



## Puppet pals

Chapel Street Nursery and Children's Centre is part of Luton's Every Child a Talker (ECaT) project. Lisa Pepper and Sam Randall, Early Language Lead Practitioners at the nursery, explain how communication is encouraged with a little help from their friends.

We wanted to create a fun activity that could be used at home to help develop communication, language and the relationship between parent and child. Our children come from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, and many are learning English as an additional language. We felt the best way to encourage communication was to provide a resource that could be taken home, where young children feel most comfortable and confident to communicate. We also wanted to use a resource they are familiar with; each room in the nursery has a puppet mascot so the puppets were an obvious choice as they spark so much excitement. So the Puppet Loan Scheme was the perfect package.



Initially, we put up a display that would appeal to both the children and their parents, asking if the puppets could visit their houses for adventures. This proved to be very effective. We also showcased the puppets at parents' evening. By this time the children had become quite attached to them and were eager to take home a puppet for the weekend and record their adventures. A puppet pack, with a digital camera and a book with photos from previous weekends, helps to kick-start the adventures and encourages parents to talk about the photos with their children. The children love the book. Puppet adventures have been many and varied: trips to the local shopping centre; accompanying dad to the fire station; having a bath; even visiting Luton Town Football Club to watch a match!

The Puppet Loan Scheme, being based on the children's own experiences, has significantly helped the children's language development, confidence and engagement with parents. The activity is popular throughout the nursery, with children from 3 months to 5 years. Many parents said they enjoyed the activity just as much as their child. We feel that this mutual enjoyment has been the main reason for the success of the Puppet Loan Scheme.

We are looking to extend the scheme with 'chatterboxes'. Adding themed resources to the puppet packs, such as, animals and a book about a farm or cars and a book about transport, will help extend the children's vocabulary. We are just so happy the children and parents are as enthusiastic as we are!