

# The Learning Catalyst Approach – Toolkit

Raising Aspirations and Achievement in Families

Borough Council of  
**King's Lynn &  
West Norfolk**



## **Learning Catalysts – A Toolkit**

<b>The Fundamental Principles</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Role Description</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>Person Specification</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>Training in Information, Advice and Guidance</b>		<b>7</b>
<b>School Profile</b>	<b>St Edmund’s Community Foundation School</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>School Profile</b>	<b>Marshland St James Primary School &amp; Nursery</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>School Profile</b>	<b>Highgate Infant School</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Case Study</b>	<b>King’s Lynn Academy</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Babysitting Course, Hopes &amp; Dreams</b>	<b>15</b>

# The Fundamental Principles

## **Working with families:**

Because families reinforce cultures, whether these are of high aspirations and achievement, or low aspirations and an expectation of low-skilled, low paid work or benefit dependency.

## **Working with schools:**

Because schools are a central focus of their communities; they have a fund of knowledge about their communities and a stake in their children's achievement; and they are the main, if not the only, local 'mainstream' organisations with the potential to deliver change in the culture of learning among families over the sustained amount of time that this takes.

## **Working through one-to-one relationships:**

Because evidence and experience suggests that one-to-one relationships with support from trusted individuals is the most effective way of helping people to make changes in their lives. The Learning Catalyst project is based on recruiting role models from among a peer group rather than bringing in support from a professional advisor. The peer group in this instance are support staff – usually but not always teaching assistants – in schools, who live in the community and often are or have been parents of children in the school. Crucially, they are 'one of us' in both school and community.

***“...the school's Learning Catalyst ... is playing a valuable role in promoting the profile of the school in the community.”***

Primary School Ofsted Inspection report: conducted 2012

# Role Description

## Learning Catalysts...

### **Listen:**

Learning Catalysts are active, reflective and informed listeners for parents/carers, gradually building a relationship of trust, enabling parents not only to express their concerns and worries and their hopes and expectations but also empowering them to form their own decisions about what they are going to do to change things.

### **Initiate conversations:**

Conversations that begin to bring out parents' hopes and dreams for themselves and for their children.

### **Signpost:**

Towards information, advice and guidance and, increasingly, a provider of information, advice and guidance, to help translate hopes and dreams into plans.

### **Create opportunities:**

For parents and families to broaden horizons, build confidence; explore potential, experience learning and achievement. Creating these opportunities is vital. It gives adults permission to try something out in an environment where encouragement and support are the main features. Learning is a risk: it is possible to fail. For many adults, especially in neighbourhoods of deprivation, failure has been a common experience and self-esteem is very low.

### **Observe and record progress:**

Recording the impact of a learning activity or the provision of information, advice and guidance on behaviours and progression; providing evidence of change and of what works and what doesn't.

### **Are positive, 'can do' role models:**

Learning Catalysts become sufficiently empowered to be learners themselves and to demonstrate by example that taking part in learning is not an admission of failure to achieve but a statement of confidence and self-belief.

# Person Specification

Developed from the experiences of the Learning Catalysts

## Experience, Knowledge and Understanding

- A role in school
- Some knowledge of the school's systems and understanding of the school's aims
- A link into the local community
- Some knowledge and understanding of the local community

## Qualifications

- No previous qualifications are necessary
- Willingness to take up training in information, advice and guidance

## Skills and Abilities

### ▪ **Good listening skills**

*Knowing when to be silent, giving space allowing someone to talk to someone they can trust about something they don't normally voice ... not saying you understand what they feel when you can't ... good eye contact ... referring to something someone told you about at an earlier time ... nods & gestures, asking them to elaborate on what they've said*

### ▪ **Organising skills**

*Able to identify the resources and people you need and bring them together ... keeping files of information up to date ... completing the necessary admin at the time*

### ▪ **Able to find out information and present it in a way that is appropriate for others, or to learn these skills**

*Thinking about what others need to know ... building up and using networks ... clarity ... thinking about presenting things in an easy to understand way ... recognising that not all people can read well or speak the same language*

### ▪ **Able to observe and record behaviour or to learn these skills**

*Not becoming too emotionally involved ... recognising changes in how people respond and what they say and do ... picking out the important bits ... making clear notes that are appropriate for others to see*

### ▪ **Able to share information and responsibilities**

*Trying not to keep information to yourself, promoting team spirit, recognising other people's skills, allowing other people to become involved*

# Person Specification

Developed from the experiences of the Learning Catalysts

## Characteristics

- **Approachable**

*Willing to listen, to make time for others, have a smile, make links, say hello, demonstrate a sense of humour, an interest in others ... encouraging ... one of the community*

- **Interested in other people**

*Able to get beyond your own concerns and feelings at times ... remembering things you've been told ... picking up the conversation*

- **Enthusiastic**

*Finding energy ... sometimes in the face of disappointment or challenge ... demonstrating a positive attitude ... being resilient*

- **Caring**

*Taking the time ... making people feel at ease ... being interested ... showing empathy ... thinking hard about other ways of seeing the world and other ways of behaving ... able to keep to boundaries*

- **Fair**

*Trying not to make judgements ... trying to be consistent towards all those you work with ... doing what you've said you'll do ... making time to listen and respond ... being aware of your own prejudices*

- **Resourceful**

*Becoming informed ... looking for answers ... making links and connections ... working on behalf of others ... signposting*

- **Trustworthy**

*Maintaining confidentiality ... being consistent ... having a genuine manner ... following things through ... remembering what you have been told*

# Training in Information, Advice & Guidance

Learning Catalysts are encouraged to take Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) training at Level 2 and/or 3. It is delivered via the NVQ route, with support from a mentor and assessor. This training provides a sound knowledge base and includes:

- How to work within and set boundaries
- Confidentiality
- Using networks
- Referral procedures
- Interviewing, listening, questioning skills
- Keeping records.

IAG training can also act as a progression pathway for the personal and career development of the Learning Catalyst. IAG training helps equip the Learning Catalyst to carry out a range of tasks that are key to the role, such as:

## Providing Information

- Printed materials such as leaflets
- Verbal information, one to one interviews
- Information obtained from other sources, e.g. Benefits information
- Signposting to other services

## Advice and Guidance

- Personalised information including referrals
- Helping individuals link their interests to jobs and learning
- Assisting individuals to understand and act on information they receive
- Helping people make informed choices
- Helping people access learning, including: Further and Higher Education, Adult and Community Education and learning/training in the workplace

The Learning Catalysts use their skills and training to assist individuals to address and overcome barriers in their lives and then support them to make realistic and well informed choices. They do not try to make people's choices for them: they recognise that in order for people to change their lives, it is necessary for them to begin to take control over their own lives and responsibility for their own decisions.

*"We learn, when we respect the dignity of the people, that they cannot be denied the elementary right to participate fully in the solutions to their own problems.*

*Self-respect arises only out of people who play an active role in solving their own crises and who are not helpless, passive, puppet-like recipients of private or public services.*

*To give people help, while denying them a significant part of the action, contributes nothing to the development of the individual. In the deepest sense, it is not giving but taking - their dignity.*

*Denial of opportunity for participation is the denial of human dignity and democracy. It will not work."*

(Saul D Alinsky: Rules for Radicals, 1971)

# School Profile

St Edmund's Community Foundation School

## St Edmund's Community Foundation School

The learning catalyst approach was used to help build a relationship of trust between families and the school in order to raise the self esteem and confidence of parents.

### Good practice to share

- Strong support of the Learning Catalyst by the Head Teacher
- Dedicated family room
- Good multi-agency and community partnerships
- The Learning Catalyst has been a particularly positive role model for parents

### Key benefits

- Parents who had a bad experience of school themselves could come into school and talk to staff: there has been more co-operation and less anger because parents know that they are listened to
- The number of parents engaged in some way with the school has doubled
- The Head and teaching staff have less family problems (debt, health, housing, family crises) to deal with and can concentrate more on the educational issues: the Learning Catalyst has supported parents to tackle such issues, drawing on links with other agencies
- Now that the level of confidence and trust has been built up, it is becoming possible to get parents and children working together and parents to take up learning on their own account

### Context

St Edmund's Community Foundation School serves North Lynn, an area of some 2,000 households mostly in social housing. Pupils are mainly from white English speaking families. Racial tolerance on the estate is not high.

A majority of adults are not in paid work. The whole of North Lynn is among the 10% most deprived areas in England, about one-third of the area in the 2% most deprived. In terms of education and skills, the whole area is within the 1% most deprived in England.

The school has about 180 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 11. The majority come from homes "experiencing high levels of

challenge" (Ofsted report 2007). Almost half have special educational needs, eligibility for free school meals is higher than the national average, the persistent absence rate is high, and results are significantly lower than the national average.

Over the last few years there have been several changes in leadership, so that stability has often been short-lived. The present Head teacher took up her post in September 2009.



# School Profile

St Edmund's Community Foundation School

## The Learning Catalyst work at St Edmund's

The Learning Catalyst at St Edmund's was also a Midday Supervisor. In her Learning Catalyst role, she ran a parent and toddler group two mornings a week, card-making and craft classes, drop-in sessions with guest speakers, an outreach library with the Library Service, English and Maths classes with Adult Education, making story sacks, a swap-shop for clothes, a reading cafe and two computers for parents' use.

She also made sure that she was available as a listener and provider of or signpost to information, advice and guidance; and in this role has established good links with a variety of agencies. The Head teacher is very supportive of the Learning Catalyst and values the role. One of the first things she did was to make a classroom available as a dedicated family room, with an entrance separate from the main school entrance for parents to use.

## Impact of the Learning Catalyst work at St Edmund's

***"Parents know the kettle is on and that there is always a warm and welcoming feeling..."*** *Learning Catalyst*

Progression in this community is often about overcoming barriers and building a relationship of trust. 'Hopes and dreams' for themselves and their children are quite a long way off for most parents, let alone plans for achieving them. The Learning Catalyst lives on the estate and her children went until recently to the same school. Parents can talk to her. She says:

*"If parents have had a bad experience themselves in school they are reluctant to speak to a teacher ... I explain my role as the bridge between the school and the parents. Parents know the kettle is on and that there is always a warm and welcoming feeling when anyone enters the room. We want our parents to feel*

*that the room is there for them and that they are welcome at any time".*

The Head Teacher says:

*"The pastoral support that our Learning Catalyst provides for families is invaluable and contributes highly to the 'building relationships' work that we are doing. We have at least doubled the families that we are engaging with. Our Family Learning Room is like a one-stop-shop for support or signposting - so needed, and something I do not have time to do."*

Last year, Adult Education offered a maths class in this school. Five parents – including the LC - signed up and gained a Level one. This would have been unthinkable before the project took off.

*"Every class that is run, e.g. literacy or computers, I do as well as the parents. I'm no different to them and I want to learn too, so this is good for them to see. One of my biggest achievements as an LC is encouraging other people to learn."*

# School Profile

Marshland St James Primary School & Nursery

## Marshland St James Primary School & Nursery

The Learning Catalyst approach is being used to develop the role and skills of administrative staff and to support a culture of change towards aspiration and attainment.

### Good practice to share

- Commitment to the community from the Head teacher and whole school.
- Head teacher's enthusiastic support for the opportunities offered by the Learning Catalyst approach and for the Learning Catalysts themselves, often taking the role of a mentor.
- Good teamwork by the two Learning Catalysts.

### Key benefits

- Increased informal contact between parents (and grandparents) and the school is proving valuable in encouraging more family members to take part in school activities and has helped the school to bring about a significant advance in pupil attendance.
- Parents spend more quality time with their children and are becoming more involved in their children's learning.
- Learning Catalysts have helped individuals to talk through what they want to do and to achieve their aims.

### Context

Marshland St James primary school is set in the centre of a long, linear Fens village. Community facilities are not, therefore, within easy reach of many; the nearest shop is in a neighbouring village and the nearest pub at one extreme end of the village. The school has an important role as a focus for the community. When the Head teacher took up her post in September 2007, the community was deeply divided over a development proposal.

Families in Marshland St James tend to work locally. The proportion of professionals is low; qualifications and earnings are low. The Head has noted a lack of aspiration: parents are content with relatively low attainment and

reluctant to push their children to reach their potential.

Attendance levels have been poor over time. The school has around 100 pupils: almost all are from white British backgrounds and there is a small but significant number from Traveller families. The school places a high priority on celebrating the cultures of all its communities and is regarded as a centre of good practice in integration by the Traveller Education Service.

A recent Ofsted inspection (Oct 2009) noted that the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well above average; and the numbers of pupils who leave or join at times other than the start of the school year is high.

# School Profile

Marshland St James Primary School & Nursery

## The Learning Catalyst work at Marshland St James

Marshland St James has two Learning Catalysts, both working in the school office. They work well together, complementing each other; and have given a great deal of thought to how they can combine the Learning Catalyst roles with their administrative duties. As a result, the school office has become a much broader point of contact with parents. They run an Information Station and a Book Exchange trolley ('Read it, Swap it').

The Learning Catalysts have organised and helped organise a variety of events such as

Fun with First Aid, French Day, Family Quiz, Maths workshop, Mother's Day card making, Breakfast with Books on World Book Day and a unique reading and writing project comprising several sessions in the theme of a Fens Heritage Day.

The Learning Catalysts have also encouraged parents to participate in courses that are run by external agencies, such as ICT and Keeping up with your Children, run by Norfolk Family Learning, whilst taking part themselves

## Impact of the Learning Catalyst work at Marshland St James

***"Informal and very valuable. Parents are more at home in school"*** Head Teacher

The Head has reported increased contact with parents:

"Informal and very valuable. Parents are more at home in school: they will chat about anything and nothing: there is more of a feeling of ownership."

This in turn is seen to have made an important contribution to getting parents to attend events such as parents' evenings. As parents take part in activities with their children, they have said how much they enjoy having quality time with their children and have become more confident about being involved in their children's learning.

There is a feeling that each person is valued and effort is made to help them discover

and realise their potential. A school cleaner confided in the Learning Catalyst that she had always wanted to work with children and was encouraged and supported in becoming a Teaching Assistant.

The report of the Ofsted team following their inspection in October 2009 noted:

"Good partnerships have been built with parents and a range of other agencies and providers. The effectiveness of the work done to promote partnerships with parents is seen in rising attendance at parents' consultations. Much of the credit for this is due to a local initiative, which has been running for three years or so. The school, and in particular the two administrative staff who have been trained, have worked very hard and successfully, using an imaginative range of events and courses, to involve parents. This has enabled parents to be more supportive of their children's learning".

# School Profile

Highgate Infant School

## Highgate Infant School

Integrating the Learning Catalyst role into an entire school's approach that makes raising aspirations explicit and creates a positive 'can do' attitude to learning.

### Good practice to share

- Vision and strong leadership from the Head and Governors.
- The whole school fosters a 'can do' culture
- New parent interviews:  
*(Parents talk not only to the Reception Teacher about their children but also to the Learning Catalyst about their hopes and dreams for themselves and their children. No parent feels singled out: this is part of the normal way of greeting families into school.)*

### Key benefits

- Every parent has had at least one opportunity to talk through their aspirations for themselves and their children with the Learning Catalyst.
- More Dads are involved with the school through the Learning Catalyst work.
- Parents who have taken part in English and maths courses have gained confidence in helping their children with their reading, writing and maths.

### Context

Highgate Infant School has traditionally served a working class area on the edge of King's Lynn town centre. Within the last few years, migrant worker families have moved into privately-rented houses and the school population has changed significantly as a result. The school roll is a little over 80 and now has a higher than average proportion of pupils with English as an additional language. A

recent (Dec 2009) Ofsted report notes that the percentage of children with special educational needs, especially speech and language or learning difficulties is also above average. The Head teacher took up her appointment recently, having previously been Deputy Head; and has maintained the whole school approach to raising aspirations.

# School Profile

Highgate Infant School

## The Learning Catalyst work at Highgate

Two Teaching Assistants spend some ten to twelve hours a week in the Learning Catalyst role.

“The hopes and dreams interviews evolved from the family work stories we did at the start of the project. While we were talking to the families about work stories we started to ask about their hopes and dreams for the future. We realised how powerful this could be as the parents said ‘I don’t really know’, and ‘no-one has ever asked me that before’. We discussed this and decided it would be really great to make time to sit down with the parents in a non-formal way and ask these kinds of questions.”

“At first, we didn’t know if this was going

to work, but it has just become a part of the introduction into school. I have been doing these interviews now for the past four years, and have had time to talk to every parent at our school.”

In addition to new parent interviews, the Learning Catalysts have run creative activities – among the most successful being painting a mural on the outside of the mobile classroom and planting container gardens; family cooking; a reading and writing project centred on folk stories from different cultures; and organised other agencies to deliver sessions and courses including ‘Facing Fears’, personal development, English and maths, Information Advice and Guidance.

## Impact of the Learning Catalyst work at Highgate

***“I’ve never got a certificate before I feel really proud”*** Parent

“The most important part of my role is being a role model and the person who says ‘you’d be good at that’ or ‘give it a go’. The painting of the school mural was really well attended and from this I made really good bonds with a wide selection of parents. This helped raise my profile within school and each time we do an activity you can see the parents’ confidence raise.”

“When I suggested that the school hold Adult Education English and maths classes, some of the parents were hesitant. I said I too would be doing the course, if I could do it they could (they know how bad my spelling is!). I promised they’d have fun and I’d supply the cakes. We managed to get 8 parents sign up and the College of West Anglia came and delivered the course. The course proved to be really good fun. During one of the classes a parent said ‘I’ve never

got a certificate before I feel really proud’. “All the parents and I passed and are now going to do Level 2. The parents themselves are now role models not only for their children but to the other parents asking them to come along saying ‘you’d be really good at it’ or ‘give it a go’.”

The Ofsted report noted at the end of 2009:

“An impressive aspect of the school's work is the support and encouragement given to some parents and carers, helping them to be ambitious for their children and for themselves ... These measures, and others, have resulted in improved attendance recently ... Leaders are ambitious for the staff, parents and children and 'You can do it' is almost a school mantra. Staff training greatly enhances the work of the school. Many support staff have gained qualifications, setting a good example to the parents, who are increasingly making the most of the training and advice offered by the school.”

# Case Study

King's Lynn Academy

## King's Lynn Academy (formerly The Park High School)

In The King's Lynn Academy, the Learning Catalysts is a teaching assistant working with young people who are at risk of dropping out of education. This is one of her case studies.

\* \* \*

"[He] came to see me very upset; I said 'would you like a chat?'. He said 'Yes but not in front of the class'. I replied 'We do not talk in front of others; I can give you a time to come and see me on my own'. We arranged to meet at lunchtime.

He said his mum said he would not get into college as he was so thick and he wanted to go to college to do a course working with wood. I asked if he had been to a connexions meeting, he said yes and showed me the book. I asked if he had shown it to his mother. This was when she had told him he was too thick to do it. I asked why his mum thought this: he said 'All my family are on the dole'.

He did not know how to fill in the application form. I said I can help you do that if you want to. 'Yes please' he replied. So we filled in the form.

'Can your mum or a member of your family go [to the interview] with you?' He said they will not, I asked 'what about a friend for support the first time?' 'No,' he said, 'I will not bother then'.

I said if you want the course you have to have an interview first: they will tell you what you need to know and what the course is about. 'I'm not going then'. He said it was because he was scared. [After discussion about who he wouldn't mind asking to go with him he said he would ask his social worker].

He did go to the interview with his social worker and if he gets the grades in August he has a place on the level one course. If not, he can do a lower level for the first year then go on to do the level one the year after. Mum agreed that he can go to college after the social worker had a long talk with her - so one happy man now. He feels grown up as he is going to college and doing a trade."

\* \* \*

# Case Study

## Target Opportunities & the Learning Catalysts

### Target Opportunities Knowledge Pack

Target Opportunities was an employment support project aimed at helping North Lynn residents find work, training or just to build their confidence. Delivered by the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk within a short, one year, timeframe and with only one worker the project sought to achieve much within a short space of time.

The primary challenge for the project was engagement. Reaching people that would benefit from the project and supporting them required tact and a neutral environment.

The difficulty faced was the limited opportunity to offer support to an individual. The project worker, usually faced with only a single opportunity to offer help to someone, would be forced to offer employment support straight away. Preferably the subject would be brought up naturally and gradually and support would be provided when needed and when wanted.

The Learning Catalyst approach provided an opportunity to do just that. Working with the St Edmund's Learning Catalyst, support was on hand whenever needed. The Learning Catalyst, armed with the support and knowledge of the Target Opportunities project worker, could broach subjects of employability naturally as they occurred in conversation with unemployed parents.

Ultimately this led to several one to one sessions and workshops being held at opportune moments in the parents' personal development. This made the support meaningful, helpful and, perhaps most importantly, wanted by those taking part.

***“The support of the Learning Catalyst enabled the Target Opportunities project to deliver support that would have otherwise been impossible.”***

*Target Opportunities Project Worker*

To maintain this success beyond the life of the Target Opportunities project, the Learning Catalyst approach has formed an integral part of its exit strategy. All Learning Catalyst schools have been provided with a comprehensive knowledge pack that contains information on a range of employment support subjects. This, coupled with an offer of workshop and information based support by the project worker, will ensure that Learning Catalysts will be confident in offering appropriate and timely support to those that would benefit most from it.

# Case Study

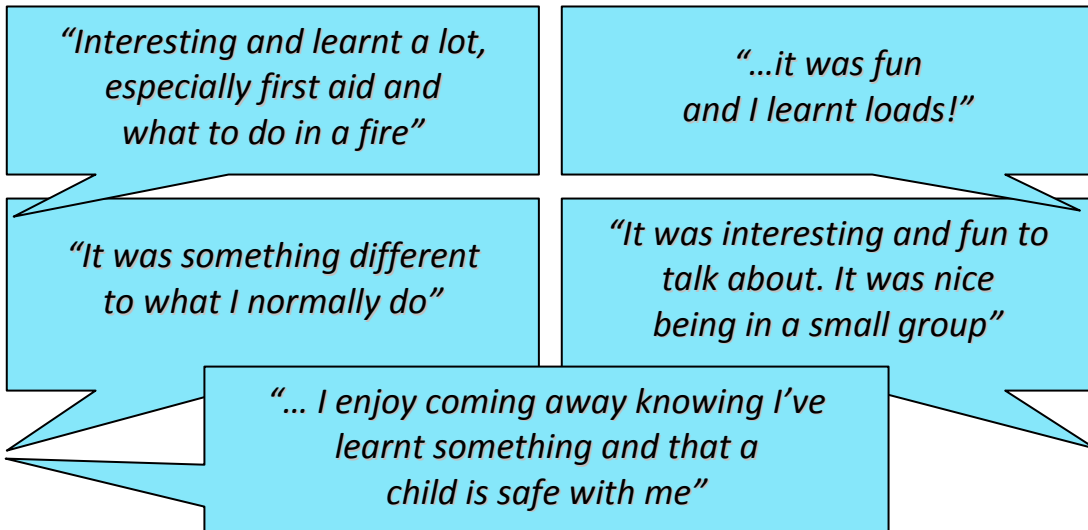
Babysitting course, Hopes & Dreams

## King's Lynn Academy & West Walton Community Primary School

The babysitting course was developed by Learning Catalysts at The King's Lynn Academy and West Walton Community Primary School from a model first used by the Norfolk Youth Service. West Walton Learning Catalysts have added the students' 'Hopes and Dreams' for their own futures.

Six sessions (one a week after school) include sessions on what babysitters and parents should expect when looking after babies and small children, a visit to a nursery or playgroup, healthy eating, basic first aid, safety in the home and personal safety with speakers from St John's Ambulance, Norfolk Fire Service and Norfolk Police with before and after quizzes on 'how much do you know about babysitting'.

### Quotes from Year 10 students



### Hopes and Dreams for yourself

