



# Early Development Group Evaluation: Spring 2025

# OUR EARLY DEVELOPMENT GROUPS

Our Early Development Groups are for infants and young children with Down syndrome aged 12 months to 5/6 years of age. Babies are also welcome to join in the second part of our youngest group.

Laura, Mel and Wendy started the academic year delivering 7 fortnightly group sessions and 4 one-to-one sessions for children with more complex needs.

Following Wendy's accident in November 2024 Mel took over delivery of her group and one to one sessions.

Then, with the cessation of National Lottery Funding in March 2025 and our failure to secure further funding, cuts had to be made. All staff contracts expired March 2025, Mel's contract was not renewed, some groups were amalgamated and three of the one to one sessions ceased.

In addition we increased the fees from £6 per session to £10 per session. This 'fee' is still classed as a donation and no child will ever be excluded for financial reasons.

We continue to seek funding for these sessions which are currently funded from our reserves at a cost of £1000 each month.

In total 50 children have benefitted from these sessions.



Wendy



Laura



Mel



## OVERVIEW OF OUR EARLY DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

We have been delivering our early development groups since 2005!

The intervention is over 5 years and follows a programme written and developed by Wendy Uttley.

All early development group sessions are two hours long and focus on early communication, language, speech sounds, interaction, number, reading and social, fine and gross motor skills delivered through short fun activities.

Sessions can be quite intense at times but the focus is always to ensure the child enjoys the session and parents feel confident to continue input at home. Professionals attend either in support of the children or to observe our best practice.

The children in the groups never cease to amaze us with their achievements and it is extremely rewarding to be part of their development.

## ONE to ONE SESSIONS & ASSESSMENTS

One to one sessions are used to support children who need more specific input. In addition, for a fee, we can undertake an assessment and produce a written report.







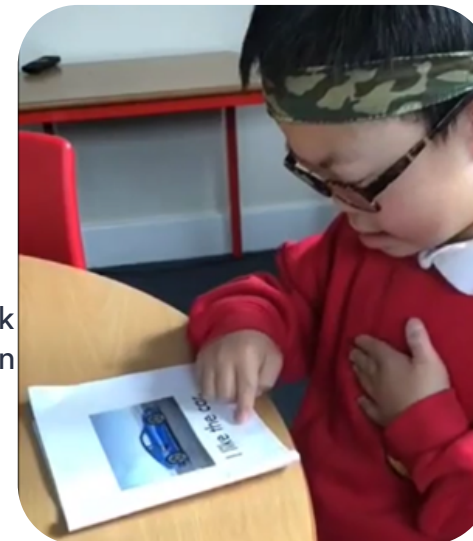
## USING WORDS IN PRINT TO DEVELOP SPEECH AND READING SKILLS

We introduce words in print from age 3 by word to word matching and as the children begin to learn these 'black on white' squiggles mean something we begin to use them to support speech.

Here's Orla using a sentence strip to ask for biscuits at snack time and Ethan using signing and word recognition to read an early book.

Wendy presented at the Down Syndrome Research Forum sharing videos to celebrate the success of the children we work with.

We are very proud of our early development groups and the children who attend them in preparation for school.



## JULY 2025 GRADUATES

In July 2025 our year 5 children graduated. Certificates were awarded and reports written detailing the progress of each child across literacy, numeracy, speech, language, communication, feeding skills, fine and gross motor skills and behaviour. In addition we send information into their schools offering training and support.



My child is making progress as a result of attending these sessions



Data	Response	%
★★★★★	17	89%
★★★★☆	2	11%
★★★★☆	0	0%
★★★☆☆	0	0%
★★☆☆☆	0	0%

What progress/developments have you seen?

Data
Concentration has increased Sharing skills Number skills
Better focus/attention, can sit & spend longer doing a task without getting distracted and is starting to understand the concept of colours,matching & counting to 3 (albeit she is none verbal, but reacts in cur to the adult counting)
My son is more socialising, before he was scared from strangers..etc..
Able to sit in group times longer, able to wait longer in taking turns. Better number recognition, better sound knowledge, speech improvements and improvement in listening skills.
Development of speech and language skills such as increased vocabulary and speech clarity, increased use of Makaton signs. He is able to sit and focus on tasks for longer. He is starting to develop his use and understanding of numbers. He is developing skills in turn taking and sharing. His friendships and confidence in interacting with others are growing.
Developed communication skills Improved social behaviour Learnt sign language
Socialising, interesting in him same age children..
O is able to recognise letters and make the relevant speech sounds, as well as identify numbers and count. This has enhanced her ability to prepare for starting school in September
My child's has shown great progress with his speech. Vocally his sounds are more distinctive. I have also seen progress in his reading, counting and memory skills.
Taking the target activities created for E and incorporating then everyday whether at home or nursery has allowed E to make consistent progress even if only small.
Social skills During singing (magic bag) paying attention tracking objects and becoming more familiar with nursery rhymes this is helping his speech and language.

## What progress/developments have you seen?

Data
Signs good waves/ dances recongises songs
Social interaction and confidence Use and understanding of Makaton aiding communication
Increased confidence in talking and Makaton Improvement in counting and word recognition Better listening skills
Learned to do more sign language & remember them & use them to communicate.
Better listening skills picking up signs so she can express herself more. Wants to learn and finds it fun
Improving speaking, reading, sharing and relating to others.
She is more focused and can spend longer on learning tasks. Confident finding her name. More consistent in matching numicon to number. Saying a lot more individual words & signs
Taking the target activities created for E and incorporating them everyday whether at home or nursery has allowed E to make consistent progress even if only small.
Social skills During singing (magic bag) paying attention tracking objects and becoming more familiar with nursery rhymes this is helping his speech and language.

I feel confident to support my child’s learning as a result of attending these sessions

40 Responses



Data	Response	%
★★★★★	15	79%
★★★★☆	4	21%
★★★★☆	0	0%
★★★☆☆	0	0%
★★☆☆☆	0	0%

I feel that I understand my child’s needs and potential as a result of attending these sessions

40 Responses



Data	Response	%
★★★★★	16	84%
★★★★☆	2	11%
★★★★☆	1	5%
★★★☆☆	0	0%
★★☆☆☆	0	0%

My child is developing good listening and concentration skills

19 Responses



Data	Response	%
★★★★★	12	63%
★★★★☆	4	21%
★★★★☆	2	11%
★★★☆☆	1	5%
★☆☆☆☆	0	0%

Do you feel supported as a parent/carer by attending these sessions?

19 Responses



Data	Response	%
★★★★★	17	89%
★★★★☆	1	5%
★★★★☆	1	5%
★★★☆☆	0	0%
★☆☆☆☆	0	0%



Can you explain your answers to the above scoring?

The staff are always willing to answer questions, support with any queries. Staff explain the purpose of each activity and the benefits. In regards to my child's development there is support and what other services and support is available to support my child's needs.

I'm confident in the support that my child needs.

A is much much developmentally delayed than other children her age (including children with DS), which has worried me about how I can get her to learn. However Wendy's approach of repetition, perseverance, and consistency means I've not given up and assumed she's incapable. Sessions are very informative, staff are really supportive.

Children have gained a lot of skills from sessions and interact well during sessions. A great chance to meet with others and share information and experiences.

The sessions are really helpful. My son enjoys them and it is a good opportunity to interact with his peers. It is really helpful seeing tasks demonstrated by Laura in the session and then being able to practice this ourselves in the group and again once at home. The resources given out in the groups are fantastic. Laura is very approachable and easy to talk to about any concerns regarding development.

M is enjoying sessions and making progress.

My child is not sitting at these sessions, concentration not there yet or focus. Joint attention needs to increase.

Whereas I don't find all of the activities are relevant to the stage my child is at, many of them are and I love that I really gain an understanding of the learning profile of my child and style of learning.

Sometimes we struggle to attend but this is no reflection on the group which is useful and well led. My child enjoys it and likes the learning materials (maybe the clear print, style of activities?)

This is an outstanding sessions. The staff is always happy to support and give advice to parents. Without these groups it would be impossible to understand our children's capabilities.

Using certain commands which have been demonstrated in the group, has enabled us to further assist O's development. We replicate what we have seen at the sessions and this has enhanced O's understanding. Her listening and concentrating skills have developed as a result of continued practising of strategies.

I feel that more classes my child attend, he will get better & learn & develop more.

Sessions are a great help I get a better understanding of U's needs and behaviour. It has also helped me too with the questions I have.

The EDG provides with a differentiated/targeted work for my child. School staff are also joining the centre, which helps guide what my son should be learning and support his development.

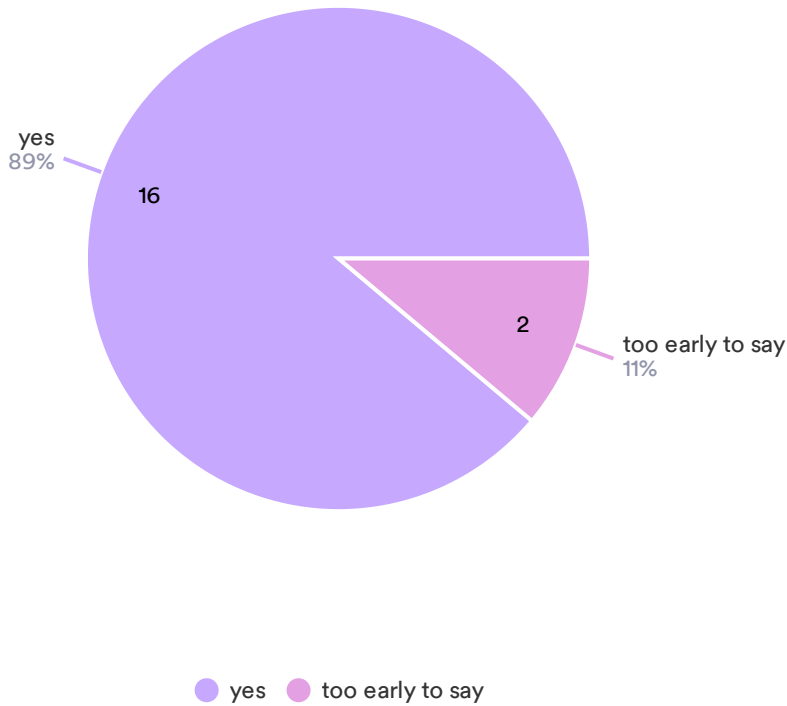
In the sessions the teacher models high expectations of skills like good listening and concentrating. This has given me the confidence to persevere with skills we are working on together and strategies to use to keep my child's focus.

Do you have any comments that you would like to make about the Early Development Groups you have attended: (i.e. any benefits/changes for you or your child as a result of these sessions?)

Data
Because our session is a 1:1 with someone who has great experience and understand of my child, I believe this has benefited his development.
Resources supplied have been really beneficial to reinforce learning at home and at nursery. My child can concentrate on learning tasks for a longer length of time. Splitting words by tapping them out has helped my daughter to start saying 2 syllable words, including her name.
I would like to thank all the staff for their support. These sessions are a great support for not only for my child but also for me as a parent.
Children's overall skills have developed due to using techniques/learning styles used in sessions. Childrens understanding skills have improved since attending sessions.
These groups have been really valuable for both me and my child. I can see the improvement in his learning, development and confidence. There is a lot of support available for parents as well as for the children.
Really beneficial for children with Down syndrome.
We have had to miss a couple of sessions lately due to car in the garage and husband has been in hospital.
Happy child but I'm concerned as not partaking in the activities in sessions. Gets distracted and distressed, won't sit to learn. Same at home.
Thanks for your help. The group leaders are caring.
O hugely benefits as both her and I are being educated on the best ways to help her learn. She has learnt how to count to ten and also to identify words. She is beginning to learn to read.
I do feel something 2 hours is long, coz my child get distracted very quick and then, he can't concentrate properly. I think with time he will get used to it.
Unable to express how great these sessions are I travel all the way from Oldham every fortnight.
The groups/session are vital for children with Down syndrome, particularly at a time when NHS therapies are non existent and being cut. The only therapy that my child has received has come from the charity. Even the SENNIT teachers are unaware of these strategies (teaching and learning specified to DS).

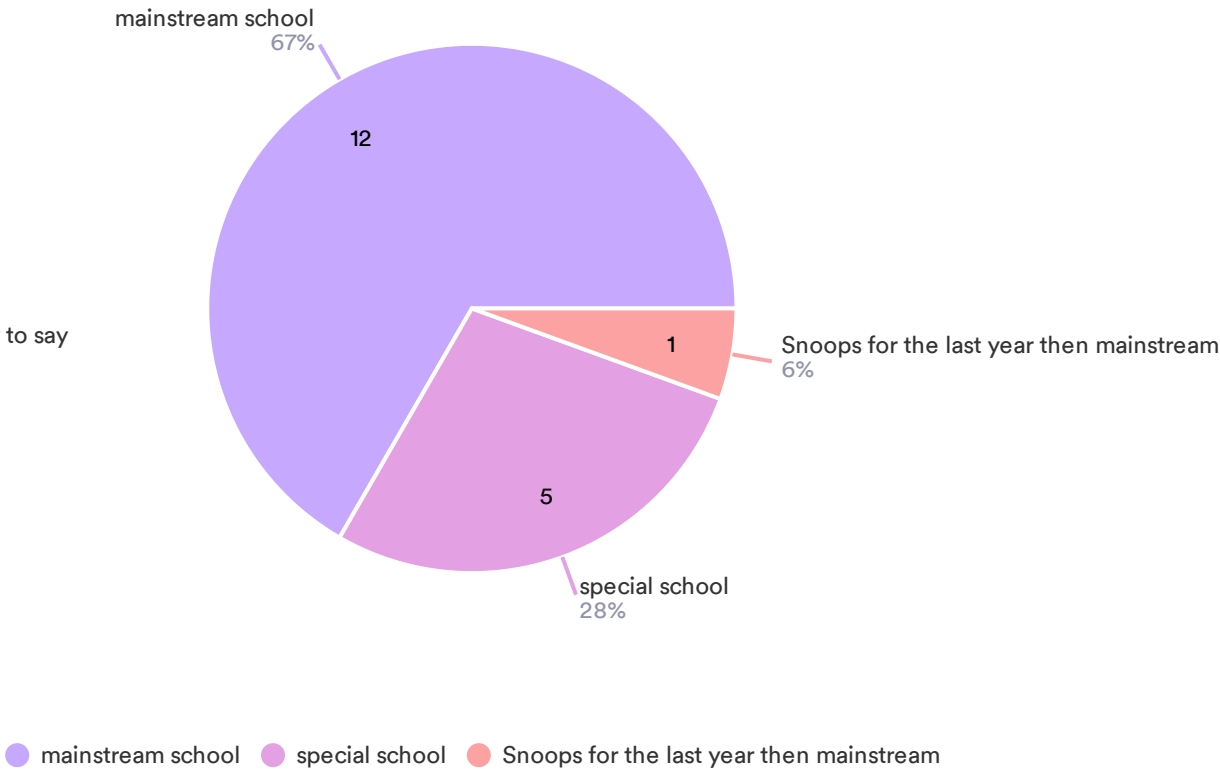
Do you think that your child will have a better start in life because of these sessions ?

18 Responses- 1 Empty



Which type of school are you planning for your child to attend?

18 Responses- 1 Empty



## Can you say how/ why?

### Data

There is no other support out there (that I am aware of) who could also provide my child the resources needed for his development.

By attending these sessions, we have been able to understand more about where E is on the development scale. Rather than feeling frustrated, we are able to approach her development with more understanding and patience. Also, we are able to target basic skills that otherwise we may have skipped over or may have been frustrated that she hasn't been moving on to next developmental milestones.

Yes we have started to see that she is using early language to express her needs and wants. She wants to make her own choices and having worked on speech sounds and using makaton has allowed her to begin communicating which will have a big impact for her future independence.

The knowledge and support given to me as a parent helps me support my child's needs. My child is also given the support which enables and gives him the head start in supporting his development in all areas of learning. This support network is always there each day of the week supporting us parents. Thank you

Because parents are new to having a child with Down syndrome we get told they won't be able to do so many things, but going to groups it enabled me to learn how to support and teach him.

Absolutely because the tasks have shown me, how to support her at home & school and are founded in scientific evidence, in regards to the learning profile of people with Down syndrome

Due to basic skills that are implemented early from the groups, helps with transition to school and helps with a range of skills needed for their development when in educational settings.

He has learnt lots of skills that are already helping him in school and will continue to help him in the future for example, an increased vocabulary, familiarity with numbers, listening, following instructions, taking turns, increased confidence.

Extra learning helps.

Tools and knowledge given to parents to help child get that better start.

She will start mainstream primary school in a position which is not too dissimilar to other students in her class, as she is able to identify certain words, letters and numbers as well as make a number of speech sounds. These are not things which I believe she would be able to do had we not attended the sessions.

I have see changing in my child but still to early to say.

U is able to concentrate more even at school.

They help with behaviour, giving/supporting effective face to face strategies. School staff do not receive this training unless they attend these specific groups, I have also gained skills. It has helped raise morale/expectations of my sons abilities at school.

# Early Development Group Evaluation: your feedback 2025

Is there anything you think we could do to improve the Early Development Groups? (e.g. timing, resources, general organisation etc.)

Data
To get their school more involved in the development groups.
It might be helpful to see the notes written during E's sessions and "next steps" on something sharable? Like a google doc, so that I can access it when I need or share it with nursery.
If there was funding to keep group sizes small it would help the children have less distractions and the teacher to focus on individual needs.
I think one set of phonics should be used as many charities organisations use their own phonics which resulted in him learning 3 different phonics schemes it has confused my son and made him less confident,I think consistently is key and schools should use the same too as he maybe having to learn a 4 at school.
No nothing
No
There are fantastic, I wish they could continue throughout primary school. We missed them when they reduced from twice to once a month.
book reading should be included.
no
If a child not engaging in class what else can be done?
Smaller group sizes would be ideal as the children definitely get more out of it when there are fewer attendees, however I appreciate that this is due to funding and the ability to run increased numbers of groups. We are grateful for the sessions!
I think everything is good, won't change anything
I am happy with it all, although we would love to have it closer to home but I am happy to travel here for the benefits.



# Thank You!

Early Development Group Evaluation: your feedback 2025