

“I never read to my children before but since doing Story Sacks I read all the time to them and they have really come on great and they love reading now.”

Parent

Story Sacks



For who?

- Parents of children aged 3-8 who live or go to school in Ballymun.



What is it?

- 8 week course where parents learn skills and strategies and develop resources to promote children's language and literacy development and bring books to life.
- Informed by the Balanced Literacy Framework.



Who's involved?

- Delivered by *youngballymun* Family and Community Literacy Officer.
- Participants recruited through primary schools in partnership with Home School Community Liaison teachers.



So what?

- Increased parent involvement in children's literacy development.
- Increased use of active reading and vocabulary development strategies.
- Greater enjoyment of reading by parents and children.
- Improved child literacy.

Objectives

- To develop parents' understanding of their role in supporting children's literacy development.
- To support parents to develop ways of supporting their children's literacy development.
- To foster parents' involvement in their children's literacy development.

Principles

- Parents are the experts on their child and primary educators of their child.
- Parents supporting their children's literacy and language skills can significantly contribute to children's achievement in school, social and emotional development and life outcomes.
- A good parent-child relationship is associated with social, educational and psychological benefits.
- Engaging parents early in children's lives has the greatest potential to contribute to good outcomes.
- Responding to varying family needs, structures, cultural beliefs and linguistic differences.
- Proactive, seeking opportunities to engage parents and to develop and sustain relationships.
- Adopting a strengths-based approach, recognising parents' life experience, identifying strengths, building skills, knowledge and capacity of parents, raising awareness of the role of parents.
- Fostering parents' social and learning support for each other.
- Outcomes-focused approach with parents, providing services that parents view as meeting real

needs, are helpful and relevant, setting mutually satisfactory and achievable goals.

Core practice elements

The Story Sacks Programme has been developed by the *youngballymun* Write Minded team, based on a concept by Neil Griffiths, and is informed by a number of key theoretical and practical underpinnings:

- Balanced Literacy Framework which recommends that equal time is given to the various domains of literacy – reading comprehension, reading fluency, writing, and oral language.
- Social and emotional development and parenting – particular knowledge, understanding and skills gained through training in the Incredible Years training.
- First Steps language and literacy resources – making links with their children's school curriculum.
- Child development theory – in the context of the parent-child relationship, is integrated throughout the programme.
- Oral language development – with input, knowledge and expertise of Speech and Language Therapists, on using books to contribute to children's language and communication development.
- Adult learning principles – supported peer learning and tailoring to parents' particular needs.
- The tone of the programme and the way in which parents are engaged are crucial. The facilitator creates a fun atmosphere where everyone feels welcome and free to participate, modelling

approaches and behaviours that can be used in interactions with their children. For example, to foster a sense of excitement about books and love of reading, the technique of hugging books is used to encourage parents to develop their children's anticipation of and interest in books.

- The facilitator, through words and actions, should model that learning is fun and enjoyable and encourage positive attitudes to learning for parents and their children, giving parents opportunities to develop their children's imagination, language skills and a love of learning. Parents are encouraged to reflect on opportunities in their own home when they can engage their children in literacy development activities.

Format

- Weekly course over eight two-hour sessions for groups of up to 12 parents held in the parent rooms in Ballymun primary schools facilitated by Family and Community Literacy Development Officer.
- The weekly schedule of the Story Sacks Programme is as follows:
 - What is a Story Sack? Make reading exciting and fun, hugging books. Choosing books.
 - Act it out: Developing vocabulary, how children learn new words, acting out words.
 - Read to me: Using facial expressions, tone of voice and character voices, helping children become a fluent readers.
 - Sharing books: Taking turns reading with your child, using questions with stories.
 - Looking at fact books together: Using fact books, extending learning to the real world, discovering information in a fact book, IT for literacy and learning.
 - Playing games: Games and activities to help reading, writing and talking skills.
 - What did we do again? Finish making Story Sacks, review and recap about using Story Sacks.
 - Celebration: Presentation of Story Sacks to children, celebration of parents' participation.
- Over the duration of the course, each session follows a similar pattern of reviewing the application of literacy supporting techniques and approaches which have been discussed in the Programme; introducing new techniques and approaches; and development of handmade, tailored resources to support the application of the techniques and approaches with participants' children.

- Over 8 weeks, parents learn a range of skills and in parallel, create a resource pack (the 'Story Sack') to encourage active engagement of both parent and child with the books, including a fact book, story book and various games to stimulate language development and literacy skills.

Implementation requirements

Skills acquisition and development

- Key characteristics of facilitators required for delivery of the Programme include a belief in the power of parents to support their children; passion, enthusiasm and a love of books; knowledge and understanding of literacy development in children and adults; group facilitation skills and reflective learning capacity.
- Story Sacks is delivered by the Family and Community Literacy Development Officer who is an experienced and qualified Adult Literacy teacher with skills in adult and family literacy, community development and group facilitation.
- A Story Sacks manual details the content, practices and materials required for each session.
- Training and observation of practice on Story Sacks, Hanen You Make the Difference, the Balanced Literacy Framework, Incredible Years programmes, and First Steps resources informs delivery.

Structures and resources to support this work

- Home School Community Liaison teachers support the implementation of the programme through advertising, promoting it to parents and assisting with recruitment.
- Story Sacks is hosted by local schools in parent rooms, providing refreshments, which facilitates parental participation. Schools also resource the purchasing of books for the programme.
- Administrative support to text parents in advance of each session and photocopy and laminate materials for the children's literacy resources that are provided for parents.
- A range of art materials and other stationery are needed to deliver the programme.
- 3-weekly programme team meetings to reflect on and review progress and plan implementation
- Quarterly facilitated implementation team meetings with key education and community sector partners to advise on and guide the ongoing implementation of the strategy.
- Resourcing as part of an integrated wider strategy to improve child outcomes.

