

# The Early Years Award

## Criteria

For the initiative that has done the most to improve the life chances of babies and young children, especially among disadvantaged or hard-to-reach communities. Entries are open to local authorities, nurseries, children's centres, nannies and childminders.

## Highly Commended

- Early Language Development Programme – Cheshire East Early Years and Childcare team

## Also shortlisted

- Amazing Babies – Eastfield Children's Centre, North Yorkshire



## Winner Starting Out, Together It's Child's Play - Borough of Poole

Parents in the south coast town of Poole have been encouraged to spend quality time with their young children thanks to this innovative resource developed by the council's 0-5 services team.

Central to Starting Out are activity sacks that parents borrow to use at home, recognising the key role that mums, dads and carers play in their children's development. The scheme also features a tool to help track children's progress during the Foundation Stage, workshops for parents, and training for practitioners.

After a pilot phase focusing on deprived areas, it was rolled out across Poole. Fourteen nurseries and pre-schools, six children's centres and 13 primary schools have so far adopted the resource.

Workshops for parents cover the fundamentals of brain development. Seeing how quickly the brain grows in the first three years of a child's life has had a "huge impact" on their desire to get involved in the project, say organisers.

Starting Out has helped many families,

including lone parents, teenage parents and those affected by domestic violence and mental health problems. But it has also played a pivotal role in forging stronger links between key services such as schools and early years settings, and children's centres and health and social care.

In addition, it has helped break down barriers between parents and schools. At one school, which had previously struggled to engage parents, 90 per cent attended at least one Starting Out workshop and 100 per cent of children borrowed an activity sack.

Before-and-after questionnaires completed by parents show the scheme has helped boost their confidence and knowledge, and they are now spending more time with their children on free or low-cost activities.

Our young judges were impressed with the project's impact and reach. "This project has created fantastic resources to make a long-term difference," says one.