

EARLY YEARS PROJECT IMPACT REPORT



2012

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2026

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1. About LD:NorthEast

LD:NorthEast has delivered specialist early years support for children and families across North Tyneside since 2012. Our Early Years programme supports children aged 0–5 with learning and/or physical disabilities, communication difficulties, complex health needs, or life-limiting conditions.

Our approach combines child focused developmental support with structured parenting intervention, recognising that parents are the primary drivers of early childhood development outcomes.

Over 14 years, our programme has been continuously funded by national funders, including 12 years of support from BBC Children in Need and current funding from the Masonic Charitable Foundation, demonstrating sustained impact, credibility and trust.



2. The Need

Children with additional needs face significant and compounding barriers to early childhood development. Children with learning disabilities, communication difficulties and complex health needs are more likely to experience delays across key developmental domains,

including communication, social interaction and physical development. These risks are often exacerbated where families face barriers to accessing early years provision and support.

Many of the families we support:

- are unable to access mainstream early years provision
- experience isolation linked to disability and complex health needs
- face challenges navigating health, education and support systems

As a result, children have fewer opportunities to engage in high quality play, social interaction and early learning experiences that are critical for development.

Our work is strongly targeted towards families experiencing the greatest levels of disadvantage. Postcode analysis using the UK Government's Office for National Statistics Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) shows that:

70% of families we support live in the 10% most deprived areas nationally, with a further 21% living in the 20% most deprived areas.

Research consistently shows that children living in poverty are more likely to experience poorer early childhood development outcomes, particularly when combined with additional needs. This creates a compounding disadvantage for the families we support.

Identified System Gap

Through our long term work with families, we have identified a clear gap in support as children transition out of early years provision. Families typically engage with our Early Years programme for an extended period, receiving intensive support for an average of three years. However as children move into school, parents frequently report a loss of support, peer networks and trusted guidance, despite their needs remaining high or increasing.

Due to the strength of relationships built:

Over 60% of families continue to seek support from LD:NorthEast beyond the age of five.

This reflects both the level of trust established and a lack of accessible, ongoing support for families of children with additional needs. In response, we have piloted a Family Project to address this gap, generating further insight into the importance of sustained parenting support and continuity of relationships across key transition points.

3. Our Approach: Parenting Led Early Intervention

Our programme improves early childhood development by strengthening parental confidence and capability, enabling parents to actively support their child's learning, communication and wellbeing.

We deliver a structured programme of early years support through play based sessions and ongoing engagement with families. This includes sensory and Stay & Play sessions, communication focused activities such as Makaton, and opportunities for parents to connect with peers and access practical guidance. Alongside group delivery, we provide tailored support to help families navigate key transitions, including into education, and offer outreach support in community and health settings where needed. We keep group sizes small in order to effectively cater for the needs of the individual children.

A core element of our approach is working directly with parents during sessions. Through guided play and interaction, parents are supported to understand their child's development, recognise their individual needs, and build confidence in using practical strategies.



Parents are supported to:

- develop and apply communication techniques
- use play to support learning and development
- respond effectively to their child's needs and behaviours

This enables parents to continue supporting their child's development beyond sessions, embedding changes within the home environment.

Thomas, aged 6 months, was born prematurely with Down syndrome and significant medical complications, including heart problems requiring multiple surgeries. His parent initially felt overwhelmed and isolated, unsure how to support his development alongside ongoing health concerns. Through early engagement with sessions, they gained confidence in using play and communication to support Thomas and built relationships with other families. Despite continued hospital admissions, Thomas made steady developmental progress, and his parent described the support as a "lifeline" during an extremely challenging time.

4. Reach and Scale Over the Past 14 Years

Our longitudinal data demonstrates sustained delivery, consistent demand, and strong targeting of families most at risk of poor early childhood development outcomes.

*Across 14 years our early years provision has supported:
1204 children aged 0-5 years.*

*This totals over 3000 people including support given to parents and
siblings.*

Our programme is highly targeted towards those experiencing the greatest disadvantage. Our work takes place in North Tyneside, where postcode analysis shows that 91% of families we support live in the 20% most deprived areas nationally, including 70% in the 10% most deprived areas.

While some of our work supports children across a wider age range, there is a clear and consistent early years focus; 75% of all children supported are aged 0–5. This reflects our emphasis on early intervention and supporting families through the critical early years and transition into education. Together, this data demonstrates a well established, high demand programme that consistently reaches children and families facing the greatest barriers to early childhood development.

5. Outcomes: Improving Early Childhood Development (ECD)

Our programme delivers measurable improvements across all key domains of Early Childhood Development (ECD) - cognitive, social and emotional, and physical development - based on outcomes consistently recorded across our reporting.

Rather than focusing solely on participation, our model supports sustained changes in parenting behaviour, which in turn drive improvements in children's development.

Liam, aged 3, had complex communication delays and often became distressed due to an inability to communicate his needs. Through consistent support and use of communication strategies both in sessions and at home, he developed over 50 signs and began using key words. This significantly reduced frustration and enabled him to engage more positively with others, take part in play and express himself more confidently.

Cognitive Development (Communication and Learning)

Across our reporting, children supported through the project demonstrate significant improvements in communication and understanding.

93% of children showed measurable progress in communication and cognitive development.

This includes:

- increased use of communication methods such as speech, signing and symbols
- improved understanding and responsiveness
- greater engagement in play and early learning



These outcomes are achieved through active parental involvement. Parents are supported within sessions to use communication strategies, model language and reinforce learning, and increasingly report confidence in applying these approaches in the home environment over time.

Daniel, aged 10 months, showed early signs of developmental delay and had limited opportunity to engage in play and interaction. His parent initially lacked confidence and avoided group settings. Through attending sessions, they developed the confidence to engage, play and communicate with Daniel, strengthening their relationship and supporting his development. Over time, both became noticeably more confident, engaged and connected.

Social and Emotional Development

Children also demonstrate strong improvements in social interaction, confidence and emotional regulation.

95% of children show improvements in social and emotional development.

Children develop:

- increased confidence in group settings
- the ability to interact and play alongside peers
- improved emotional regulation and engagement

These changes are supported by parents developing confidence in responding to their child's needs, modelling social interaction, and creating consistent, supportive environments.

Physical Development (Sensory and Motor Skills)

Many children accessing the programme experience sensory and physical challenges that can limit their ability to engage with their environment.

Across our reporting, children demonstrate gradual but consistent progress over time in their ability to engage physically and sensorially. This includes:

- increasing tolerance of sensory experiences
- greater participation in physical and exploratory play
- improved interaction with their environment

While these outcomes are more individualised and typically observed as incremental progress rather than measured through fixed percentages, they are consistently evidenced across our delivery. Progress is often seen in small but significant steps, reflecting the complex needs of the children we support.



Parents play a central role in achieving these outcomes. Through supported sessions, they develop a deeper understanding of their child's sensory needs and are equipped with practical strategies to support engagement. Over time, parents increasingly apply these approaches within the home, enabling children to engage more confidently both within sessions and in everyday environments.

Sammie, aged 23 months, has severe global developmental delay and a visual impairment, which limited his ability to engage with his surroundings. Through regular participation in play based sessions alongside his parent, he began to show increased awareness, interaction and physical engagement. His parent described these changes as significant, particularly given his starting point, and felt more confident in supporting his development at home.

Across our reporting, these developmental outcomes are closely interconnected rather than occurring in isolation. Improvements in communication, confidence and engagement enable children to participate more fully in new environments and successfully transition into early years and school settings. This is supported by increased parental confidence and capability, ensuring children are better prepared to engage beyond the home. These patterns are consistently observed across our delivery and reflect a clear pathway in which strengthened parenting leads directly to improved interaction and, in turn, sustained progress across early childhood development.

Ethan, aged 3, had not accessed nursery due to behavioural challenges and difficulty interacting with peers. The project worked closely with his parent and professionals to prepare for transition. Through the introduction of visual aids and a communication plan, the nursery staff were able to feel comfortable in his new surroundings. Ethan is now settled in a specialist nursery, calmer, more engaged and able to participate in learning in a way that was previously not possible.

7. Impact on Parents and Families

Our programme places parents at the centre of change, recognising that improvements in early childhood development are driven by confident, supported and informed caregivers.

Across our reporting, parents consistently describe improved wellbeing and reduced isolation as a result of engaging with LD:NorthEast.

100% of parents report improved wellbeing and reduced isolation

Parent Outcomes

Through sustained engagement with the programme, parents demonstrate clear and consistent improvements over time. These include increased confidence in their parenting role, a stronger understanding of their child's needs, and an enhanced ability to actively support their child's development. Parents also report reduced anxiety and greater resilience, particularly where they have previously experienced isolation or difficulty accessing appropriate support.

Oliver, aged 12 months, was referred shortly after diagnosis, and his parent described feeling extremely isolated and struggling to cope. Through engagement with the programme, they gradually built relationships with other families and gained confidence in supporting Oliver's development through play. Access to support at this early stage helped improve their wellbeing and provided emotional stability during a critical period for both parent and child.

Behaviour Change in Parents

These improvements translate into observable changes in parenting behaviour. Across our delivery, parents increasingly:

- initiate and lead developmental play within the home
- use communication strategies, including tools such as Makaton, independently
- support their child through key transitions, including into early years and school settings
- confidently advocate for their child when engaging with health, education and support services

This behaviour change is critical in sustaining outcomes for children beyond structured sessions.

Maya, aged 2, attended sessions with her parent, who initially lacked confidence in supporting her development through play and communication. Within sessions, staff worked alongside her parent to model simple play based strategies, including using Makaton signs, following Maya's lead in play, and building interaction through everyday activities. Her parent was encouraged to practise these approaches during sessions and at home, with ongoing guidance and reassurance from staff. Over time, they developed the confidence to actively engage with Maya, using play and communication techniques independently. As their confidence grew, Maya became more responsive and engaged, strengthening their relationship and creating more positive day to day interactions.



Long Term Impact and Sustained Engagement

A key strength of our programme is the long term relationships we build with families. Many parents continue to engage with LD:NorthEast beyond early years provision.

Across our work, families frequently report a loss of support once early years services end, including peer networks and trusted sources of advice, despite ongoing need.

Over 60% of families continue to seek support beyond early years provision

This continued engagement reflects both the strength of relationships established and a gap in ongoing support for families of children with additional needs.

Our ongoing support helps to:

- sustain parental confidence over time
- reduce long term isolation
- support families through key transition points

Megan, aged 4, has Down syndrome and had been supported by LD:NorthEast since infancy. As she transitioned into nursery, her parent described feeling a loss of the trusted support and peer networks they had relied on during early years. We continued to check in with the family after this transition, ensuring Megan was settling well and that her parent felt supported. As a result, the family went on to engage with the Family Hub, where they accessed ongoing support, peer connections and advice.

8. Why Our Approach Works and Contribution to Systems Learning

Our approach is grounded in evidence based early years practice and strengthened through long term delivery, close partnership working and continuous learning from families and professionals. At the core of our model is a play based, parent led approach, where children learn through interaction and exploration, and parents are supported to actively facilitate their child's development. This is combined with a "small steps" methodology, enabling incremental, measurable progress for children with complex needs.

Our inclusive delivery model ensures that children who are unable to access mainstream provision are supported in environments that are responsive to their needs, while parents are equipped with practical strategies they can apply consistently at home.

Working Within and Strengthening Local Systems

Our programme plays an active role within the local early years and SEND system. We work closely with a range of professionals, including speech and language therapists, Portage services and SEND teams, contributing to Team Around the Family (TAF) processes, Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and shared assessments of children's needs.

Through this integrated approach, we support a more coordinated understanding of each child and contribute to improved outcomes across services.

We also influence practice within early years settings by modelling inclusive approaches, sharing tools such as Makaton and sensory strategies, and supporting practitioners to adapt provision for children with additional needs. This helps build confidence and capacity within the wider workforce.

Amelia, aged 3, has Down syndrome and uses signing to communicate, developing a strong range of signs to express her needs. When she started mainstream nursery, staff initially struggled to support her communication, and she found it difficult to interact with peers, becoming frustrated. LD:NorthEast worked alongside the setting to introduce Makaton strategies, including “sign of the day” and visual supports, enabling both staff and children to communicate with her. Over time, Amelia became more able to engage socially and participate in activities alongside her peers.



Bridging Gaps for Families

A key role of our programme is acting as a trusted intermediary between families and services. Many families we support face barriers engaging with statutory systems. Through ongoing relationships, we support parents to:

- navigate SEND processes and services
- access appropriate support
- advocate effectively for their child

This improves engagement with services and helps ensure families are better supported within the system.

Jacob, aged 2, was recently diagnosed, and his parent described feeling overwhelmed and unsure how to navigate the range of services available. LD:NorthEast supported them to understand assessments, access appropriate support and engage with professionals. Over time, the parent became more confident in advocating for Jacob and accessing the support he was entitled to.

Learning from Feedback and Long Term Engagement

Our evidence base over 14 years, combined with sustained relationships with families, enables us to identify patterns of need and gaps in provision. Through this work, we have identified a consistent gap in support for families as children transition out of early years provision. Families report a loss of trusted relationships, peer networks and practical guidance at this stage, despite ongoing need. In response, we piloted a Family Project, which has provided valuable insight into how continued parenting support can address this gap and support families through key transition points.

We use our historical dataset and ongoing feedback from families to:

- continually refine our delivery
- design services that respond to emerging needs
- identify effective approaches to supporting children with complex needs

This ensures our work remains responsive, evidence based and grounded in real world experience.

Our early years provision is shaped directly by the lived experience of the families and communities we support, through long term, trusted relationships built over sustained engagement. We create safe, inclusive environments where families feel known, supported and confident to participate, led by staff with lived experience of disability who bring a deep understanding of the challenges families face. Alongside continuous day to day feedback, our participation group, made up of adults with learning disabilities and autism and parents of children with additional needs, actively shapes our services, including co-creating and delivering elements such as the Family Hub. This ongoing dialogue informs how we adapt our delivery, from maintaining small, trusted group sizes and strengthening support during key transitions to increasing practical guidance around SEND systems. As a result, our work remains responsive, relevant and grounded in real-world experience, with families actively influencing how support is designed and delivered.

9. Conclusion

Over the past 14 years, LD:NorthEast has developed and sustained a high impact early years programme that improves outcomes for children with additional needs by strengthening the confidence and capability of parents. Our historical data and case evidence demonstrate consistent improvements across all areas of early childhood development, alongside meaningful and sustained changes in parenting behaviour. Through long term, trusted relationships with families and strong partnership working, we not only support children and parents directly, but also contribute to strengthening the wider early years and SEND system. Our work highlights both what is effective in supporting early childhood development and where gaps remain, particularly at key transition points. As a result, we are well positioned to continue delivering, refining and scaling a model of support that is responsive, evidence based and rooted in the lived experiences of the communities we serve.

10. Thank You to Funders

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to our principal funders, BBC Children in Need and the Masonic Charitable Foundation, for their continued and invaluable support over many years.