

# ‘Sounds, Songs and Stories’: early literacy for toddlers



## Our vision

Learn to Love to Read is a literacy charity working in the London borough of Wandsworth. We want all children to have positive, frequent reading experiences, and be enabled and empowered by learning to love to read. Working in partnership with local primary schools, we train and support volunteer teams to improve reading, build confidence and inspire a love of reading. We develop early literacy skills through our parent and toddler sessions and engage parents in supporting their children’s literacy at home.

We believe that becoming a confident reader will change a child’s life.

## Our goals

We want to:

- Improve literacy levels in the UK. Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world.
- Reduce the number of children whose opportunities are limited by poor reading skills.
- Build partnerships with local schools to give children, regardless of background, the opportunity to have positive, frequent reading experiences.
- Give parents the motivation, skills and confidence to support their children’s reading at home.
- Help children to learn to love to read.

## How we started

Learn to Love to Read is a Christian charity, founded in 2014 by Teresa Harris. Teresa first became interested in children’s literacy when her own two children found learning to read difficult. She became a reading volunteer and later gained a Postgraduate Certificate in Difficulties in Literacy Development. Wanting to broaden the impact of her work in the local community, she began to recruit and train volunteers, developing a programme of early intervention, designed to reach children in Key Stage 1 as well as their younger pre-school siblings and parents. As well as instigating twice-weekly one-to-one reading sessions with Year 1 and 2 children in partner schools, Teresa developed ‘Sounds, Songs and Stories’ sessions for parents and toddlers at the schools Learn to Love to Read was working with. Focusing on school families whose pre-school children are at risk of starting school behind their peers, these sessions now run weekly in six schools in Wandsworth. To further engage parents, the charity also runs termly family events in all its schools, where Year 1 children and siblings come with their parents or carers to listen to stories and try out different activities.

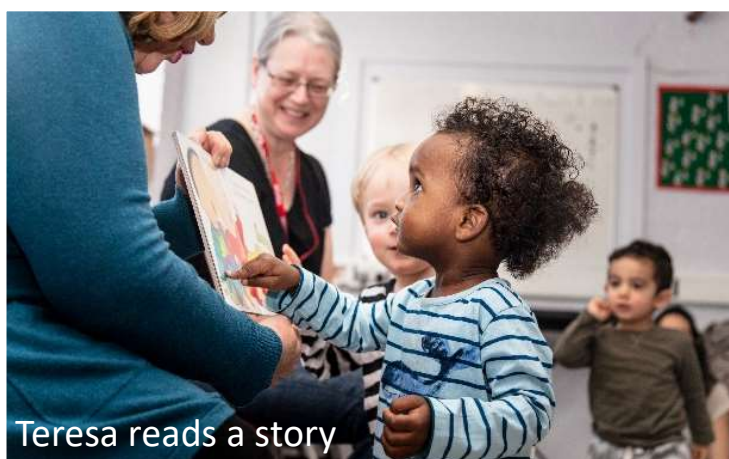
## The need

According to the Department for Education, 25% of children left primary school in 2018 unable to read at the expected level and it is estimated that there are nine million working-aged adults in England with low literacy or numeracy skills, or both. Even by the age of three more disadvantaged children are, on average, already almost a full year and a half behind their more affluent peers in their early language development (Read on Get on, 2014/Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential, 2017).

Research by Dr Reid Lyon, formerly of the National Institute of Health, shows that intensive early intervention can increase the reading ability of 90% of low-performing readers, and engaging parents and children in mutual activities that include book reading, but are not limited to it, may constitute the richest potential for supporting children's early literacy development (Susan B. Neuman, Guiding Young Children's Participation in Early Literacy Development, 1997). This is backed up by the Department for Education's own findings in 2008, which show that children with interested parents pull ahead of the rest whatever their starting point and that educational failure is increased by lack of parental interest.

## What we do: Sounds, Songs and Stories

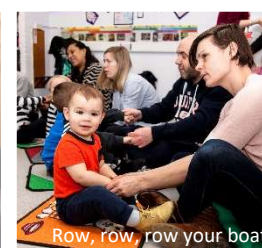
Our hour-long, weekly 'Sounds, Songs and Stories' sessions for pre-school-aged children have been carefully developed in conjunction with experienced nursery teachers to explore early reading skills with children and their parents/carers. Through singing, actions, instruments, games and stories children practise key skills such as listening and talking about what they hear and see, and are introduced to the sounds they will learn when they start school. Session leaders also work with parents and carers to model how they might engage with their children at home to further progress these skills.



Teresa reads a story



Parents and carers share books



Row, row, row your boat

We run weekly 'Sounds, Songs and Stories' sessions in six partner schools. These are attended by pre-school-aged siblings of children already at the schools, as well as their parents and carers, who have usually been identified by school as needing additional reading support. These children may have EAL, receive Pupil Premium, be recent arrivals to the UK, have challenging home circumstances or come from low income families. For a variety of reasons their parents may not be used to attending groups, so we work closely with schools and families to ensure they feel welcome and comfortable, therefore encouraging regular attendance. Increasingly often, we also see parents coming to sessions through the recommendation of other parents who have been to and enjoyed the sessions with their toddlers.

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*‘Working with Learn to Love to Read has played an integral part in the lives of those children who are most in need. The sessions at SM Children’s Centre are invitation only which means only our target families take part. This ensures those children who are typically working below age-appropriate levels receive a unique learning experience based upon developing their language development using sounds, songs and stories. The Children’s Centre staff have seen a dramatic improvement in all children’s language and understanding of the world. Families provide us with such positive feedback from the sessions and are pleased with how much the sessions not only help their child but also them as a parent in supporting their child’s learning.’*

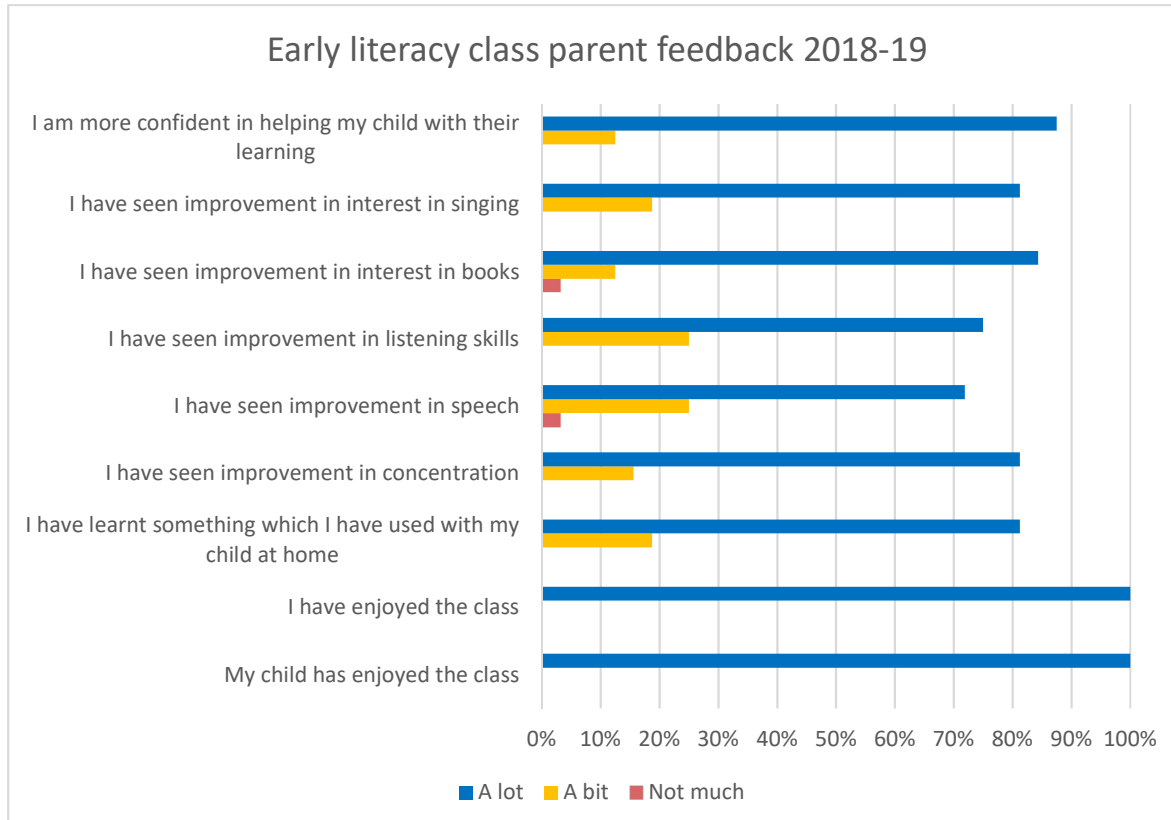
*Children’s Centre Manager*

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## Facts, figures and outcomes for pre-school sessions

We collect feedback from our pre-school sessions using a simple parent/carer survey at the end of each year. We also ask the school for feedback on whether the starting levels in the Nursery or Reception classes of our regular children seems to be higher than they would expect, and whether they feel parents are more engaged than those who have not attended our classes. Feedback on this is very positive.

### Figures



## Outcomes

Last year over 80 parents and toddlers regularly attended our early literacy classes in our partner schools. All parents/carers and children who gave feedback reported that they enjoyed the classes a lot. All parents and carers also felt they had learnt something from the sessions that they could use with their child at home and 81% felt they had learnt a lot they could practise with their child. 100% of parents and carers also reported feeling more confident in helping their child with their learning at home as a result of attending the pre-school sessions. These children were then more ready to start to learn to read when they started their Reception year, borne out by comments from their teachers. Due to this success, in the academic year 2019-20, we are continuing to run early literacy classes sessions in six schools across Wandsworth.

## What parents tell us about the sessions

“L has really improved in joining in and copying actions since we started coming.”

“A great experience before starting the school and nursery, thanks.”

“This course has really helped my children concentrate and listen.”

“Fantastic morning activity! Great balance of fun and learning!”

“We loved learning the sounds and actions and have used these a lot at home.”

“We've really enjoyed coming and J has really grown in his confidence!”

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*‘The nursery teacher seemed surprised that my child was recognising sounds and was keen to start reading. She asked where my child had learnt this. I told her - it is simple - it is all because of Learn to Love to Read.’*  
Pre-school session parent

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## Case studies

### A and her daughter

We met A, an older single mother, and her daughter in October 2014 when she attended our preschool ‘Sounds, Songs and Stories’ sessions. Her daughter was two and a half years old at that time. A, like many of our new mums, had to be shown how to sit with her daughter to read a story, and encouraged to engage with her in conversation. At the sessions she learnt how she could help her at home to be ready for reading when she started school. Once her daughter was directed and encouraged, she made enormous efforts to invest in her daughter’s learning. We also encouraged her to join a local library and they are now regular users. A’s daughter is now in Year 1 at one of our partner schools. Her reading level far exceeds her age expectation and she already knows all her times tables fluently. A herself has said that her daughter would not be flourishing as she is without the input given by Learn to Love to Read.

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*'I think that the work you are doing goes a long way to fulfilling the elements identified with narrowing the gap for some children. I particularly like how you use the song and listening elements which are the foundations for successful literacy development. By modelling this with the adult/parent it gives them lovely material to use at home and in their daily activities. Alongside, the use of instruments to enhance this is also great as the children can then feel the beat and the rhythm in greater depth. Families who have English as an additional language can also use their own cultural songs here too at home. The conversation spot is so vital today to support the understanding of everyday tasks and of course helps to build positive relationships as well as the further understanding of the place that literacy has everyday life'.*

Early Years Leader and nursery owner

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#### J and family

We initially supported one of the children in this family in Year 1 when they had recently arrived at our partner school. Helped in weekly one-to-one sessions by a trained volunteer, he gained confidence and improved both his reading and comprehension considerably over the year. The mother then began to bring two of the younger children to our pre-school 'Sounds, Songs and Stories' sessions, learning there how to engage four young children in reading at home, and picking up tips on how to develop a richer language environment. Feedback from teachers after the second child started nursery has been hugely positive, indicating how well prepared she is for the demands of school, beyond many of her peers. Following our recommendation, the mother also registered at the local library over the summer holidays and came back at the start of the autumn term full of how exciting their trips there had been and how much the children had enjoyed it. The whole family has also attended our after-school Story and Craft events where they have enjoyed listening to stories and getting stuck in to colourful craft together, and where we have shared more advice on how to best enjoy reading together at home. The mother has learnt new skills and her confidence has increased – so much so that she has trained as a Learn to Love to Read reading volunteer herself.

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*'The Learn to Love to Read scheme has a huge impact on pre-school children. The children who come into our Nursery having attended these sessions are leaps and bounds above their peers. They are socially more able and their love of books and progress in reading is a great advantage than their classmates. It has been a great opportunity for parents to meet, making the parents a cohesive group who support each other. I really recommend all parents new to the school and existing parents attend these sessions, which are not only fun for the children but a great opportunity for parents to meet and share ideas.'*

Head of Early Years at one of our partner schools

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