

Connecting Families Manual



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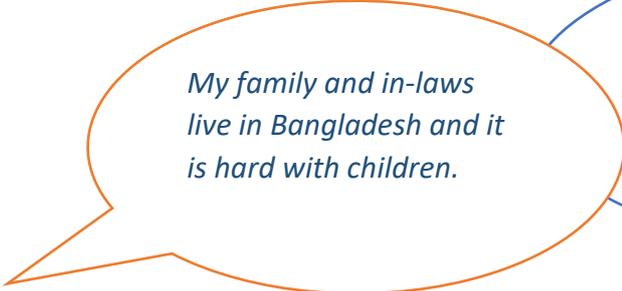
About this manual

This manual has been designed to share ideas and tips with anyone who is interested in training and supporting volunteers to plan and run community-based workshops for families. The content is based on key learning from the *Connecting Families* project.

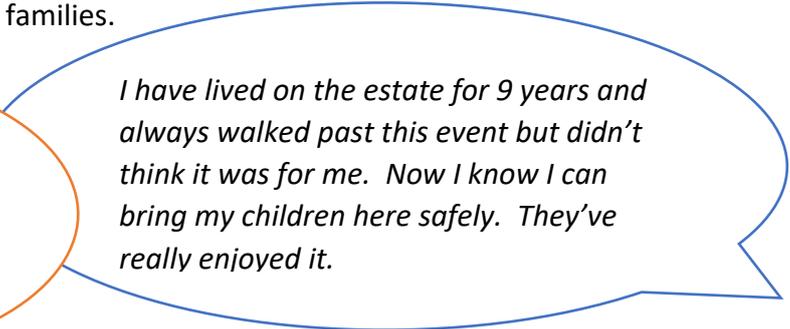
The Connecting Families project - a brief introduction

Connecting Families was a 2.5 year project aimed at combatting the loneliness experienced by many marginalised and socially-isolated families in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth, London. According to research carried out on loneliness by the Office for National Statistics, the lack of *social connections* “are an important aspect of loneliness and the results clearly show that communications with friends, family and neighbours, as well as feelings of belonging to and satisfaction with local area are associated with loneliness.” [Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely? - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

The project was delivered between January 2019 and June 2021. It was designed to enable families to build connections with other people, families and service providers in their area, to learn and have fun together, and to feel more confident about participating within their local communities through a programme of support delivered by project volunteers. The Connecting Families project team undertook consultation at 7 events/meetings between January and March 2019 to find out more about how the project could best meet locally-identified needs and engage the most socially-isolated families.

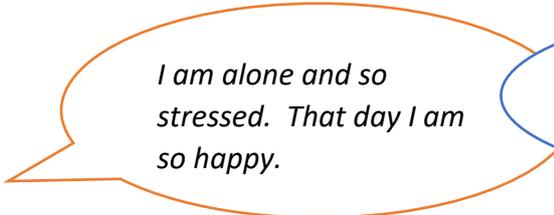


My family and in-laws live in Bangladesh and it is hard with children.

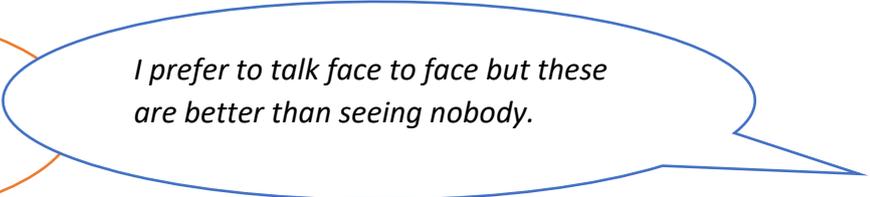


I have lived on the estate for 9 years and always walked past this event but didn't think it was for me. Now I know I can bring my children here safely. They've really enjoyed it.

Due to Covid-19 and lockdown, the project was adapted to provide online rather than the planned face-to-face workshops and support. The project staff and volunteer team recognised that social isolation could increase significantly for many families during this time. Support for volunteers was particularly important during the first lockdown when many volunteers themselves also experienced high levels of anxiety.



I am alone and so stressed. That day I am so happy.



I prefer to talk face to face but these are better than seeing nobody.

In total, *Connecting Families* trained 40 volunteers, mostly parents and migrant women, who engaged and supported local socially-isolated families through a varied programme of thematic-based family workshops. Where possible, follow-up one-to-one/small group support and signposting was provided. In total 180 adults and 359 children participated in 22 volunteer-led workshops.

The value of family workshops

Family workshops provide valuable opportunities for intergenerational learning and positive intergenerational communication. They enable both adults and children to experience learning as a positive and enjoyable activity they can do together, leading them to embrace further learning opportunities. Adults and children enjoy developing their skills and knowledge and parents develop effective strategies for supporting their children's development.



The feedback from families that attended the workshops was very positive and emphasised the importance of organising community events when tackling loneliness and social isolation.



Family workshops can:

- Connect people
- Give people the chance to get to know each other
- Reduce loneliness
- Give families something to look forward to
- Provide a space for people from different cultures to meet and interact
- Help people feel part of a community

This lockdown has been very difficult for me and for my children. Today they were very happy to make things all together.

Socialising plays a huge part. Takes the stress away, seeing other parents and children.

This was my first workshop with the kids. My niece told me about it. I'm very happy as the children liked seeing other children and it was good for me to see other adults.

Volunteer training

Connecting Families delivered four 5-session volunteer training courses, with a target of 10 participants for each one. Training sessions were run on a weekly basis and each lasted for 2 hours. Participants were recruited in a wide range of ways - through small consultation events, publicising through local service providers, social media and through word of mouth in the community. The volunteers were from a wide variety of backgrounds, many were parents/carers themselves and many had no previous experience of volunteering. The training programme was designed on a strength-based model - to recognise and build on individuals' skills, knowledge and experience – and trainee input was central throughout.

An important part of the training was for volunteers to plan and deliver their first family workshop together, then reflect on key learning in their final session. As most participants had little or no experience of running workshops, this was a very important opportunity for them to build their skills and confidence.

The training also covered the importance of volunteers working in pairs or small groups as these provide maximum support not only for the families but for the volunteers themselves.

<p>Session 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to participants and trainer(s) • Introduction to the volunteer training programme • Understanding the project • The role of the volunteer • Exploring social isolation and loneliness 	<p>Session 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is family learning? • Being a volunteer – key values • Confidentiality and building trust • Being non-judgemental • Providing sensitive support and signposting
<p>Session 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning a family workshop (i) • Running workshops online • Keeping safe • Safeguarding 	<p>Session 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating with/supporting speakers of other languages • Planning a family workshop (ii) • Delivering a family workshop face to face and online
<p>Volunteers plan and run their first Family workshop</p>	<p>Session 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection and learning from Family Workshop 1 • Asking for help/Getting support for yourself • Planning your volunteering commitments

Keeping in touch with volunteers



Maintaining regular contact with volunteers is essential to a successful volunteering project. This helps people feel valued and that they are part of a team. It also helps to keep volunteers motivated and engaged with a project. Also, it is important to recognise that people become volunteers for a range of reasons and some volunteers may have their own support needs that also need to be recognised and addressed.

Some different ways to keep in touch with volunteers:

- Informal coffee mornings - face to face and/or online
- Keeping in touch meetings - face to face and/or online
- WhatsApp groups
- Regular 1:1 phone contact with a volunteer co-ordinator/supporter



*Really enjoyed meeting up
with you all yesterday....
Just what we all needed...*

Adapting training and workshop plans for online delivery

The implications of lockdown and Covid-19 safety measures have created a steep learning curve for all of us and providers have had to review and reflect on training, workshop and project plans in order to adapt to very different circumstances. This has included trainers and volunteers having to adapt and deliver their training and workshops online.

Some key lessons learned:

- Importance of digital support for volunteers and participants. Provide additional support and devices if required.
- Use materials/things families will have at home
- Are you targeting a particular age group or will you make it suitable for all ages?
- Think of something for the families to do while they wait for everyone to join the session – (start designing x, draw a picture, talk about x)
- Introductions – names on screen, get everyone to say their name and age / where they are / favourite story
- Ground rules – have fun, work together – help and share, family learning means parents get involved – make your own if not helping child, ask questions. Use of the mute button and gallery view. Try avoiding speaking at the same time as others
- Explaining the purpose – What are we doing today? Why?
- Things to be aware of:
 - Time delay
 - Connectivity – have a backup plan – such as a second person who can take over
 - Safeguarding – ensure everyone identifies themselves and have waiting rooms
 - Lighting and background view, background noise



Volunteer training activities and resources

This section includes some example activities and resources to support volunteer training with some suggestions for using them. These activities can be used or adapted by other providers:

<p>1: Providing voluntary support</p>	<p>Ask volunteer trainees to discuss a range of scenarios they may encounter and identify what they could do in each situation. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who could you signpost people to? • Are there any other issues you need to think about? • Are there any safeguarding issues? • How would you ensure that the issues have been addressed? • Is there anything you should definitely not do?
<p>2: Planning a family workshop</p>	<p>Share the instructions on the handout with volunteer trainees who can work in pairs or small groups. You could elicit and agree one or more different workshop themes and then compare and discuss each group's ideas.</p>
<p>3: Being non-judgemental</p>	<p>This activity has four scenarios to consider from the different perspectives of a. volunteers and b. family participants. Divide trainees into pairs and give each pair a different scenario – 1, 2, 3 or 4. One trainee will have card a. and the other card b. e.g. 1a or 1b. They then role play and/or discuss their scenario and agree the best action to take.</p>
<p>4: Running family workshops - Top tips for volunteers</p>	<p>Here are some top tips underpinning key Family Learning principles and approaches to discuss and add to as part of a volunteer training programme. It is important to stress that Family Learning models are strengths-based, i.e. they recognise and build on what parents and children already know and can do, and their life experiences</p>
<p>5. Planning a family workshop – checklist for volunteers</p>	<p>A checklist like this can reduce dependence on the volunteer trainer/supporter by helping volunteers to work together and take responsibility for the workshop.</p>
<p>6. What helps to make volunteer training and family workshops successful?</p>	<p>You can elicit ideas against each of these headings from volunteer trainees. They can then compare their ideas with the suggestions on this handout – and add their own.</p>

Fatima attends one of your workshops with her two boys aged 10 and 12 and her eight-year-old daughter. Fatima asks you for ideas about what to do with her children during the long-school holidays as they always end up fighting. What ideas could you give her?

Hasbia has two children - a 3-year old son and a daughter (8 years old) who has a disability and has to use a buggy to go out. Hasbia would like to take her children out more but finds taking her daughter up and down the flight of steps leading to her home challenging. Who could you signpost her to?

Dave and his wife are claiming universal credit and both work. Problems with their payments mean that they now owe money to their childminder who says that she cannot continue looking after their children. What can you suggest?

Mulu has only recently arrived in the UK from Eritrea. She has three sons aged between 18 months and three years old. She does not have a partner and she hardly leaves her flat. She would like to find a shop that sells food from her country. What can you suggest?

Jameel's wife died recently leaving him with four children under twelve. He is finding all aspects of life difficult from getting the children to school, to cooking, shopping and doing his little girls' hair. What advice could you give him?

Sharon recently gave birth to her first child. The doctor has reassured her that the baby is healthy, putting on weight and growing well. Sharon is worried because the baby cries a lot. She says she isn't sleeping well and is always tired. Also, she tells you she is finding it hard to go out, and that is putting on a lot of weight. What can you suggest?

Sheryl tells you she desperately needs nappies for her baby. Her partner has not been giving her any money to do shopping. What could you advise?

1. Imagine you are running a themed family workshop, e.g. 'Pirates' during half-term, which is in four weeks' time. On strips of paper list all the actions which need to be taken before this workshop and on the day itself. One action per strip of paper.
2. On different coloured strips of paper, write different time headings, e.g. one month before, 3 weeks before, the day before, on the day.
3. Arrange your actions under the time headings. If an action needs to be done several times write it out on several pieces of paper.
4. Agree which volunteers will work together on each action.



1a. (Volunteer)

You are helping at a family learning workshop. A father is sitting back looking at his phone instead of working with his son. You approach him to encourage him to take part in the activities with his son.

2a. (Volunteer)

You are giving support to a parent you met at a family workshop. The mother's clothes look dirty and she has personal hygiene problems. The mother wants to get a job and is asking you for tips for an interview she has the next day.

3a. (Volunteer)

You are volunteering at a family workshop. There is a mother with four lively children who are not engaging with the activities but running around and knocking into people. You bring the children round to the activity and start engaging them and the mother just lets you get on with it.

4a. (Volunteer)

You are volunteering at a family learning event and a group of four mothers arrive with their children. They settle their children around an activity table and leave them there while they go off and chat. Try to encourage them to take part with their children.

1b. Dad/male carer

You are at a family learning workshop with your son. You don't want to be there. You are doing things on your phone while your son is making a pirate ship. The volunteer comes to encourage you to work with your son. Tell her that this is women's work and you don't have time for it. Add that this isn't learning - it's play, and your son already plays too much for a five-year-old!

2b. Mum/female carer

You want to get a job now that all your children are at school. You have an interview the following day for a lunch time meal supervisor job at a local school. Ask the volunteer for tips for the interview. Your clothes are dirty, you smell and you keep scratching your head.

3b. Mum/female carer

You have several lively children. You have brought them to a family learning workshop but they are just running around. Complain to the volunteer that the children don't listen to you and don't concentrate on anything. But you do nothing to engage your children except shout at them to stop running.

4b. Mum/female carer

You and three friends have brought your children to a family learning event. You settle your children round an activity table and then join your friends for a chat instead of working with your children. You are patronising and rude to the volunteer when she tries to get you to work with your children.

Do

- Choose something fun, attractive and engaging to do
- Be welcoming, friendly, inclusive and encouraging
- Give just enough support (don't take over)
- Make sure that parents/carers are taking part with their children
- Make sure everyone is having fun
- Celebrate all contributions
- Respect confidentiality
- Report any concerns
- Ask for help and support

Avoid

- Making assumptions about what people can or cannot do
- Being patronising (talk down to people)
- Being judgemental
- Doing things for people and taking over
- Being critical or negative

✓	CHECKLIST
	Check funding/budget
	Confirm venue or online platform, date and time
	Agree theme or focus
	Plan publicity/recruitment, e.g. social media post, flyer, word-of-mouth
	Build up a list of participants
	Plan the workshop including timing
	Agree volunteer roles including workshop lead
	Make a list of resources needed and who to source, create and/or buy
	Plan refreshments (if face-to-face and budget available)
	Check there is a risk assessment and what Covid 19 precautions needed
	Make examples of resources
	Check and finalise the plan for the day including instructions



I feel so much better, my children can run around and do different things. I can talk to other parents.

It makes my children happy and that makes me happy. Have met other people, chatting with parents.

What helps to make volunteer training and family workshops successful?

Good planning

- Good publicity and effective recruitment
- Good number of participants
- Meaningful , relevant and interesting content
- Session is accessible – participants understand it, have the right resources and can engage with it
- Opportunities for success at different levels
- Strengths-based
- Activities suitable for a wide range of ages

Positive learning environment

- Opportunities for teamwork
- Good support from peers and tutor/trainer
- Feeling safe
- Feeling valued

Anything else?

Feeling engaged

- Fun and interactive
- Everyone is engaged and can actively participate
- Energetic and enthusiastic tutor/trainer
- Flexible approaches

Strong group management

- Everyone involved in agreeing group guidelines at the beginning
- Having the right resources/materials
- Providing a variety of activities to engage different types of participants with different skills

Good resources

- High quality, attractive, relevant, accessible and engaging resources
- Good internet connection (if online)
- Support to build confidence in using online platforms

Useful websites and links

The volunteers on the project were given a range of ideas and examples of Family Learning activities developed and used by Learning Unlimited. They also used YouTube and Pinterest for ideas and demonstrations for activities to include in their family workshops. Once the theme of the workshop had been discussed in a planning meeting, they could then narrow their search. Here are some other links for free to download guidance and resources which volunteers and volunteer supporters may find useful:

[Building Connections Fund | The National Lottery Community Fund \(tnlcommunityfund.org.uk\)](https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk)

www.learningunlimited.co

www.sparklebox.com

[Volunteers, English language learners and conversation clubs - Learning and Work Institute](https://www.learningandworkinstitute.org.uk)

www.thecrafttrain.com

<https://thedadlab.com>

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk>

The Learning Unlimited team would like to thank all the Connecting Families volunteers who contributed such a lot to this project and to supporting families in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth (London) - especially during such a challenging time.



www.learningunlimited.co July 2021