible improvement. First, more frequent and accessible communication between staff members and coordinators across the three different councils would be useful. Second, some staff noted that the allocated areas in some of the libraries were not suitable due to restricted space. Third, interest and input from other agencies, such as learning centres, could add to the programme:

*"There have been communication difficulties."*

*"The fact that it is running across three authorities brings complications."*

*"I would like to see other agencies taking an interest."*

### **Coordinator Perceptions**

Detailed analysis was carried out on the coordinator interviews, and the following key themes emerged:

#### **Impact on Families**

Coordinators felt that the BYB project has had positive impact on families who attended, especially with regard to improved relationships between parents/carers and their children. They also feel that parents/carers have benefitted from

encouragement to join in activities and from observing demonstrations of how to interact with their children:

*"You can see that some of them have a lot more confidence."*

*"Their relationship with their child has developed. Learning to play with their child and having that set aside time every week."*

### **Project Strengths**

Coordinators commented that the greatest strength of the project were the staff who ran the workshops. It was felt that they have been very supportive and enthusiastic, and have built up a strong rapport with the parents/carers and children. The multicultural slant on the workshops was also regarded as a key strength as it provided an educational and informative outline for the workshops:

*"Workers are a great strength."*

*"They have a great dialogue with mums and babies."*

*"The multicultural thing has really worked well."*

### **Improvements**

A number of improvements to further enhance the BYB project were identified. These included increased space and facilities for the groups, a multi-agency approach which perhaps involves health or educational services, and ensuring that the target population (there were some concerns that those attending BYB activities did not necessarily represent the target population):

*"We need to look at getting a better area with more space."*

*"I think more of a multi-agency approach would be good."*

*"To reach the target group, and keep working until we reach the target group."*

### **Project Aim**

Some coordinators considered that the aims of BYB have been successfully met as preschool children and their parents/carers have had access to cultural activities. A greater number of the target population would have been preferable in some areas:

*"Would say (aim) was partially met."*

*"Some people attending did experience cultural activity."*

*"We can always do a lot more, but it (BYB project) has been reasonably well accessed."*

## PART 4: DISCUSSION

### Overview

The BYB project was implemented throughout three council areas with the aim of re-engaging disenfranchised families into the community by introducing them to cultural experiences. Through gathering key stakeholders' perceptions, this evaluation sought to ascertain whether the aim of the project had been met. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents/carers who regularly attended workshops, staff members and coordinators of the BYB project.

Results demonstrate that the aim of BYB has successfully been met and that the workshops have had a positive impact on all involved. Data from key stakeholders suggest that this project is perceived as positive and worthwhile. All parents/carers expressed their enjoyment at participating in the workshops, and similar levels of enjoyment by the children. This suggests the workshops not only increase opportunities for learning but also promote positive family relationships.

### Limitations

Qualitative analysis of stakeholders' interviews has allowed an in depth understanding of perceptions and experiences of the BYB project. However, consideration of other quantitative data may have provided additional information about the impact of the BYB project. For example, taking measurement of factors at start and end of the BYB programme, such as self-esteem or self-confidence, may have been beneficial, but this was not possible as the programme was underway when the evaluation began.

### Project Strengths

The major strengths of the BYB project identified by this current evaluation include:

- **increased confidence.** Many of the stakeholders noted an increase in confidence in both parents/carers and the children. This increased confidence is demonstrated by the families' willingness to join in with the activities and increased willingness to communicate with one another.
- **enhanced relationships.** Enhancement and formation of relationships between parents/carers, children and staff members attending the BYB was commented upon. Many of the parents/carers stated that they had formed new friendships with other participants, and members of staff. It was also noted that the children enjoyed socialising with one another and with the adults.
- **transferable skills.** Many of the parents/carers regarded the skills and information learnt through the BYB workshops highly. These skills included child interaction, cultural knowledge and increased confidence. The value of these abilities is heightened as they are transferable to home life.
- **community involvement.** A positive outcome of the BYB project experienced by parents/carers was enhanced community involvement. Parents/carers felt that engaging with other members of their community improves their knowledge of the local community and allows them to integrate into it.
- **common appeal.** Those attending the BYB workshops varied in terms of race,

age and social circumstance, demonstrating that the project appealed to a broad population and was not culture specific. This is a very positive outcome and one which is highly regarded by many stakeholders.

### **Future Challenges**

Examination of the project strengths indicate that the BYB programme has had a positive impact on many of the parents/carers and their children. However, in order to ensure future sustainability of the project, coordinators will have to continue to work very closely with participants, and be reactive to their wants and needs as a repetitive programme may discourage future attendance. Other challenges for organisers may be in finding ways to encourage the participation of other disenfranchised groups who may also benefit from community integration. Finally, in relation to evaluation methods, it would be useful to collate quantitative data in addition to qualitative, to provide a greater wealth of information.

### **Suggested Improvements**

Despite the apparent success of the project, a number of improvements are suggested by stakeholders:

- **target population.** The target population for the BYB project is families living in areas of multiple deprivation, who may be struggling to integrate into community life. However, some coordinators feel that many of the families already attend the library regularly and are therefore not necessarily members of the target population. In light of this, it is felt that an improvement would be to actively seek the target group and to hold workshops in alternative locations.
- **resources.** Many stakeholders stated that the resources in the BYB workshop areas could be improved. For example, it was mentioned that some of the libraries had allocated a very small area for the children and parents/carers to work in, with few tables and chairs. This proves problematic if a large number of service users were present.

## **PART 5: RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of this evaluation confirm that the BYB project has moved towards achieving its key aim of re-engaging disenfranchised families with public agencies and promoting learning and life skills through the provision of weekly meetings and cultural events. If the project continues, the following recommendations are offered to further strengthen its impact and effectiveness.

- R1: recruitment procedures:** It is suggested that appropriate procedures for recruiting parents/carers should be identified to ensure that a greater number of hard-to-reach stakeholders are successfully engaged in BYB project.
- R2: extension of the project:** It is suggested that the BYB project could be extended to include additional community events, and to develop closer links with other services. This could result in the provision of more varied information and practical help.
- R3: maximising participation:** It is suggested that the BYB weekly workshops times and locations could be considered in more detail, in order to maximise the number of parents/carers and children who are able to attend and participate.
- R4: monitoring numbers:** It is suggested that the number of parents attending each workshop should be closely monitored to ensure groups are running at their optimal level of effectiveness and are neither too large nor too small.
- R5: improving communication:** Consideration should be given to improving communication between stakeholders. This could prove beneficial to the planning and running of the project, particularly when more than one council is involved.

## REFERENCES

Batorowicz, B., McDougall, S., and Shepherd, T.A. (2006) AAC and Community Partnerships: The Participation Path to Community Inclusion. *AAC: Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 22(3), 178-195

Conder, K (2002) *The Social Role of the Local Library: The Case in Gloucestershire a study submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Librarianship at The University of Sheffield*, in Harris, K. and Dudley, M. (2005) *Libraries and community cohesion: a paper for the South East Museum, Library and Archive Council*, accessed on 16/01/08 from [www.mlasoutheast.org.uk/assets/documents/100005EALibrariescommunitycohesion.pdf](http://www.mlasoutheast.org.uk/assets/documents/100005EALibrariescommunitycohesion.pdf)

Harris, K. and Dudley, M. (2005) *Libraries and community cohesion: a paper for the South East Museum, Library and Archive Council*, accessed on 16/01/08 from [www.mlasoutheast.org.uk/assets/documents/100005EALibrariescommunitycohesion.pdf](http://www.mlasoutheast.org.uk/assets/documents/100005EALibrariescommunitycohesion.pdf)

Nyangila, J.M. (2006) *Museums and Community Involvement: A Case Study of Community Collaborative Initiatives – National Museums of Kenya*, INTERCOM 2006 Conference Paper, accessed on 16/01/08 from [www.intercom.museum/documents/1-3Mhando.pdf](http://www.intercom.museum/documents/1-3Mhando.pdf)

Royal Museum Funding Secured (2007) National Museums Scotland accessed on 16/01/08 from [http://www.nms.ac.uk/royal\\_museum\\_funding\\_secured.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/royal_museum_funding_secured.aspx)