

Doodle Families- Sarah's Story

The Childhood Development Initiative



The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) is funded under the government's Area Based Childhood programme, which builds on the learning to date from the Prevention and Early intervention Programme (PEIP). The initiative aims to break the cycle of child poverty in areas where it is most deeply entrenched and to improve the outcomes for children and young people in these areas. Through innovative partnerships, CDI brings together evidence-based practice and rigorous evaluation with an approach that is focused on the identified needs of children and families.

CDI is based in Tallaght West and designs, delivers and evaluates a suite of programmes across a spectrum of local needs including language, literacy, early years, conflict management and community safety. All CDI programmes are evidence-informed and are delivered through existing structures and services.

One such programme that was designed in consultation with the community is Doodle Families. This is a Family Literacy Programme aimed at offering children and parents a space to engage with literacy in a fun way. The programme focuses on the family's own experiences with sessions being tailored to suit the needs of the individual groups.

Doodle Families

Doodle Families is a Family Literacy Programme aimed at children in First Class. It has been designed to be delivered in two components – one is for parents/guardians and the other is for children. Parents' sessions can be delivered during the school day and the children's sessions are delivered after school. We run the two sessions together after school so the parents and children can spend time together at the end of the session. Below is an account from a Doodle Families facilitator telling the experience from one of the parents who participated in Doodle Families. It describes

how participating had impacted on her personally and her relationship with literacy and her son.

We have been running Doodle Den in our school since it was introduced as a Literacy programme by CDI, so it was only natural for us to implement the Doodle Families programme once it became available to us a couple of years ago. Having recently taken over as HSCL within the school, Doodle Families was a wonderful opportunity for me to meet and work with parents in the school setting.

Despite having a lot of anxiety about her own literacy issues I managed to convince Sarah to join us on the Doodle Families programme last year. She was nervous about “not being able for it” and “making a show of herself” but she was willing to accept a place on the programme so that her son Kayden could participate.

Once we got started she realised how accessible the programme was and she began to relax and enjoy the interaction with other parents, and began to realise that other parents faced the same anxieties about participation. She admitted very early on that she didn’t help Kayden with his schoolwork as she didn’t feel able to do so.

The joy of the Doodle Families programme is that it shows parents just how easy it is to help a child with schoolwork and homework and helps explain how things are taught in the classroom – Sarah hadn’t been in a classroom since she left school over twelve years ago so she was intrigued how things had changed since. But the basics are still pretty much the same and over the eight weeks of the programme Sarah took on board all the hints and tips from the Doodle Families programme to help give her the self-confidence to help Kayden with his work.

Sarah’s favourite week of the programme was the writing week, she shared with the parent group how she used to write stories all the time at school and realised now how much she missed that, the other parents encouraged her to take it up again. Her favourite part of the weekly session, as was every parent’s favourite part, was the time spent with her child at the end of the session, she would happily bring in her work to share with him and he would have his work to share with her. Then they would work on a small activity together.

Sarah says the benefits she got from Doodle Families far outweighed any anxiety issues she had initially about taking part. She feels it gave her tools to use at home

which came in especially useful during learning at home during lockdown. She felt her relationship with Kayden around homework time became easier. She said one of the main parts she took away from it was the benefits of reading with your child, no matter what age your child is, or how good your reading skills are.

*names are changed

A Facilitator's Account of a Doodle Den Session

We have six parent sessions throughout the year. Session one sets the tone for the programme and how much we need the parents to engage with their child and encourage them to attend and participate in the programme. As you are aware, it can be difficult at times to have parents attend these sessions. Now, I will create a scenario of a typical session below;

"Phew, that's great. Eight parents have turned up. Hi everybody. Thank you for attending today." Nothing. Silence. Sugar! "Alright, we are going to play some games today." Oh no! Again, silence. We explain they will be broken into small groups and we will be playing Snap, Bingo, Bang and games on the iPads. John and Mary (example parents) are in the same group. John is a quiet man and Mary is quite chatty. We haven't spoken to either of them very much and we continue with the scheduled activities. We go around the room, explaining; "Pretend you are at home playing with your child, just relax. No judgement here, just a bit of fun." I look over, and John is smiling and Mary is having a ball! They are playing bang (a game where if you get the word bang, you need to put all the cards back in the tub). "Alright, change! New game." John and Mary are chatting away. A few minutes later, the games are put away and we ask for feedback from the parents. Now we are talking to the parents directly. Mary explains that her child, Daisy, is always asking what are the signs on the road about, and what they mean. This is great! John has decided to open up. He talks about how his son loves Doodle Den and how surprised he is that he himself is learning so much, as he had never heard of a tricky word before and that they will now practice their tricky words at home after his son's homework. He will also try playing Bang at home now, as he enjoyed it so much. This is how we grow and encourage parent engagement in Doodle Den. Parents need to feel comfortable and then, like their children, they can grow and learn. We see this in action, such as the time when we went to the Library for our visit. Some families had

never been before and didn't realise that it was free. To see the parents and children on the floor, looking at pictures and words, putting them into stories... It is priceless, those few moments that can make all the difference in a family's life. And that is what family literacy and engagement is all about. Those precious moments.

Thank you for your time, and I hope you have gotten a glimpse into what Doodle Den is all about.

All aforementioned names have been changed and/or altered.