



A Better Start Southend Stories of Impact

Now, Next and Beyond:
The Legacy of ABSS



Executive Summary

The A Better Start Southend (ABSS) programme was a ten-year, place-based initiative, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aimed at providing children with the best possible start in life. Working alongside local parents/carers, ABSS developed services to improve children's diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and language and communication, as well as build community resilience and achieve systems change.

A key objective of the test-and-learn programme was to ensure that an effective legacy strategy was developed and implemented to allow insights and learning from ABSS to persist in the community and beyond into the future. The legacy strategy was multi-faceted. For professionals, this included supporting services to find external funding to continue delivery, providing workforce development and training opportunities, and consolidating the ethos for partnership working and shared learning. For parents/carers, this included building confidence and self-belief, empowering parents to develop strong peer support networks, and embedding co-production and the family voice as central to service development and delivery. The ABSS legacy vehicle, City Family Community Interest Company (CIC), became a key driver of the legacy strategy, with a dedicated focus on maintaining momentum around early years development and family support.

This report considers the ABSS legacy across six areas:

- Children's outcomes
- Parents/carers
- Systems and networks
- Services in Southend
- Extending the legacy with City Family CIC
- Insights and learning

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Introduction

Over the course of a decade, A Better Start Southend (ABSS) delivered a significant place-based initiative aimed at improving early childhood outcomes across Southend-on-Sea. As one of five sites funded through The National Lottery Community Fund's A Better Start programme, ABSS operated with a mandate to improve the life chances of children from pregnancy to age four by addressing three priority domains:

- Social and emotional development
- Communication and language
- Diet and nutrition

The programme was underpinned by a commitment to building Community Resilience through evidence-informed practice, co-production with families, and Systems Change through partnership working and the transformation and integration of services. By designing and delivering a diverse portfolio of interventions and capacity-building initiatives, ABSS sought to influence individual-level outcomes, the design and delivery of services, and the wider systems that shape early years provision, aimed at ensuring long-term sustainability.

This means that the legacy of ABSS is not solely in the outputs of discrete projects, but is also reflected in impacts for individuals, families and communities, and in the sustained cultural, procedural, and structural shifts that emerged across the local early years system. At the individual level, the programme sought to create improvements in children's outcomes primarily by enabling parents/carers to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to support their children's development. The programme supported parents'/carers' and families' resilience and mental health as well as enhancing parental knowledge, confidence, and engagement through grassroots projects, targeted interventions, and accessible community-based services.

Formal and informal peer support networks enabled parents/carers to build relationships and share their expertise and experiences with others, building resilience within the community but also creating new systems of support that could work with and influence formal services. Parents/carers became active agents in service co-design, contributing their lived experience to shape delivery models in meaningful and lasting ways and for future generations. Through partnership working, organisations could work together to identify opportunities for service integration and collaboration, based on a shared ethos and common goals.

This report explores the different forms that ABSS legacy takes, including:

- Legacy for children's outcomes
- Legacy for parents/carers
- Legacy in systems and networks
- Legacy for services in Southend
- Extending the legacy with City Family CIC
- Legacy in insights and learning

Legacy for Children's Outcomes

Complex and interconnected factors influence child development, from their home and community, through to the services and systems that support them. ABSS services aimed to improve developmental outcomes for children aged 0–4, with wider benefits extending into later childhood, by offering support and targeting change across multiple levels. These included direct support to children, building parental confidence and capacity, and improving the services and systems that supported children and families.

For children living in ABSS wards, access to services designed to support child development in areas like speech, language and communication or social and emotional development helped to prepare children for a successful start in school. Programmes to support school readiness and to smooth the transition into school built on these outcomes. Analysis of measurements of children's development identified that ABSS interventions were associated with improved children's attainment, identified by the Good Level of Development (GLD) measure taken at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), at age five. Children in ABSS wards demonstrated measurable progress in Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSE), Mathematics, and Literacy, suggesting that targeted support enhanced school readiness and core learning competencies. Given the established link between early educational attainment and longer-term academic and social success, these results suggest that the ABSS programme will have a sustained and life-long legacy of improved opportunities for children who benefited from its services.

The positive results seen for children benefiting from ABSS services echo evidence from the Sure Start programme, which demonstrated that high-quality early years interventions significantly narrowed developmental gaps and yielded long-term benefits for children, particularly those from lower socioeconomic areas (Carneiro et al., 2025). Children who accessed Sure Start services showed improvements in areas of school readiness such as language development, social skills, and emotional regulation (Melhuish et al., 2010). Longer-term outcomes included a reduction in hospital admissions by late primary school (Cattan et al., 2019), suggesting improved overall health and wellbeing.

Furthermore, ABSS continued this legacy, targeting support for children aged 0–4 in the critical areas discussed above. With focus on early development and empowering families through co-production, ABSS helped to lay the foundations for long-term success. Children supported by ABSS are more likely to start school with the social, emotional, and cognitive skills needed to thrive, increasing their chances of positive outcomes throughout their education and into adulthood. In doing so, ABSS not only addressed immediate developmental needs but also contributed to long-term social mobility, health, and economic stability for children and their families.

Legacy for Parents/Carers

For parents/carers, the legacy of ABSS can be seen in the impact on individuals through improved confidence and self-belief, not only in their parenting skills but also through relationships built with other parents and a sense of community connection and belonging. At an individual level, parents/carers described how their new-found knowledge and confidence supported them with other or subsequent children, and how they shared this learning with other family members and friends. They also described how meeting other parents/carers and building connections with them supported them on their parenting journeys, reassuring them that they were not alone and that other people faced similar doubts and challenges.

These connections formed the basis for informal peer support networks that had the potential to last beyond the initial context of the ABSS service attended. For parents/carers who volunteered to be Parent Champions or Parent Ambassadors, their role brought with it the development of new friendship groups and supportive social circles, with many commenting that they expected these connections to be long-lasting or even life-long.



For some services, the development of peer support networks was a specific aim, particularly around breastfeeding and for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Bump to Breast, the Group Breastfeeding Support service, worked with parents/carers who wanted to be peer supporters to ensure they had training and support for that role. These roles also tied in with other community-based groups in

Southend, such as the small local charity Cake Club which provided parent-led parenting support including around infant feeding. For both the Peer Support Workers for Social Communication Needs and for Chaos and Calm's Sparkles Sensory Story Time, attending services was also an opportunity for parents/carers of children with SEND to meet other parents/carers in similar circumstances and build supportive networks and relationships.

Legacy in Systems and Networks

The ABSS programme created an ecosystem of support for families, based around a shared ethos of partnership working that built connections between organisations and put family voices at the centre of service design and delivery. This ethos shaped the changes that ABSS made, from systems-level integration of services and the adoption of co-production through to services' common focus on relationship building, improving soft skills to support hard outcomes, and continual improvement of services.

Partnership working and forging strong relationships between statutory, professional and community partners improved efficiency of referrals, inter-organisational communication and sharing of strategic priorities. Some systemic changes introduced by ABSS will remain in place following the end of the programme. In particular, the additional strategic roles of the Public Health Midwife and the Infant Feeding Lead, which cemented infant feeding services as a coherent system, have been absorbed into mainstream services funded by Southend City Council's Public Health Department (SCC PH) and continue to tie together different services and share learning across the system. Another example is Southend Supports Breastfeeding, an initiative launched in Summer 2024, which aimed to make positive and social behavioural changes that would contribute towards normalising breastfeeding in Southend, by engaging businesses, statutory providers and community organisations. As part of the ABSS legacy, this strategy continues to grow and thrive, with funding provided by SCC PH.

Building on the partnership working that ABSS achieved at a more strategic level, City Family Community Interest Company (CIC), the ABSS legacy vehicle, is taking forward the coordination of regular networking meetings for providers of early years and family services in Southend. While this cannot replicate the commissioning power and resources that ABSS was able to bring to its partnership meetings, it does provide an opportunity for continued conversations about collaboration, service integration and strategic priorities.



With the publication of new national policy documents such as the 'Giving every child the Best Start in Life' (Department of Education 2025) and 'Fit for the Future' (HM Government, 2025) the ten-year strategy for the NHS, such conversations take on added importance as the sector comes to understand the implications of the new policy landscape. Further changes to this landscape are expected in the coming months, with the publication of the Child Poverty Strategy and national SEND review, both in Autumn 2025, and with local government reorganisation expected to be announced in early 2026.

ABSS supported workforce development and multi-agency collaboration through continuous learning and shared practice opportunities, discussed in more detail below, in the learning section of this report. With specific projects offering more tailored training programmes to practitioners, a suite of toolkits, practitioner resources, and professional development materials were co-produced to embed consistent, evidence-based approaches within the local early years workforce. Governance frameworks relating to co-production introduced by ABSS emphasised transparency, shared accountability, and the inclusion of community voice at multiple levels of decision-making.

By embedding reflective practice, continuous learning, and systems thinking into its core operations, ABSS enabled a reconfiguration of how early years challenges were conceptualised and addressed. This legacy was intended to support future generations by leaving behind a more equitable, collaborative, and responsive early years system, in addition to contributing to the early years sector on a wider level.



One of the most fundamental legacies of the ABSS programme is less tangible, but nonetheless has significant implications for service design and delivery in Southend. This legacy is in the ethos exemplified by ABSS that put parents/carers and families at the centre of thinking, whether through services that focused on building trusting relationships and supporting soft skills development to improve hard outcomes, or through co-production and other ways of including families' lived experiences. This is a cultural shift that changes the dynamics and focus of thinking about service provision, and so changes the practice of the organisations and individuals who have been engaged in developing and delivering ABSS services and the ABSS programme. The continued roles that those organisations and individuals play in Southend services beyond the end of the ABSS programme offer an opportunity for the ethos and culture of ABSS to also endure and influence into the future.

A critical element of the ABSS legacy is the continuation of the approach, learning and culture of the commissioning and programme management team. As the programme ends, the professionals who formed the team have been employed, promoted and dispersed across the City and beyond. With them, they take the expectation of high quality in delivery, the importance of inclusive leadership, and muscle memory of a team operating within a culture of psychological safety. As leaders and future leaders of public, charitable and private sector organisations, they will remember and implement stakeholder working, cherish the benefits of collaborative partnership relationships and talk with passion about early child development. Over 30 individuals will take with them all that ABSS offered and gave in experience and learning. ABSS will influence the future lives of babies, children and families and also the operating functions and standards of organisations and networks.



Legacy of Services in Southend

Reaching the end of the period of National Lottery funded activity does not mean the end for all services that were delivered as part of ABSS. While some services have ended, many have been taken forward in new forms by ABSS partners. Some examples of this include:

- **City Family CIC:** ABSS's legacy vehicle continues to provide services for children and families in Southend, and is extending the types of services and age ranges it supports.
- **Parent Voice Ambassadors:** The Parent Champion programme formed the blueprint for a new scheme run by SAVS and supported by Southend City Council to bring family voices into decision-making about public services.
- **Forest Schools:** Taking the learning from their Families Growing Together service, Trust Links have established a new Forest Schools programme.
- **Infant Feeding Pathway:** Southend City Council has taken on the roles of Public Health Midwife, Infant Feeding Lead Advisor, a Community Breastfeeding Support Service, and Southend Supports Breastfeeding as an ecosystem of support for infant feeding.
- **Breastfeeding Circle:** Southend YMCA is building on the Bump to Breast service and delivering a self-funded community breastfeeding group offer.

To support parents/carers as the ABSS programme came to an end, the Beyond ABSS: Signposting graphic presented here provided an overview of services available to families beyond March 2025. This highlights a continued commitment to early intervention, community involvement, and integrated working to ensure that families in Southend could still access high-quality support beyond the life of the original programme:

BEYOND

A BETTER START SOUTHEND



You can find out more information updates and FAQs on our website at

Legacy of Services in Southend

ABSS Services

Beyond March 2025

City Family Services

Your Family supported families in Southend with advice and assistance to prevent crises and achieve goals.

City Family Explorers (ABSS Creche) offered free childcare, enabling parents to take part in development sessions and projects.

City Family Services

Your Family will continue delivering services, ensuring families can continue to access support in Southend.

City Family Explorers Creche will continue to deliver childcare so that parents can access support in the city.

ABSS Parent, Family and Community Hub

The **ABSS Parent, Family and Community Hub** in the SAVS building was a parent-designed space where families accessed ABSS and community services.

ABSS Parent, Family and Community Hub

The **Playroom** a one-room early years space on the first floor of the SAVS building, will be provided by SAVS and City Family.

Our Specialists

The **Infant Feeding Supervisor Lead** supported infant feeding initiatives, UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation, and breastfeeding education in Southend.

The **Public Health Midwife** led maternal health initiatives such as smoking cessation, breastfeeding and antenatal programmes.

Our Specialists

The **Infant Feeding Supervisor Lead** and **Public Health Midwife** roles will continue, providing advice and guidance across the Council and NHS organisations to influence how services are delivered.

3-to-5 Month Health Visitor Contact

The **3-to-5 Month Health Visitor Contact** promoted healthy weight through education about solid foods, portion sizes, and nutrition while encouraging sustained breastfeeding.

3-to-5 Month Health Visitor Contact

The **3-to-5 Month Contact service** will expand to support all families across Southend, delivered by the Council's Health Visiting Team.

Journey to Parenthood

The **Journey to Parenthood** antenatal programme delivered 6-week antenatal courses led by Family Centres, YourFamily, maternity services, and health visitors.

Journey to Parenthood

The **Journey to Parenthood** antenatal service will continue until the 17th April 2025 when a review of service delivery will be conducted.

Infant Feeding

One-to-One Breastfeeding supported mothers in the first six weeks, in the maternity ward and at home, strengthening parent-child bonds.

Bump to Breast was a breastfeeding support group delivered weekly across ABSS wards by Southend YMCA.

Southend Supports Breastfeeding is a scheme aimed at raising awareness and normalising breastfeeding throughout the city.

Infant Feeding

One-to-One Breastfeeding service at Southend Hospital will no longer include home visits but will still support new parents on the maternity ward.

Bump to Breast service will end. Southend YMCA will provide future breastfeeding support. Southend City Council will offer a new group-based support service through the Health Visiting Team.

Southend Supports Breastfeeding scheme will continue alongside the new group-based support service delivered by the Health Visiting Team.

Parental Engagement and Co-Production

The **Parental Engagement Service** empowered parents in ABSS wards to get involved in changing systems and services through co-production and the Parent Champions programme.

Southend's Parents' Voice

Southend City Council will test a different service to learn about what works best. This will ensure parents' voices continue to influence service development and delivery.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Support

Chaos and Calm supported children with complex disabilities by improving learning, communication, and social skills while introducing alternative communication in a fun, supportive setting.

Peer Support Workers for Social and Communication Needs helped ABSS families with children facing communication, interaction, or play difficulties, including those on the Multidisciplinary Assessment waiting list.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Support

The groups delivered by **Chaos and Calm** will continue with a reduced service from July. Additional support will be available through their website and social media.

The **Peer Support Workers** service will end. Families with young children with special educational needs can access support through the Council's education service.

Southend Storysacks

Southend Storysacks provided resources for families in ABSS wards to support parents to read and communicate with their children.

Southend Storysacks

The **Storysacks** service has now moved into Southend Libraries, where it is available for all families with young children across the city.

Food On Our Doorstep (FOOD) Club

The **FOOD Club** offered families access to affordable, nutritious food while reducing food waste.

Food On Our Doorstep (FOOD) Club

The **FOOD Club** will continue in 2025 with support from Southend City Council.

Specialist Health Visitors for Perinatal Mental Health

The **Specialist Health Visitors for Perinatal Mental Health** focused on early intervention, prevention, and positive parent-infant relationships to support mental health needs for women and families during and after pregnancy.

Specialist Health Visitors for Perinatal Mental Health

The **Specialist Health Visitors for Perinatal Mental Health** service will end. Learning from the project will inform the local services of the future. Other services are available to support parents with mild to moderate mental health needs during and after pregnancy.

Families Growing Together

Trust Links **Families Growing Together** supported parental resilience and mental well-being through outdoor learning activities.

Families Growing Together

The **Families Growing Together** programme will evolve into innovative forest school activities for families across Southend.

Early Years Independent Domestic Violence Advisors

Early Years Independent Domestic Violence Advisors provided support for parents of children under four exposed to domestic abuse.

Early Years Independent Domestic Violence Advisors

Safe Steps will continue to deliver information and specialist services and provide victim support in the community.

Speech, Communication and Language

Let's Talk provided preventative speech and language services for children aged 0-4, supporting children's development needs.

Talking Transitions improved children's social and emotional readiness for starting school and upskilled staff in communication and language development.

Speech, Communication and Language

The **Let's Talk** service will end, but the knowledge gained will guide the next steps for communication and early language development support in mid and south Essex.

The **Talking Transitions** service will evolve over the coming months.

Work Skills

Work Skills delivered training focused on skills, enterprise, and employment to support ABSS parents.

Work Skills

The **Work Skills** service will end. The experience, knowledge and learning will continue to influence support to parents.



Contact us with any questions at BeyondABSS@eyalliance.org.uk

Extending the Legacy with City Family CIC

In May 2022, the approval of the ABSS Legacy and Sustainability Strategy by the ABSS Partnership and The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) marked a pivotal moment in the programme's journey. This milestone established a clear roadmap to ensure that the significant investment made in Southend's early years by TNLCF would have a lasting impact well beyond the life of the original programme. Central to this strategy was the creation of sustainable structures capable of embedding ABSS values, learning, and community-led approaches into long-term systems of support for children and families in Southend.

Following this, City Family Community Interest Company (CIC) was established in September 2022 as a key driver of this legacy strategy. It soon became a formal strategic partner of the ABSS programme, with a dedicated focus on maintaining momentum around early years development and family support. As ABSS moved into its 'Beyond ABSS' phase, City Family provided a vital safety net, particularly for families who lacked confidence or strong community connections, ensuring continuity of care and preventing families from falling through service gaps. By championing partnership building and leveraging the strengths of the ABSS legacy, City Family CIC plays a central role in sustaining the long-term vision of improved outcomes for Southend's youngest children and their families.

Since the ABSS programme has ended, City Family has expanded its remit and its future ambitions. City Family is looking at new ways to serve families, by extending its hours of service into evenings and weekends, by extending its focus to children up to age eleven and the transition into senior school, and by looking for opportunities to apply its learning and approach in areas outside Southend. City Family is taking forward true early intervention approaches, developed through ABSS, to tackle the inequalities that impact happy, healthy child development.



Legacy in Insights and Learning

ABSS embedded a test-and-learn approach at the heart of its programme, creating vital space for innovation and adaptation. This approach allowed new ideas to be explored and tested in real-world settings, recognising that not all initiatives would succeed but that each provided valuable learning. Testing promising ideas, gathering evidence, and refining or scaling up successful interventions enabled ABSS to build more effective services.

Shared learning was a critical part of this process. By working closely with parents/carers, professionals and partner organisations, ABSS ensured that insights from both successes and setbacks informed ongoing development. This culture of openness and reflection helped build trust between stakeholders and promoted collaboration. It also laid the groundwork for long-term systems change, shaping how local services interacted, how decisions were made, and how resources were directed towards early intervention and prevention.



Through continuous learning and shared practice, ABSS supported the development of a community in which families were empowered, services were better aligned, and Southend moved closer to its vision of being the best place in the country to bring up a child and be a parent.

From April 2024 – March 2025, ABSS partnered with SAVS to deliver Lunchtime Learning webinars; a series of online learning sessions designed to share insights, experiences, and emerging practice from the ABSS programme. These free and accessible, hour-long webinars created a space for professionals, community partners, and local residents to engage with key themes such as early childhood development, working with families, and working in the voluntary and community sector.

Each session showcased learning from ABSS initiatives and involved contributors from across the local system, including practitioners and service providers whilst supporting knowledge exchange, celebrating innovation, and strengthening collaboration by highlighting real-world examples of what works in improving outcomes for children and families. By making learning visible and widely accessible, the series helped embed ABSS learning into the wider local landscape and encouraged a shared commitment to early intervention and preventative approaches in Southend and beyond. Webinars:

Active Listening

Engaging our African Communities

Fundraising Strategies

Measuring Impact

Early Maths Matters

Telling Stories about Impact

The Social & Cultural Context of Breastfeeding

Ready, Steady to Start School

Five to Thrive

Grant Applications

The recordings of these webinars are available on the ABSS website, as a way of ensuring the good practice and legacy stretches far beyond the city limits and the timeframe of the programme.

In addition, ABSS delivered two in-person workshops aimed at early years practitioners and others working with families in Southend. The first, in November 2023, titled 'Strengths-based practice: Empowering Southend's families', explored the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to working with families and communities. It was delivered by the University of Essex with contributions from two practitioners working in grass-roots organisations that utilised this approach. The second, in May 2024, was titled 'Re-thinking ACEs and Trauma-Informed Practice' and was led by Sally Poskett from Knowledge Change Action Ltd. This explored a compassion-led approach to the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Protective and Compensatory Experiences (PACES).

These in-person workshops provided an introduction to different ways of working that attendees could take forward in their practice. This legacy of understanding effective ways of working was built upon with the introduction of a series of workshops called Five to Thrive, open to practitioners providing support to families across Southend. The Five to Thrive training, delivered by Knowledge Change Action Ltd, was offered at two levels: 'Five to Thrive: Brain development and relationships' offered to practitioners working with families at a 'universal' level of need, and 'Mending Hurts: Trauma recovery informed practice' offered to practitioners working in 'targeted' service provision with families with a higher level of need. Alongside the training, networking opportunities were established to ensure that practitioners could continue to come together to share their experiences of working with children and families and to take forward new ideas about effective working.

The legacy of the learning offered to practitioners and parents/carers through ABSS is the ongoing application of that learning with children and families. Upskilling staff enables them to take their learning and skills with them into whatever work they do and to influence the organisations and settings they work within. Evidence from the evaluations of ABSS shows that parents/carers apply learning and new skills with subsequent children as well as the child(ren) who benefited directly from ABSS services, and also share their learning with family members, friends and others in their community.

A number of resources were created for learning to continue after ABSS – both 'Stories of Impact', which disseminated the evidence and impact of the ABSS programme, and 'Family Resources', which provided families and practitioners with useful learning toolkits. All of these resources are available via the ABSS website: <https://abetterstartsouthend.co.uk>



Family Resources were grouped thematically, as follows:

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Families of children with additional needs often face unique challenges in day-to-day life, from routines and play to navigating support systems and education. These resource packs are designed to offer practical strategies, useful information, and gentle guidance to help make everyday experiences more manageable and supportive. Topics include daily routines and life skills, such as eating, sleeping, toileting, and emotional regulation—areas that can be more complex but are supported with tools like sleep diaries and calm boxes. For play, communication, and social development, the resources encourage engagement, expression, and connection through sensory

play, early communication tips, and access to inclusive play sessions. Education and childcare guidance helps families identify suitable school or childcare settings, understand admissions processes, and prepare for transitions, ensuring children are placed in environments where they can thrive. To support the often-overwhelming task of navigating appointments and paperwork, the appointments and administrative support resources provide tips for attending professional meetings and applying for benefits such as Disability Living Allowance. Finally, support for parents and carers is available through signposting to local Southend services and online platforms (offering connection, advice, and reassurance throughout the journey).

Co-production

These resource packs highlight the power of co-production at ABSS, capturing learning and experiences from both families and practitioners over the past ten years. Through written case studies, insights from those at the heart of the programme, and video content, they showcase real-life stories of collaboration, including parent-led initiatives, community development projects, and the success of the ABSS Parent Champion programme. Together these resources offer valuable insights into how meaningful partnership working can create lasting, positive change for families and communities.

Breastfeeding

These resource packs are designed to support and promote breastfeeding across the City of Southend. They focus on normalising breastfeeding, creating welcoming and inclusive spaces, and additionally offering practical advice for breastfeeding families. Whether you're a partner, family member, or friend, the information provided helps build understanding and confidence around breastfeeding, encouraging a supportive network for families.

Health, Diet and Nutrition

These resources offer practical support for parents and carers of children under five. They include guidance on healthy eating, with clear advice on what young children need nutritionally at each stage of development. They also provide information on how to care for a child when they're unwell, including when to seek medical help and how to manage common illnesses at home.

Learning and Development

These resources offer a broad range of support for families to help children thrive in their early years and prepare for the transition to school. They include practical guidance on early communication, brain development, and play, as well as tips for supporting early maths and language skills from birth to five. There are also tools to help children get ready for school, such as booklists, games, and advice on building routines and confidence. Together, these materials aim to support children's development and ease their journey into education.

Perinatal Mental Health

These resources offer support for parents' mental health and emotional wellbeing during pregnancy and after the birth of a baby. They provide information and guidance tailored for both mothers and fathers, helping parents understand and manage the emotional changes that can come with having a baby. The materials include expert advice, real parent stories, and practical tips for self-care and connection. They also highlight the importance of early bonding and encourage both parents (especially dads) to be actively involved from the start. Some resources also introduce calming techniques, like forest bathing, to support overall wellbeing.

Conclusions

The legacy of ABSS is one of deep, system-wide transformation, anchored in the lived experiences of families, the commitment of professionals, and the collaborative spirit of an entire community. While the ten-year programme has formally drawn to a close, the work it set in motion continues to shape the present and future of early years services across Southend.

Through its innovative, test-and-learn approach, ABSS has helped to redefine what meaningful early years intervention looks like. It prioritised co-production, evidence-informed practice, and systemic integration, embedding these not just as strategies, but as core values within Southend's early years ecosystem. The programme demonstrated that investing in families, particularly in their capacity, confidence, and community, has lasting ripple effects for children's outcomes, service effectiveness, and stakeholder engagement.

The tangible outputs of ABSS, such as improvements in children's school readiness, workforce development, service redesign, and stronger referral pathways, are matched by subtler but equally critical cultural shifts. These include new ways of working between statutory and voluntary services, a strengthened role for family voice in local decision-making, and a growing expectation that services are developed with, not just for, communities.

This cultural legacy is perhaps the most important achievement of ABSS. It ensures that the learning, ethos, and impact of the programme do not fade with time but continue to influence practice and policy in Southend and beyond. Organisations that collaborated with ABSS now carry forward its approach in their own settings, and parents who once engaged with services now advocate, support, and co-create within their communities.

City Family CIC stands as a steward of this legacy, not only sustaining core services and support for families but also adapting and expanding the work of ABSS into new geographies, age groups, and delivery models. Its role reflects the enduring commitment to early intervention, to partnership, and to listening to those with lived experience.

Ultimately, the ABSS journey demonstrates what is possible when communities are supported and empowered. It reminds us that transformational change does not end when a funding programme concludes, it lives on in the systems reshaped, the professionals upskilled, and most importantly, in the lives of the children and families whose futures have been positively altered. The ABSS legacy is not an endpoint, it is a foundation for what comes next.

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