



## Early Years Cocoon C.I.C.

Winner of the Family Learning to Support Early Years Award

[Early Years Cocoon C.I.C.](#) is a grassroots, parent-led organisation based in Barking & Dagenham, supporting families with children aged 0–5. Founded as a community group in 2018 and incorporated as a community interest company in 2020, it has provided free, inclusive early years provision to over 850 families, addressing challenges linked to poverty, isolation, and unequal access to enriching opportunities.

It hosts five weekly stay-and-play sessions across community venues, alongside Forest School, wellbeing sessions for mothers, parenting workshops, and community events. Based on its family learning model, parents and carers build confidence and strengthen relationships through participation alongside their children.

Families are crucial to shaping delivery, contributing ideas, leading activities and, in some cases, progressing into volunteering or paid roles. The organisation also prioritises environmental sustainability through recycled materials, reuse initiatives, and nature-based activities such as Forest School.



### Family Learning in the Early Years: Co-Created Family Learning Through Play Programme

Early Years Cocoon developed a long-term, play-based family learning programme in response to challenges faced by families in one of London's most deprived boroughs, including social isolation, limited access to early years provision, and barriers to confidence and engagement.

The programme brings children aged 0–5 and their parents or carers together in weekly sessions combining child-led play with structured learning. Activities include sensory play, arts and crafts, storytelling, music, and movement, with additional enrichment from artists, educators, and early years specialists.



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A highlight of the programme is its co-creation model. Families are encouraged to actively shape sessions by contributing ideas and leading activities such as storytelling, crafts, cultural celebrations, and recipes. This approach strengthens inclusion and confidence, enabling parents to move from participants to contributors. Families and local partners also co-create the organisation's parenting booklet, now in its fifth edition, which extends learning into the home.

The programme also embeds evidence-based approaches such as ORIM (Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Modelling), part of the Peep Learning Together Programme, and HENRY (Health, Exercise, Nutrition for the Really Young) into informal community settings. Rather than being delivered as standalone courses, these principles are woven into everyday interactions, helping parents understand how play supports development and how learning can continue at home.

Delivery focuses on accessibility and inclusion. Communication through a WhatsApp community of over 850 families ensures information and learning resources are shared in a simple way, supporting engagement across diverse communities where over 60 languages are spoken. Partnerships with more than 20 local organisations provide additional support for families.

Together, these elements create a flexible, inclusive and innovative model that connects early learning, parenting support, and community development in a single, accessible programme.

*"The nicest play group I've been to. Very educational, filled with loads of sensory play and workshops. The team are really friendly and welcoming too. My kids love coming here and always come home happy." – Parent*





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### Impact and next steps

The programme has reached around 35,000 participant attendances since 2020 and delivers strong outcomes for both children and parents. Families report improvements in children's wellbeing, communication, and social skills, alongside increased parental confidence and understanding of early learning. The organisation's January 2026 family survey (116 responses) highlights consistently high impact, including ratings of 4.65/5 for child wellbeing, 4.67/5 for children's social development, 4.55/5 for communication skills, and 4.53/5 for parent wellbeing, echoed by a 4.9-star rating across 119 Google Reviews.

Beyond individual outcomes, the programme plays a significant role in reducing isolation and strengthening community connections. Families report an increased sense of belonging and inclusion, supported by welcoming, accessible spaces, and peer networks.

The organisation continues to evolve its offer in response to feedback, expanding workshops, webinars, and specialist sessions to deepen learning. Its co-created, community-led approach ensures the programme remains relevant, sustainable, and responsive to local needs.

*"A great community hub, which has helped me enormously in overcoming social isolation. Early Years Cocoon is precious and its contribution to local families invaluable." – Parent*

