



## Partners in Learning UK, 2024

Big Partners waiting to lead their first session

## Introduction

Our Partners in Learning programme is based on a child to child model, in which we train older children to deliver playful early learning sessions for younger children within their communities. To date, we have reached over 4,500 children in diverse settings, in Pakistan and the UK. Within London, our focus is on supporting children from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds. In this latest iteration we worked with two schools to deliver 8 weeks of sessions that were a mix of playful learning, experiential science and socioemotional learning.

## Objectives

We want to see children thriving and motivated to learn in educational spaces, in spite of difficult realities.

The programme impact is on two levels:

- **reinforcing curricular learning** objectives for the Little Partners
- and **building key socio-emotional skills** for the Big Partners, so they can navigate both school and life in the UK with confidence.

At both levels, the creative sessions work to reinforce **positive mental health** and **psychosocial wellbeing**.



## Partner Schools

Our Big Partners were from **Newman Catholic College, a secondary School of Sanctuary in Brent**.

This is the second time partnering with this school that supports a high number of learners from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds. The Big Partners were a diverse group of 13 with different nationalities, and having high English as an Additional Language (EAL) needs.

This year, we collaborated with **Furness Primary School**. This serves a diverse community, with 60% of students being of Somalian and Brazilian Portuguese origin, while many new intakes this year are from the Middle East, including Syria and Palestine. We worked with the Reception Classes comprising 35 children. These classes had a diverse range of special educational needs (SEN) and EAL needs, with a significant **83% of the children having English as their second language**.

The programme took place with the support of Alia Elleithy, Refugee Lead at NCC and Will Scott, Early Years Lead in FPS.

# Impact on Big Partners

The intentional focus on specific Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) domains for Big Partners includes the development of a **positive self-image; confidence; empathy; relationship and leadership skills.**

## POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE

A key development was the Big Partner's ability to build meaningful relationships with their peers, and take on a sibling-like role to the younger children. One Big Partner expressed a concern for the children, reflecting, **"I was always nervous during the sessions because I was worried about the children, I felt happy because I did a good job"** (Body mapping). Despite his nervousness, he looked after his group attentively and wanted to ensure they were taken care of, feeling a sense of pride in his achievements.

**I can play an important role in helping a group of children learn**

90%



Big Partners mixing materials for making Silly Putty

“**It was a great session for team building.**

**Refugee Lead**

## CONFIDENCE

### Case Study: Farzaad

Farzaad is an **Afghan student** who has SEN and ESL needs, took a very tiny piece of paper in our introductory activity, to demonstrate that his English was "only a little." He was open about sharing this and had a good rapport with the other boys, sharing jokes. However, during the initial sessions with the cohort of Big Partners, he would easily get distracted, especially if his group members were not staying on task.

During the sessions with the Little Partners, we saw a change - he was focused and took his **responsibility of leading the children seriously.** He visibly enjoyed engaging with them, often laughing and smiling while helping his group. During a particularly challenging session, he was asking the Little Partners questions about the shapes they were cutting: "How many sides does it have?" and "What is the name of the shape?" His consistent efforts to interact with the children showed how **he thrived while having a sense of purpose.** Further emphasised by his enthusiasm for teaching, "I love to teach someone".

## RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

A key development was the Big Partner's ability to build meaningful relationships with their peers, and take on a sibling-like role for the younger children.

**After this programme, I am much more comfortable in managing groups of children**

82%

## EMPATHY

### Case Study: Amir

Amir struggled with the concept of sharing and putting the Little Partners first. He faced challenges in engaging and connecting with the children. He didn't know how to share, left the group unattended at times, and would get upset if things didn't go his way.

At times, Amir began showing signs of progress, by asking children questions politely, praising them for their responses, and making efforts to engage them. He required time and practice to develop the ability to prioritise the needs of the younger children.

## LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Overall, there were improvements in the Big Partner's ability to lead a group. Some, who were confident from the start, began to bring their own ideas to the session eg. numbering the four stages of the life cycle to reiterate the process and directing the Little Partners - "take it in turns." Bringing their own ideas was one marker we used to indicate a sense of agency.

Others, who were initially timid and lacked confidence due to their English proficiency, began to feel more comfortable leading groups over time.

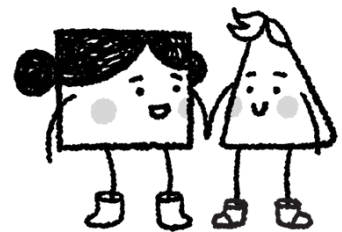
Asad's group looked to him for encouragement, "It got easier throughout, but only because Asad was so supportive" (Big Partner, Body Mapping). He took on that role of leader, contributing to a positive and collaborative team environment and really shone for that reason.

“ I worked well with the children. Before, I felt nervous.

Big Partner, Body Mapping



Big Partner leading his group in the activity



“ I love to be a leader.

Big Partner

# Impact on Little Partners

For Little Partners, we analyse literacy, numeracy, motor skills and socioemotional skills. In such a diverse classroom setting, the programme also works to support language development and create an inclusive environment.

## RECALL OF SESSIONS

We align the sessions with the national curriculum to support their transition to school life and childhood developmental goals. This includes creative and experiential science sessions involving hands-on activities with different materials, and an exploration of the butterfly life cycle.

Our emotional learning sessions are aligned with national **Personal, Social and Hygiene Education (PSHE) objectives**, and we would be looking for evidence that children have learnt to recognise and name different feelings, what others might be feeling and the different things they can do to manage big feelings.

During our reflection sessions with the children, we measured their ability to recall the butterfly life cycle and emotion. We were interested to hear about their experiences, the relationships they had formed and the words they used to express their enjoyment of the sessions.

“ Magnificent ”

“ We were scientists ”



The Reception teachers put up the sessions as part of the PSHE display in the classroom



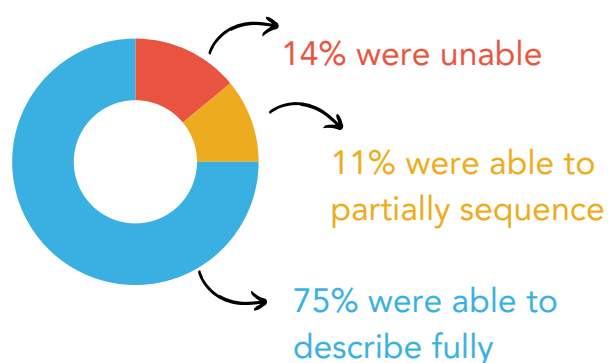
## RELATIONSHIPS WITH BIG PARTNERS

They were fond of their Big Partners and had evidently built strong relationships. They described their Big Partners as "fun, kind, very nice, very funny," and appreciated the "kind talking." One Little Partner commented fondly: "They know my name" emphasising the personal connections.

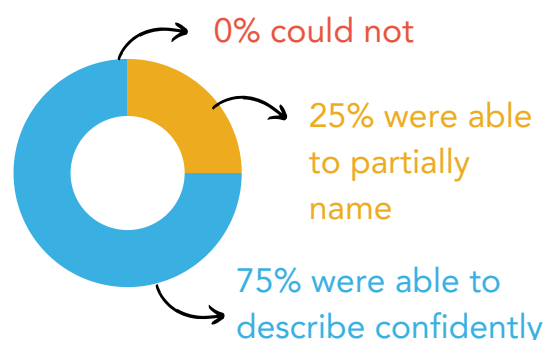
“ It was fun! ”

“ It was super duper fun! ”

## Able to sequence butterfly life cycle:



## Able to recognise emotions:





Big Partners blowing bubbles with the Little Partners during session

## Feedback from teachers

The Primary School teachers felt that the sessions allowed the Little Partners to **express themselves more freely**. Their **“more boisterous boys benefited from the programme, as they looked up to the Big Partners as big brothers”**, finding a space where they could be themselves.

The sessions also helped those who lacked confidence, such as the ESL Learners. The Arabic-speaking group felt comfortable speaking Arabic in front of others, enhancing both their English and Arabic skills. Allowing the group to speak in their first language meant that the Little and Big Partners could relax and form friendships - as the teacher shared, they were **“not ashamed or shy to speak in Arabic”**. A Big Partner even asked, "Can I speak Arabic?" and was encouraged to do so, developing an **inclusive and supportive environment**.



The Teachers found the **session material relevant and engaging** for the age group, and even **incorporated some sessions into the Nursery curriculum**. They particularly enjoyed the session in which the children created stress balls, as the children were experimenting with different materials to discover what worked best, reinforcing their STEM skills.

Overall, the sessions provide a way in which to **reinforce key learning principles** and provide repetition to children - useful for revision, learning, and solidifying concepts.

Making positive references to bilingualism and supporting learners with EAL to feel proud of their first language is a key aspect of EAL pedagogy (Bell Foundation).

# Challenges

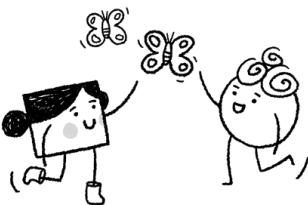
The group generally struggled with English as English was a second language for them. More support was required, as some pupils had only just arrived in the country. Observations showed a lack of confidence with their English skills - there were some signs of struggling or getting frustrated when thinking about their answers. Some pupils even expressed, "I don't speak English," highlighting their difficulties with the language barrier.

The hands-on demonstrations helped the children to understand concepts, but there was not always enough time to show them beforehand. Also, the learners struggled to explain these concepts to the Little Partners and further adult intervention was required.

# Lessons Learned

**Better coordination with primary school.** We would have liked to have more communication and consultation in advance with the Reception teachers and this was something that they shared in their feedback as well. This would help achieve the objective of reinforcing the curriculum better, e.g. in terms of the vocabulary used for the butterfly life cycle, the teachers would prefer sessions to be carried out after teaching to avoid developing misconceptions and to have consistent language.

Moving forward, the programme manual will be provided beforehand and we will be requesting greater collaboration with teachers to determine the ideal timing for each session. It would be ideal to meet with the teachers beforehand to exchange information and learning goals.



## Case Study: Ivan

Ivan, newly arrived from Ukraine, is a very timid student and as his English was very limited, he was reluctant to talk and participate within the group sessions. He also struggled to fit in as he was the only Ukrainian student in the group.

He discovered a special bond with another student, and together they supported each other through the programme. He was always polite and assisted the children, but struggled to lead the group. By the end of the programme, although he was shy, he was evidently feeling more comfortable within his group. His body language was relaxed and he smiled as he interacted and formed connections with the children.



Crafting butterfly masks together

For older children particularly with **language barriers**, conveying the central idea of the session could be a challenge. For future sessions, it would be beneficial to include an introduction by an adult session leader that clearly explains the purpose and objectives to the children, as the Big Partners seemed to struggle with explaining this effectively.

When **tidying up** at the end of sessions, we need to ensure that enough time is built in and that the Big Partners are given the responsibility to leave the rooms as tidy as possible.