

Share in Suffolk

Increasing parenting support and parents' involvement in their children's learning is an integral part of the extended schools strategy in Suffolk – and an integral part of the core offer of extended services to be accessed through all schools by 2010.

Siobhan Arundel is the Suffolk Share County Co-ordinator. She has worked hard since 2004 to establish the Share programme across the county as a key strategy to making an important contribution to the quality of parents' involvement in their children's learning and development.

Initially, the project was to focus on summer-born reception children in primary schools and Year 5 children in middle schools. However, this evolved as dictated by the degree of school and parental involvement in the project. Some schools threw themselves into the programme and extended delivery to all year groups, while others have stayed focused on their intake year group. Some schools became self-sufficient and have built Share into their annual plans, while others still require minimal support to deliver sessions.

In South Lowestoft 52 parents from a Year 5 group of 120 children recently attended a session about healthy lunchboxes, and 14 parents attended a nature activities session with 27 reception children. When running a Share session, all children are involved, whether or not a family member attends. This gives the children the opportunity to work with a range of adults other than the school staff.

The project has used the flexibility of Share to meet the needs of parents, children and schools across the cluster. Methods of delivery include: weekly groups; activity sessions during the school day and in the evening; challenges culminating in a review of work; and holiday challenges. Schools have offered resources for sessions, for example, the use of a school's woodland for nature sessions. The results of older children's Share sessions are being shared with primary schools within the cluster.

Siobhan and her extended services colleagues see Share as a vital tool in enabling them to raise standards in schools by increasing parents' involvement in their children's learning. The steps Siobhan and the team have taken to start to measure the impact of Share are to engage with the link advisors at a joint training event, where they presented the benefits and progress to date.

They are now identifying schools of concern and using Share as part of their toolkit to help improve outcomes in target schools. They have also:

- identified three schools at different stages of Share and designed a tool to help measure impacts and outcomes which can be directly, or indirectly, related to the Share implementation
- shown how Healthy Share activities map on to the Healthy Schools criteria and increase the schools chances of becoming accredited
- mapped how healthy Share activities can contribute towards a school's self-evaluation form (SEF) and the Every Child Matters agenda.

Future plans for the extension and sustainability of the Share programme in Suffolk include reliance on the support of the county's extended schools development officers in: assisting with making links and presentations to groups of schools; supporting the training events; and maintaining communication between the extended services team, the Share team and the schools. Feedback from all parties involved in the roll-out of the Share programme so far has been excellent.