



A Better Start case study



**NATIONAL
LOTTERY FUNDED**

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)



A Better Start

A Better Start is funded by the Big Lottery Fund using National Lottery funding. It is a ten-year programme focused on developing and testing new approaches to promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD). The A Better Start partnerships have developed locally tailored strategies to promote ECD, focusing on three key child development outcomes: diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication.

Fathers Reading Every Day

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) is an evidence-based programme designed to encourage dads to read to their child or children every day.

FRED is being delivered in the A Better Start areas of Blackpool, Nottingham, and Southend.

A Better Start early childhood development outcome the service aims to improve is **speech, language and communication**.



What are the key aims of the service?

FRED aims to:

- encourage the engagement of fathers in their children's early years settings and schools
- increase the amount of time fathers spend reading to their children and the numbers of books read to children
- improve closeness and attachment between fathers and young children
- improve school readiness for children aged 2 to 4 leading to better outcomes at age 5 in literacy, numeracy and maths.
- The programme was developed in the United States by Texas A&M AgriLife Extensive Services. The Fatherhood Institute is providing FRED training for practitioners in the United Kingdom.

Who is the service for?

FRED is for children aged 2-4 and their fathers and/or father figures.

What is the evidence base for the service?

Children who grow up with warm, nurturing, and actively involved fathers do better at school and in further education, have higher self-esteem and build closer relationships with other children. Research shows that children whose fathers read to them at age 1-2 have a greater interest in books later in childhood.

fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-their-childrens-education/

An evaluation of FRED using pre and post measures was commissioned by Fatherhood Institute. The study indicated the positive impact of the programme on children's reading, writing and numeracy in nine UK primary schools.

Forrest, S. & Lloyd, T. (2014) *Results of an evaluation of outcomes and impact for FRED*. Available at: fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FRED-evaluation-report-Sep-2014.pdf

A more recent study of FRED in the United States found that dads reported improvements in their children's language abilities, auditory comprehension and expressive communication skills, and a reduction in behavioural problems. It also enhanced their parenting skills.

Chacko, A. et al. (2017) [Engaging fathers in effective parenting for preschool children using shared book reading: A Randomized Controlled Trial](#). *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*.

How is the service run?

FRED is delivered by early years practitioners, teachers, speech and language therapists, and volunteer fathers at children's centres, schools, libraries, community and workplace settings.

Core content of the service

Fathers are introduced to the programme at a group event or individually. They are presented with evidence about paternal impacts on children's outcomes and are then asked to read to their children for 10-30 mins per day for 4 weeks depending on child's age. The aim is that they will continue this practice beyond the duration of the programme.

Fathers and children who take part attend an introductory literacy event at the school or setting and when the four week programme is complete are awarded certificates and take part in a celebration. They have access to a library of books and/or a special anthology and can attend their local library, children centre or school every week to change their books and report on their progress.

Innovations in A Better Start partnerships

A Better Start Southend

A Better Start Southend is working in partnership with local children's centres, schools, libraries, and food banks to deliver FRED sessions for families with pre-school children. Minor adaptations to the programme have been made to firstly engage the most confident fathers who are then able to mentor and support others.

The Fatherhood Institute is training Parent Champions and community centre workers to become local experts in father-inclusive practice in order to make FRED and other A Better Start Southend services more accessible and welcoming to fathers and father figures.

- FRED is being evaluated in A Better Start Southend areas through pre-and-post evaluation measures, which records the amount of time and number of books read over a 4 week period. These are being used to evaluate fathers' behaviour change and their children's learning and development including: changes in the frequency of reading to children
- percentage change in how often fathers attend pre-school activities
- percentage change in how often father talks to their child's key person about their child's learning and development percentage increase in Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores: making relationships; listening and attention.

An evaluation of FRED with 4 year olds found that the programme significantly increased the amount of time that fathers were reading with their children - up to six hours per week. Dads also reported that it improved their relationships with their children by strengthening attachments. The evaluation was carried out by checking children's progress against key metrics on the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. Outcome data on children under three is expected in autumn 2018.

Blackpool Better Start

A group of fathers are being trained to deliver FRED in the Blackpool Better Start area. The dads are being supported by local community engagement workers to run FRED sessions in local children's centres. Children's centre staff are also being trained.

The FRED programme took place in Blackpool in the Spring and Autumn of 2017. 52 dads had completed the FRED programme by December 2017, with 55 children aged under 4 years participating. Blackpool Better Start has asked dads to visit a local library to choose books with their children. This aims to encourage dads to continue visiting the library and reading with their children at home after the programme has ended.

FRED is being evaluated by the Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development in relation to the following criteria:

- the father-child activities engaged in before FRED
- the child facilities used by the fathers with their child before FRED
- the father-child relationship post-FRED
- the pre and post-FRED differences in family literacy

The evaluation found that father-child relationships greatly improved after the FRED programme. There was an 80% increase in dads supporting their children's learning and a 70% increase in dads reading daily to their children. There are plans to increase the sample size through future phases of the programme in order to determine statistical significance.

To read more blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/dads-story-time-to-help-children-learn-1-8395496

Further information

<https://www.blackpoolbetterstart.org.uk/news/better-start-launch-fred-fathers-reading-every-day/>

<http://abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/dads-signup-reading-programme-boost-childrens-literacy/>

A Better Start Southend

"FRED has strengthened our relationship by demonstrating my commitment to my boys". - **father**

"A crucial time every evening after work. Time to relax together, talk about our days and enjoy great stories." - **father**

"The dads were really affected by the research (about the impact dads have) and it inspired them to read." - **practitioner**

"One of our dads used to read occasionally and he did not see the value in it. Now mum feels that they are a team." - **practitioner**

"Looking at the bigger picture in Southend, FRED is about encouraging dads to play a full part in their children's lives so that children and the wider family benefit. FRED is helping change things in Southend so that services are inclusive of fathers from the outset, giving dads all the support they need to be part of their children's lives." - **Kathy Jones, Joint CEO of the Fatherhood Institute**

Blackpool Better Start

“We know even small children and babies benefit tremendously from being read to. Children love cuddling up to their dad and hearing their voice, and they also enjoy looking at pictures and helping turn the pages of books. Blackpool dads are joining us and starting a reading relationship that will help build a strong bond between them and their child. We are starting to see how it will also help improve children’s vocabulary, spark their imaginations, and help their brains to work.”

- Colin Smy, Engagement Officer, Blackpool Better Start



Blackpool
Better Start



For more information about A Better Start
abetterstart@biglotteryfund.org.uk
#abetterstart