50 things to do
Parents as Partners

50 Things to Do: Parents as Partners Project
Yearly Report 2024–2025

The first five years of a child's life are critical. It is at that time that the foundations for learning, health and wellbeing are laid for adulthood, leading to health and economic benefits to the whole of society. 50 Things to Do Before You're Five was developed because the team are passionate about reducing inequalities and increasing life chances. As experts in the early years, they know the value of high-quality experiences, building early relationships and parental involvement.

What is 50 Things to Do Before You're Five?

50 Things to Do Before You're Five is an exciting initiative full of screen free ideas for parents and families with young children. It offers a wide range of activities from outdoor discoveries in the woods, exploring how sound changes in different places, to sharing stories and water play!

50 Things to Do is a suite of localised:
- **Printed Resources**
- **Apps**
- **Websites**
- **Promotional materials**

Through its place-based, playful experiences, 50 Things helps young children to have the **best start in life**, inspiring families to make their homes a great place for their children to learn and thrive. Whilst it is underpinned by **evidence-informed** impactful pedagogies and parenting approaches, what parents really need to know is that it is full of **fun stuff to do with their children!** The focus on families having fun together is a deliberate approach, promoting an **inclusive, non-judgmental** way for parents to engage fully with their children.

Even just a few minutes a day of playing together;
- Creates relaxing and enjoyable times for children and adults
- Impacts positively on the whole family's mental health
- Provides the ideal bonding opportunity, which helps to secure relationships

50 Things to Do also provides childminders and Early Years group settings with the **perfect resource** for supporting your families. When settings embed 50 Things in their practice, not only are they facilitating the above changes, they are **strengthening relationships between parents and practitioners**, which can help to improve attendance.

Parents who regularly involve their children in early home learning activities that 'stretch a child's mind' can enhance their children's learning and development : EPPE

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Supported by KPMG Foundation, we are embarking on a research project named 'Parents as Partners' (PaP) project.

The project seeks to contribute robust evidence on the effectiveness of 50 Things in strengthening practitioner–parent relationships and strengthening the home learning environment.

Over a three-year period, we aimed to engage 600 children and their families across three wards in Bradford: Holmewood, Manningham & Girlington, and Keighley Central.

Parents as Partners

Working in partnership with parents, families and carers is central to the Early Years Foundation Stage. When parents are actively involved in their child's early years setting, and their child's learning, research shows that there will be a significant improvement seen in children's outcomes [1]. High-quality relationships between practitioners and families are recognised as central to supporting this engagement, enabling practitioners to build trust, share knowledge, and co-construct approaches to children's learning and wellbeing [2]. Practitioner confidence and capacity are critical factors influencing the quality and sustainability of such relationships.

Over the course of the project we will gather meaningful data, to explore the impact of 50 Things in relation to:

- Improving parental – practitioner relationships
- Building practitioner confidence
- Improving uptake and attendance
- Improving outcomes for children

In the initial phase, recruitment focused on Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings, childminders, and school-based early years providers supporting children aged 0–5. Eligible settings agreed to provide attendance and outcome data and gave commitment to embed 50 Things into practice. Participants received **training and practical home learning resources** to support delivery.

The second phase will extend to **feeder primary schools**, enabling tracking of children's transition into Reception. This will help assess whether the impact of 50 Things is sustained and support schools to embed it within their own practice, promoting smoother transitions and stronger parental engagement at a key time in children's education.

This study seeks to gather meaningful, practice-informed evidence that can inform local delivery and contribute to the wider strategy on parental engagement, practitioner development, and early childhood outcomes.

We also aim to demonstrate that these in-turn will lead to the following intended outcomes for children and families:
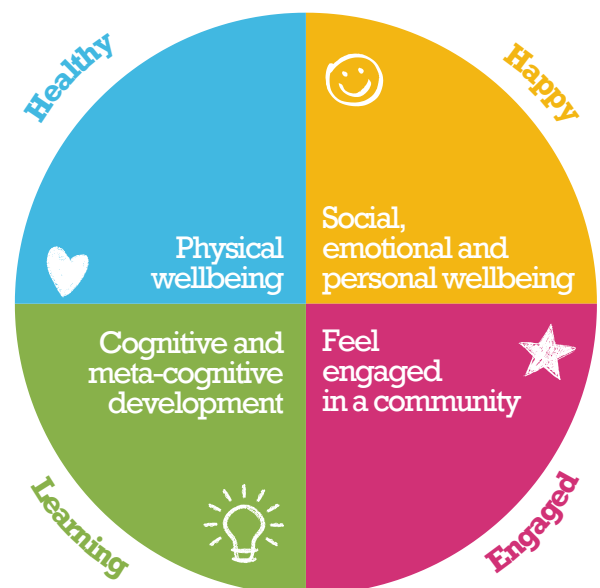
Healthy: Children are healthier, leading to more regular attendance
Happy: Children and Families have improved wellbeing
Learning: Children are ready to learn
Engaged: Children and families are more engaged with their settings, schools and wider community
Kindred² – Outcomes for all children

Theory of Change

Outcome	Short Term Impact	Long Term Impact	Measure
Improving parental/ practitioner relationships	• Settings develop a robust plan to engage parents within their setting using 50 Things • Settings offer more opportunities to engage with parents such as parents evenings and stay & play sessions • More families attend engagement opportunities • Settings developed mentoring partnerships around parental engagement	Practitioners recognise the importance of parent partnership in improving child outcomes Practitioners have improved relationships with parents Parents engage in learning jointly with the setting	Questionnaire, focus groups, case study
Building practitioner confidence	• Practitioners attend training and develop knowledge on the importance of parental engagement • Practitioners attend training and feel confident on embedding 50 Things within their setting	Practitioners feel more confident in developing parent partnerships and talk more regularly to parents Practitioners feel more confident using 50 Things as a tool to engage families	Questionnaire, focus groups, case study
Improving uptake and attendance	• Settings develop more effective tools to support families to engage with the setting • Settings work more effectively with families to reduce barriers to attendance	Setting attendance increases	Attendance data
		Uptake of early education places at settings improves	Uptake data
Improving outcomes	• Settings are introduced to tools which more effectively assess children's outcomes • Settings use project data to better identify their training needs and changes to their education provision	Children have higher levels of well-being and involvement	Observation
		On-going improvements to attendance, child outcome and relationships	Observation Attendance and EYFS data
		EYFS profile scores improve	EYFS Profile

Delivery plan

Phase 1

Mapping & consultation
A map of eligible settings is created and project lead carries out project consultations.

Recruitment
Settings who meet eligibility criteria and are short listed are recruited into the project.

Training
Settings receive training covering how to use 50 Things, the importance of play, parental engagement and the theory of well-being and involvement.

Implementation
Following training, settings launch the Parents as Partners project with their families and begin to embed 50 Things into their practice.

Initial data collection
Initial interviews and settings surveys begin.

Phase 2

Feeder school engagement
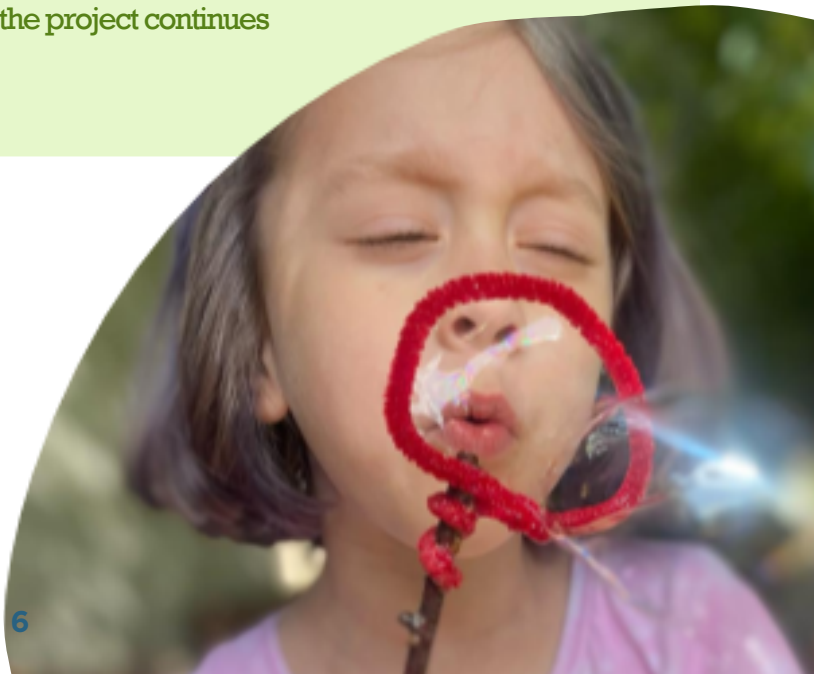Feeder schools mapping and project consultations take place.

Feeder school training
Settings receive training covering how to use 50 Things, the importance of play, parental engagement and the theory of well-being and involvement.

Phase 3

On-going data collection throughout the life of the project continues

Overall impact report

Evaluation approach

To understand and evidence the project's impact, a COM–B (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation–Behavior) approach has been threaded through the evaluation [3]. COM–B provides a clear framework for examining what enables or limits behaviour for practitioners and families. It allows us to explore how and why change happens.

In this study, **COM–B** captures factors influencing change when settings embed 50 Things. Data highlights practitioners' and parents' skills and confidence (capability), systems and environments shaping practice (opportunity), and beliefs around parental engagement, play, and home learning (motivation). This approach ensures evidence is rooted in behaviour change and provides actionable insights for strengthening family relationships and supporting future interventions.

Focusing on the four key research aims evidence will be collected using a variety of methods including:

Short surveys for practitioners, parents and setting leaders

Interviews and case studies

Attendance data

Outcome data related to the Birth to Five Matters, Development Matters and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

The collection of both **quantitative and qualitative** data will provide a comprehensive evaluation of the project's effectiveness [4]. Quantitative measures, such as statistical data, provide objective indicators of impact and allow for the identification of patterns and measurable outcomes over time. These data points are essential for assessing the scale and consistency of change across settings.

Qualitative data focuses on the experiences of the participants. Stories play a crucial role in this project, collecting stories develops understanding of the processes and relationships that underpin outcomes.

Monitoring both forms of data across the duration of the project strengthens the validity of findings and will support better future implementation.

> *"Practitioners, families, and children shared their experiences, letting us track changes in confidence, understanding, and engagement over time."*
>
> **Project lead**

The Bradford Context

The project takes place in Bradford. The city of Bradford is a metropolitan borough in West Yorkshire. It is a **youthful city**, with 27.9% of the district's population aged under 20 – the highest percentage in West Yorkshire and the seventh highest in England [5]. Bradford is a richly **diverse city**. This diversity is one of the district's greatest strengths, and is reflected in its food, arts, faith communities, and entrepreneurial spirit. Bradford was recently recognised as the **UK City of Culture 2025.**

Alongside its strengths, Bradford faces on-going challenges. Data from the Department for Education shows that **educational attainment in Bradford is below national average [6]**. These educational inequalities are not evenly distributed across the city but are particularly concentrated in neighbourhoods such as **Manningham and Girlington, Holmewood, and central Keighley**. These are the focus areas for this project.

Manningham and Girlington

an inner-city neighbourhood, characterised by high population density, and a diverse community. The area faces challenges in housing, health inequality, and youth opportunities. It also benefits from a wealth of cultural and faith-based organisations.

Holmewood

one of Bradford's largest estates, shaped by persistent economic deprivation and high levels of unemployment. Access to services and employment opportunities is limited. Yet Holmewood is also recognised for its resilience, strong resident networks, grassroots initiatives, and a deep sense of place.

Keighley Central

at the heart of the town of Keighley, there are many barriers to education and employment. Health outcomes are low, particularly for children and young people. However, central Keighley is also home to a diverse mix of cultures, entrepreneurial energy, and active community organisations working to address local needs.

Focusing on Manningham, Holmewood, and central Keighley Central will help us better understand how to support **children and families living in disadvantaged circumstances**, with an opportunity to build on the strengths that exist within these communities.

Implementation of Parents as Partners

To support the implementation of 50 Things, each participating setting was offered a two-hour training session. During this session, practitioners were introduced to the aims of the project, and explored research evidence on the benefits of **parent–practitioner partnerships** and the role of the home learning environment in supporting children's development.

Training addressed common **barriers to parental engagement** and facilitated a discussion of challenges specific to each setting, and ways to overcome any barriers to data collection requirements. Each setting was supported to **develop a plan** to embed 50 Things as a tool to strengthen relationships with families and enhance the home learning environment.

To support the implementation of 50 things, settings were also given bespoke resources, as well as financial incentives. These included:

- **Ludic the Monkey – (a home learning resource cuddly)**
- **50 Things home learning backpack**
- **50 Things card packs**
- **50 Things posters**

Following the training, settings were offered the opportunity to attend **three networking sessions** per year. These sessions allow settings to share project updates, data, successes, and challenges. A key focus is maintaining ongoing conversations about barriers to effective parental–practitioner relationships and sharing collective strategies and approaches.

In addition, settings received **ongoing support** from the project lead, with opportunities to seek guidance around delivery and data collection.

Ludic the Monkey...

is a home learning resource that was offered for settings to use as part of the project. The intention was that Ludic could be sent home with children and families, encouraging them to engage in a 50 Things activity together and then share this experience with the setting. Parents could share photographs or write about their experiences with Ludic, creating a link between home and setting learning.

Recruitment and take-up

To join to project settings had to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- **Their intake must include children living in the project areas**
- **They must support children aged 0–5**
- **They must agree to provide data on attendance and child outcomes**
- **They must give commitment to embedding 50 Things into their practice**

Recruitment involved identifying and mapping eligible settings based on the initial two recruitment criteria. Once eligible settings were identified, each was contacted directly to share information about the project's aims, expectations, and potential benefits. Follow-up consultations were then arranged to discuss the project in more detail, to explore how participation would fit within each setting's existing priorities, and to confirm their ability to meet the remaining criteria around data collection and implementation.

This approach helped ensure that participating settings were both suitable and motivated to take part. Out of the 21 settings consulted, 16 agreed to join the project, **supporting over 1000 children.** Those that did not participate either did not to meet the eligibility criteria or faced barriers to engagement such as staffing issues.

In total 16 settings were successfully signed up to the project – 6 settings from Manningham & Girlington, 6 settings from Holmewood and 4 settings from central Keighley.

Manningham & Girlington

Holmewood

Central Keighley

Across all 16 settings over 1000 children were to be supported by the project.

1000 Children

"We would like a consistent approach to engaging parents in their children's play and learning and staff who are confident using it as part of everyday practice."

School-based nursery

Setting leader interviews

Following recruitment all settings were invited to take part in an interview to discuss the key reasons they signed up to the project. Settings spoke of a noticeable **decline in parental engagement following COVID-19,** sharing that their engagement with families had changed since the pandemic with many opportunities such as trips and community events no longer happening. Settings expressed an interest in a new approach to re-engage parents and wanted to strengthen the sharing of information between the home and setting.

Settings also shared that children were entering their provision with lower developmental outcomes than in previous years. One setting reported that **54% of children within the setting were experiencing language delay.** They hoped that by working closely with parents they can work to address these gaps through strengthening the home learning environment.

Building confidence of both parents and staff formed part of responses from settings. Settings highlighted that practitioners often lacked confidence in initiating conversations with parents around children's play and learning. They also shared that parents often lacked confidence in supporting their child's play. They wanted a way to share ideas with parents.

Overall, the recruitment process highlighted that despite the pressures faced by the sector, the large majority of settings understood the need to **engage with families to strengthen relationships and improve outcomes.**

> *"We would like more engagement from families and would like to show families that it is the everyday things with 50 Things that they can do."*
>
> *PVI nursery*

Initial Insights

After one year of the Parents as Partners project journey, 16 settings are now working to embed 50 Things into their practice. Below are some initial insights emerging from the recruitment and implementation period, as well as some initial data insights.

Recruitment

Recruitment was highly successful, with the project now working with around 1,000 children across participating settings. Although a small number of settings were unable to take part due to eligibility or staffing constraints, engagement and interest in the project have been very strong.

Implementation

Each setting's unique delivery of 50 Things, combined with their dedication, has been key to the project's early success.

Since the start of the project:

> **Settings have involved parents in children's learning through trips and on-site activities, including 50 Things activities.**

> **Ludic has been introduced as a home learning resource for families.**

> **Settings have tailored initiatives for their community. For example, hosting a 'Woodland Wandering' trip specifically for dads.**

> **Settings have created take-home learning resource packs for parents.**

It is too early to measure the impact of these changes on our data. However, if sustained, they could positively affect outcomes for children. The Education Endowment Foundation [7] notes that effective early parental engagement can boost progress by up to five months.

Settings have reported **early positive outcomes** including increased parental engagement and improved attendance, and improvements in children's speech and language through discussing 50 Things activities done at home. These insights suggest the initiative is already benefiting children and families.

> *"We have seen an improvement in attendance since embedding 50 Things into our setting. Before summer, nursery had the best attendance across the whole school."*
>
> **School based nursery**
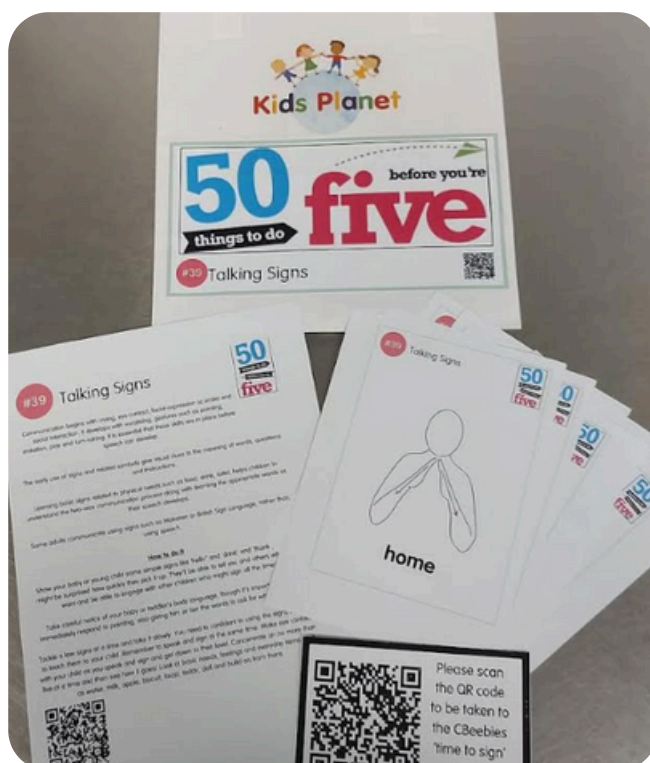
Parent insights

Initial data collection from families explored barriers to play, parents' confidence levels, and their views on who can and should support their child's development – as well as whether they believe play contributes to that development. This information helps us **understand families' experiences** and identify areas where additional support may be needed.

The top **barriers to play** identified were limited access to safe spaces, language barriers, mental health challenges, and lack of time. These findings will be explored further through upcoming interviews and focus groups to gain deeper insight into how we can better support families.

Parents generally saw themselves as the main supporters of their child's development, with nursery settings identified as the next most influential, ahead of wider family. This highlights the important role early years settings play in engaging with and supporting parents. Overall, families expressed confidence in supporting their child's development at home and recognised the value of play as a key contributor to children's learning and growth.

"Introducing Ludic has been a wonderful catalyst for our parent partnerships. It has helped families see the immense educational value in simple, playful activities, empowering them to become more confident and engaged partners in their child's learning and development at home."

Maintained Nursery School

Challenges

Alongside the success, the journey has not been smooth for all settings involved. Many settings have experienced **high levels of staff turnover** and staffing changes, this has resulted in new staff taking over the lead of the project and delays in data collection. This has been a particular issue with the PVI settings involved in the study. Research published by the NDNA [8] discovered that 69.8% of providers said they did not have sufficient staff to operate at maximum capacity. This statistic also matched with findings from the **West Yorkshire Early Years Workforce plan** [9] which demonstrated pressures facing the sector, including high turnover, poor recruitment and workload stress.

With these points in mind and a snapshot from our data collection in which **56% of practitioners felt that parental engagement** impacts on workload stress, a question that will be answered by the study is '**will ongoing pressures faced by settings impact on parent–practitioner relationships and what is the long term impact for children and families?'**

Summary

The first year of the Parents as Partners project has provided valuable insights into its impact and potential across early years settings. The initiative has enabled practitioners to **strengthen relationships** with families, **promote home learning**, and build meaningful community connections that enrich children's early experiences. Settings have demonstrated creativity and commitment through parent-child trips, open sessions, and home learning resources, resulting in **stronger parental engagement** and noticeable improvements in children's communication and confidence.

While some settings encountered challenges, the project has been an overall success. Initial data from this first stage highlights clear evidence of progress, with reported increases in **parental engagement, improved attendance, and greater parental confidence** in supporting children's learning at home.

The achievements of this first year provide a **strong foundation** for continued development, deeper partnership working, and sustained positive change in the early years across West Yorkshire. Looking ahead, the next phase of the project will focus on building on these successes and gathering further insights to inform ongoing improvement and long-term impact.

References

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BIRTH TO 19

INSTITUTE FOR THE EARLY YEARS