

# The 'Bring Your Baby' Project 2007–2008

## Evaluation Summary

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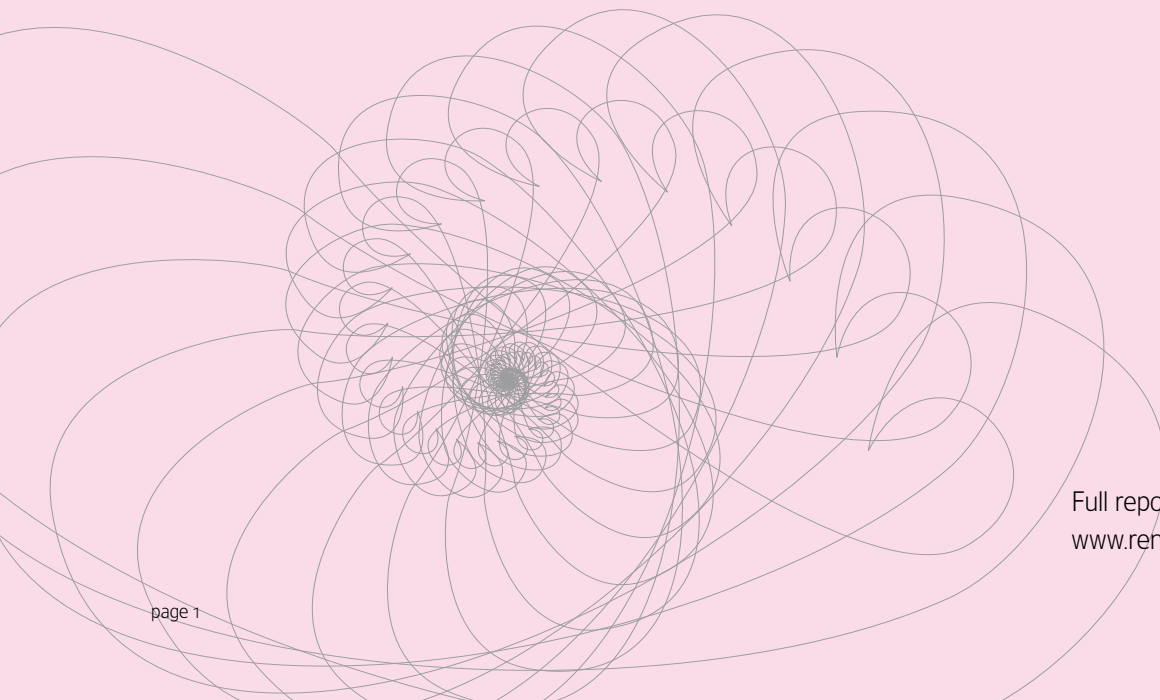
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# Executive Summary

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. These 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 through semi-structured interviews with the parents/carers who had attended BYB events, with the project coordinators and with the project staff. The results demonstrate that the BYB project has been successful in achieving 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 enhanced family relationships.

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



# Background and Aims

## Introduction

Renfrewshire Council's Arts and Museums service 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 interest in the culture of their surroundings and in issues surrounding the whole community, 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.

The project provided opportunities for families to become involved in a range of cultural activities through the medium of crafts, storytelling, 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 programmes of activities by selecting events 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 suited their own needs.

## 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 the three councils. Taking a multi-agency approach aimed to facilitate engagement between individuals and public agencies, to promote learning, life skills, literacy and health in a non-threatening community environment.

## Evaluation

Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service conducted an evaluation of the project to establish how successfully the aims of the project have been met. This involved eliciting stakeholders' perceptions of the BYB project and their suggestions for future improvements. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- elicit a sample of parents' views of the BYB project
- elicit a sample of project workers' views of the BYB project
- identify ways in which the BYB project might be improved
- provide guidance to enable the project to develop further.

# Methodology

## Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather stakeholders' perceptions of the BYB project. 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 gave signed consent prior to participation, and were informed that all information would be kept confidential and be anonymised.

Interviews took place face-to-face and lasted 20-40 minutes. The majority of parents/carers who took part in the workshops were either regular library users or families who had learned about BYB through advertisements in the library.

## Stakeholder Interviews

**Parents/Carers.** A representative sample of parents/carers was obtained from the three local authorities. The BYB project 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 selected from a list of those who attended ten or more events. In total, 12 parents participated, two from each area. Interviews focussed on experiences and opinions of the project with particular focus on community involvement.

**BYB Staff.** Interviews were conducted with all 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 council. Interviews focussed on implementation and experiences of the project.

# Results: Parent/Carer Perceptions

## Social Involvement

Parents/carers stated that they have met new people through coming to BYB events, and have kept in regular contact with them. This weekly contact with individuals in similar situations to themselves has provided them with an opportunity to share problems and socialise with others. 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."*

*"My son has got much more interaction through coming."*

## Relationships with Children

Many parents/carers reported that attending BYB sessions strengthened relationships with their children. This was mainly by increasing their confidence which in turn encouraged them to interact more with their children. Many parents/carers noted that they learnt from staff about different ways to play and interact with their child which they have used in the home setting:

*"Coming has strengthened the relationship between us."*

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

## Family Impact

Parents/carers reported that BYB events such as the external cultural trips which targeted whole families had made a positive impact on their family. Parents/carers also mentioned that the skills and confidence that they and their children have learned through attending events are transferable to home life, for example, children were eager to show family members crafts they made, and songs they had learnt:

*"We send pictures to all the family; they admire them."*

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

## Cultural Influences

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

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

*"I am more aware of things going on."*

# Results: Parent/Carer Perceptions Continued

## 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 libraries and organised children's events. It was also mentioned that the project has facilitated the integration into society for some families, by introducing them to new people:

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

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

## Staff Involvement

Project staff are 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 staff's enthusiasm and relaxed manner helped engage the children, while at the same time provided support and advice to the adults:

*"I think the staff are really good, good with the children."*

*"The interaction of with staff is great."*

## Project Strength

One of the key strengths of the BYB project was the friendly and casual setting of the meetings, which allowed parents/carers to drop in when it was convenient for them. Additional strengths mentioned include the ways in which events integrate learning and play, the social interaction which both parents and children are exposed to and the social skills that children were observed to have developed from the groups:

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

*"They don't just play but are getting taught how to behave."*

## Improvements

Many parents/carers felt the project ran well in its current format and were unable to identify potential improvements. However, some commented that bigger premises for events would be useful; others mentioned they would like meetings to be longer. Parents/carers regarded the project as extremely beneficial and were keen for it to continue next year:

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

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

# Results: Staff Perceptions Continued

## Community Involvement

Staff members considered that the aim of the project, to encourage pre-school children and their parents/carers to access cultural activity, was successfully achieved through the provision of weekly workshops based around the cultural calendar, and monthly events outwith the libraries. Staff also stated that community involvement had been heightened through the design of workshops:

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

*"A broad emphasis was maintained throughout the project."*

## Project Strengths

Staff noted a number of strengths of the project, including the activities offered, the relaxed atmosphere of workshops which enhanced relationships between staff, parents/carers and children, the flexible nature of the programme which empowered parents/carers, and the involvement of parents/carers in helping their children to complete a variety of tasks:

*"A major strength is that it is not prescriptive."*

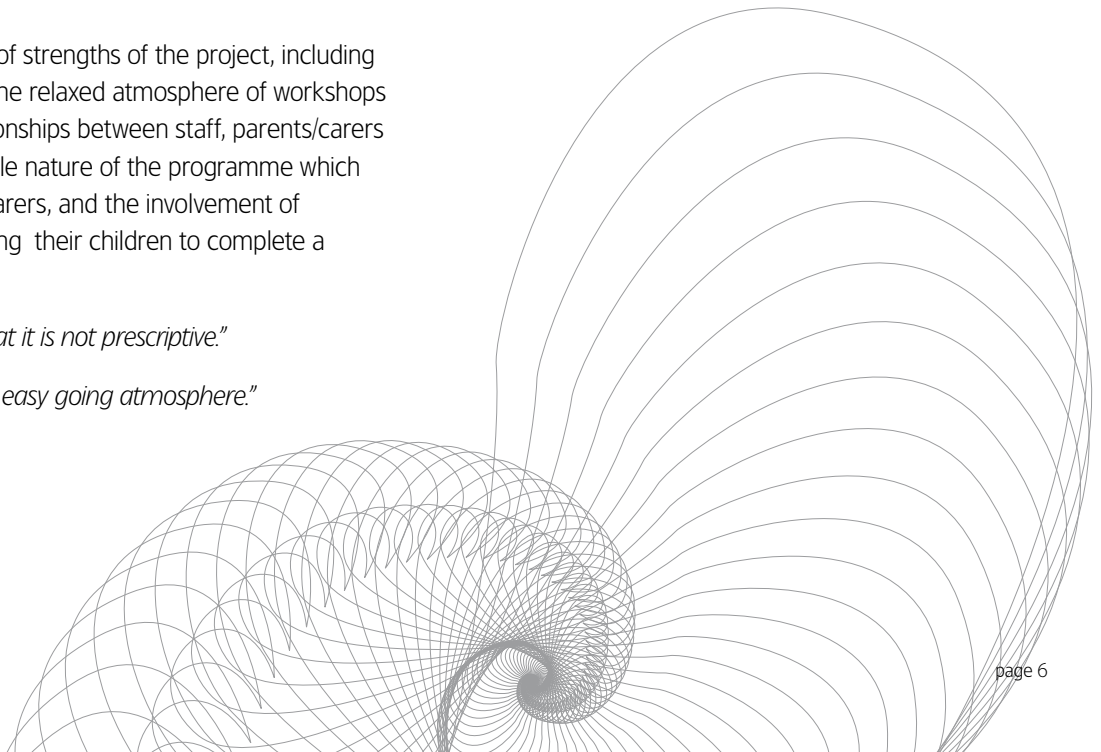
*"There is a relaxed and easy going atmosphere."*

## Improvements

Staff identified some areas of possible improvement. First, they felt that more frequent communication between staff and coordinators across the three different councils would be helpful. Second, some staff noted that the allocated areas in some of the libraries were not suitable due to restricted space. Third, it was felt that input from other agencies could add to the programme:

*"There have been communication difficulties."*

*"Running it across three authorities brings complications."*



# Results: Coordinator Perceptions

## Impact on Families

Coordinators felt that the BYB project had a positive impact on the families who attended events, especially with regard to improved relationships between parents/carers and their children. They also felt that parents/carers have benefitted from the ongoing encouragement to join activities and from observing demonstrations of how to interact with their children:

*"Some of them have a lot more confidence."*

*"Their relationship with their child has developed."*

## Project Strengths

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

*"Staff 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 involving health or educational services, and 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."*

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

## Project Aims

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. However, despite many events being well attended, in some areas it was felt that attendance at events of a greater number of the target population would have been preferable:

*"I would say it the aim was partially met."*

*"The project has been reasonably well accessed."*

# Summary of Findings

## Overview

Results demonstrate that the key aim of the BYB project has successfully been met and that the workshops have had a positive impact on the families involved. Data from key stakeholders suggests that involvement in this project has been positive and worthwhile. All parents/carers expressed their enjoyment at being able to participate in the workshops and felt that their children also benefited from involvement. Responses suggest that workshops not only increased opportunities for learning and community integration but also promoted positive family relationships.

## Limitations of Evaluation

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 project. For example, taking measurement of factors at the start and end of the BYB programme, such as self-esteem or self-confidence, may have been beneficial. However, this was not possible as the programme was underway when the evaluation began.

## Project Strengths

Some of the major strengths of the project identified through the evaluation include:

- **increased confidence.** Many stakeholders noted an increase in the confidence of parents/carers and children. This was demonstrated by the families' willingness to join in with the activities and to communicate with one another.
- **enhanced relationships.** Many stakeholders reported that enhancement and formation of good relationships between families attending events, children and staff had been built.
- **transferable skills.** Parents/carers regarded the skills acquired through BYB workshops highly. These skills included child-parent interaction, cultural knowledge and increased confidence.
- **community involvement.** A positive outcome of the BYB project was enhanced community involvement for families. Parents/carers enjoyed engaging with other members of their community.
- **common appeal.** Those attending the BYB workshops varied in terms of race, age and social circumstance, demonstrating that the project appealed to a broad spectrum of the population.

# Discussion

## Future Challenges

Examination of the project's strengths indicate that the BYB project has had a positive impact on many of the parents/carers and children involved. 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 repetitive programmes 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.

*"The family have noticed he has got better at talking and is more confident."*

– Parent

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

– Parent

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

– Parent

*"Parents' relationships with their children have developed. Learning to play and having that time set aside time every week."*

– Project Coordinator

## Suggested Improvements

Despite the success of the project, a number of improvements are suggested. The target population for the project is families living in areas of multiple deprivation, who may be struggling to integrate into community life. However, some coordinators felt that many of the project participants already attend the library regularly and were therefore not necessarily members of the target population. Therefore, it is felt that actively seeking the target group would be beneficial, as would be holding workshops in an alternative location.

Many stakeholders also stated that the resources for workshop areas could be improved. For example, it is mentioned that some of the libraries had allocated small areas for workshops with few tables and chairs. This proved problematic if a large number attended.

# 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 the 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 workshop 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 events and participate.

**R4: monitoring numbers:** It is suggested that the number of parents/carers attending each BYB workshop should be closely monitored to ensure that 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.

