

50 Things to Do Before You're Five



How-to Guide

This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

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50 Things to Do Before You're Five



Title	50 Things to Do Before You're Five
Organisation	Bradford Birth to 19
Category	Fully Validated and Adopted Elsewhere
Poverty Impact	Mitigation., Awareness
Introduction to the Project	
<p>'50 Things to Do Before You're Five' is a free mobile app and website that provides 50 local low-cost and easily accessible activities to support the early year development of children across the UK. Available in 25 local areas, it supports parents and caretakers in developing their home learning environment. As a place-based, parent-facing offer for Local Authorities and other public sector organisations, it seeks to mitigate the effects of poverty from an early age. The project is based on the simple notion that fun, low or no-cost experiences with family, indoors and outdoors, are great ways to support children's development no matter their background.</p>	

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?

Headteacher of St. Edmund's Nursery in Bradford.

How did the idea for the project come about?

The headteacher developed 50 fun activities to do within the nursery and for the parents of the nursery school. It was an initiative for the families within the school to encourage conversation between parents and children. By encouraging the families to do the 50 fun activities, children naturally wanted to talk about their experiences. Realising that this idea could be spread across the whole of Bradford to support children's development in the early years, Bradford Birth to 19 developed an app and website to make the initiative accessible to more people. Enabled by seed funding, they developed the digital offer, providing more detail and additional support to parents (e.g. by suggesting words that parents can use when having conversations with their children to expand the vocabulary on certain topics).

With the development of the online tool, '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' rapidly expanded to other areas. Based on a commissioning model, local authorities and other public sector organisations have since bought the model and adapted the app and website to their specific locality. It is now used by anyone working with children under five, such as schools, early years settings, health visitors, libraries and museums. '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' is currently available in 25 local areas across the UK, with Jersey being the furthest South and Fife being the furthest North, which became publicly available in August 2023.

Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?

No	
Yes	✓

There was not one particular paper shaping the development but the influence of play on language skills development has been evidenced.

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Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?			
			No
			Yes
Headteacher from St. Edmund's, Becky Earnshaw (at that time Chief Executive Officer at Voice 21 UK and now Advisor at The Oracy Education Commission), local authorities, parents, Big Change (funding) and an IT specialist.			
Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?			
			No
			Yes
The local community, meaning the parents and carers, contributed to the development and were asked what the 50 things in the online offer should be.			
Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?			
		No	Yes
			✓
Please provide details of the funding that was used to support the development of the initial idea of the project.			
Which organisation provided funding?		The Big Change, the National Funding Organisation.	
How much was required?		N/A	
What was the specific source of funding? (e.g., particular grant or policy)		Seed funding.	
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?			
		No	Yes
			✓
Please provide details of the resources that were required when developing the initial idea of the project.			
Staff/Volunteer Time	N/A		
Facilities / Workspace	N/A		
Equipment	N/A		

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Local Knowledge	As the project is a community-prioritised and place-based service, local knowledge was important to understand the community's needs and local offers.	
Food and Drink	M/A	
Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?		
		No
		Yes
Initially, there were small barriers to the development of the app due to a lack of IT knowledge within the 50 Things group and restricted funding to develop it. Overall, however, '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' did not experience many barriers in its development.		
Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?		
		No
		Yes
<p>As they did not have the knowledge or money to invest in the app's development, it was crucial that they found a tech partner who was willing to take a business risk and believe in the potential of a commissioning model.</p> <p>They had a very enthusiastic team and willing partners who were involved in writing the content which sped up the process.</p> <p>The co-construction approach was one of the secrets behind its success. A lot of the communities they work with have a rich history of people coming and telling them how to do a better job as parents. The project builds partnerships with the communities to generate local contextual information about special places that only the community knows about. Through conversations, they develop the 50 things most relevant to that area (e.g. where to find conkers) while ensuring variety (e.g. indoor/outdoor, different seasons and age groups). Through the process of gathering information from the community for the community, the project ensures that the information provided is most relevant for the people in the locality but also owned by them.</p>		

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How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?
From receiving funding agreements to the launch of the online offer it took about 8 months.
Who made the decision to introduce the project?
The project was initially developed for families attending St Edmunds Nursery School. During the development process the team reflected that it could be available for all families across Bradford and sourced seed funding to develop the project as an App and Website. The decision was inspired by the then Headteacher Anne-Marie Merfield.

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Early Development – Pilot Project or Feasibility Study

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a pilot project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a feasibility study	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Is there a referral process?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>The referral process is a combination of trying to reach out to potential service users directly and reaching out to organisations.</p> <p>The local authorities and organisations that buy '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' roll out the work in their locality. The '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' team has social media campaigns in most areas and also uses press articles. However, generally, they rely on frontline practitioners to spread the word, e.g., in schools, nurseries, or through childminders, health visitors, museums, and libraries.</p> <p>The '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' team maintains strong relationships and supports the local area by meeting with partner organisations on a monthly basis to share ideas, such as how to make the offer widely known or more appealing. They also share approaches and ideas from different localities.</p>		
Is referral the only way that potential clients are made aware of the project?		
	Yes	N/A
	No	N/A
Other than referral, how do potential clients come to know about the project?		
Working With People with Lived Experience of Poverty		
What is the most common way through which users typically access the service?		
N/A		
Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to service users?		
	No	N/A
	Yes	N/A

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Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
Many individuals are involved by being enthusiasts or through volunteering.		
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or project governance?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Parents and caretakers of children experiencing poverty are equally encouraged to contribute to the website and app to share their knowledge and expertise with the wider community.		
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project? <i>If so, please describe below.</i>		
	No	N/A
	Yes	N/A

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Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?		
Christian Bunting.		
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?		
	Yes	
	No	✓
Christian is also responsible for a range of other offers and projects at Bradford Birth to 19, including the Skit School Centre for initial teacher training and the Institute for the Early Years, which offers a BA degree programme in the early years.		
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Bradford Birth to 19 oversees the projects from a national perspective and liaises regularly with the partners rolling it out in their locality. The central team of '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' meets monthly with the commissioning partners and acts as their advisory group. There are also various examples of localised steering groups in the project's different localities.		
Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?		
	No	N/A
	Yes	N/A

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

In your opinion, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
Yes. '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' has fed into policy-influencing publications, including a series of reports focused on child poverty called "the Child of North" for the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) (Child of the North Reports - N8 Research Partnership).	
Is the project part of any other strategy?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
They have been consulted for a report for Early Years (due to be published in the summer of 2024) that will help influence anti-poverty policies within the Government.	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this strategy?	
Don't know	
No	✓
Yes	
However, their work links to anti-poverty strategies and statutory requirements.	
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?	
No	✓
Yes	
However, their work links to anti-poverty strategies and statutory requirements.	

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Funding

Has external funding been secured to support the work?	
No	N/A
Yes	N/A
Please provide details of the external funding that was used secured to support this work?	
Which organisation provided funding?	N/A
What was the specific funding stream/source/scheme?	N/A
How much funding was secured?	N/A
For how long has funding been secured?	N/A
Is future funding from the same external source a possibility?	
Don't know	N/A
No	N/A
Yes	N/A
Is future funding from the same external source based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered from this work?	
No	N/A
Yes	N/A
The project is now running on a commissioning-model in which local authorities and other public organisations pay for using the app and website in their locality annually.	
Has a specific sum been secured from the host organisation to support this work	
No	N/A
Yes	N/A

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Please provide details of the funding that was used secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
How much funding was secured?	N/A	
For how long has funding been secured?	N/A	
Is future funding from the host organisation a possibility?		
	Don't know	N/A
	No	N/A
	Yes	N/A
Is future funding from the host organisation based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered?		
	No	N/A
	Yes	N/A
N/A		

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from the host organisation contribute toward the work of this project as part of their broader work for the organisation?		
No		
Yes		✓
The core staff within '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' are all paid. Bradford Birth to 19 also offers paid internships. Some staff are waged on a sessional basis.		
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?		
No		N/A
Yes		N/A
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?		
No		N/A
Yes		N/A
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?		
No		
Yes		✓
There are enthusiastic volunteers who support the work of '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' (e.g. going to shopping centres to raise awareness).		

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Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?			
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please provide details of the resources that are required to deliver the project?			
Facilities / Workspace	N/A		
Equipment	N/A		
Local Knowledge	Yes, through steering group member input.		
Food and Drink	N/A		
Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?			
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Local Knowledge: Partner organisations and communities in the respective localities.			
Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project?			
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The project is based on a website, and they had to develop an app with the help of an IT partner.			
Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?			
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?				
No			✓	
Yes				
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?				
Yes			N/A	
No			N/A	
Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project?				
Data collection is an on-going process facilitated through web analytics and coordinated by the team.				
How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation?				
N/A				
What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to measure impact of the project?				
Web analytics.				
What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?				
Number of users	Yes	✓	No	
Profile of users	Yes	✓	No	
Experience of users	Yes	✓	No	
Outcomes for users	Yes		No	
Anything else	Yes		No	
They have an annual survey for the commissioning partners to find out about their experience.				

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Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?

No	
Yes	✓

Bradford Birth to 19 uses the anonymous data to examine usage patterns and levels which influence their design. Local commissioners of 50 Things use data they can access through Bradford Birth to 19 to track and measure engagement from priority groups, including socio-economically disadvantaged groups. They can then adapt their service delivery model to become more impactful.

Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project

No	✓
Yes	

Bradford Birth to 19 is currently conducting an internal evaluation of its work in Bradford, following support provided to 1,000 children in Early Years settings over three years. This evaluation is being carried out in collaboration with the University of Bradford.

Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?

Don't know / no current plans	N/A
No	N/A
Yes	N/A

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Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?	
Fully met	✓
Making progress toward meeting Aims	
Not making progress	
'50 Things to Do Before You're Five' continues to meet its aims and expands its service.	
What difference has the project made?	
<p>'50 Things to Do Before You're Five' created an accessible service which is targeted at families that may be impacted by poverty. By making the offer available to different localities within the UK, more children and their families can use the free services and engage in local activities. According to their impact report (see details below), '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' has increased the time for children to go outside and their opportunities to socialise within their local communities. Additionally, the '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' supported parents to help their children's development in different ways.</p>	
Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?	
No	
Yes	✓
The service has shown increasing demand since its inception, growing from one council to 24. Use has grown too - in January 2025, they reached 100,000 downloads - an important marker.	
Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?	
Yes	✓
No	
They have developed and refined the offer so that it can be used by a growing range of health, education and care services.	

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Has the project changed through time?		
		No
		Yes
What changed	The service has shown increasing demand since its inception, growing from one council to 24. Use has grown too - in January 2025, they reached 100,000 downloads - an important marker.	
Why has it changed	N/A	
Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?		
		No
		Yes
They have seen much greater connectivity between health, education and care services. Professionals from different agencies have historically too often acted in silos. 50 Things helps to break this down.		
In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?		
		No
		Yes
The rapid uptake of '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' in various locations across the UK and the continuous downloads of the app show that parents and caretakers are looking for ways to engage more effectively with their children in their everyday lives and in their learning processes. By providing an online offer that is free and lists free or low-cost '50 Things to Do Before You're Five', the project enables families of various backgrounds to give their children a good start in life. Providing equal learning opportunities is thus paving the way to mitigate the effects of poverty and inequality.		

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?
The app enables '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' to extend its reach across the country. By being locally adapted the offer is, however, co-created and meaningful to the local community.
What, if anything, is working less well?
One of the biggest barriers to further expansion is local authority budgets. Whilst many authorities, e.g. the Scottish Government, expressed interest, funding restrictions are preventing public sector organisations from adopting the app. The issue hereby is that the project mainly delivers long-term impacts, e.g. improving the health of families and children by encouraging them to do activities outside or improving the language development of young children. The team tries to advocate that the costs for a local authority to purchase '50 Things to Do Before You're Five' is, on average, approximately the cost of two children that need to be picked up with chronic lifestyle-dependent issues such as respiratory or coronary problems or obesity impacted health problems. However, while the paediatric service would have a saving, it becomes difficult to convince the local authority of this benefit as they are not responsible for paying hospitals.
What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?
Easily accessible and low-cost activities for children under five can mitigate the impact of poverty, promote children's development and reduce costs on the health and education systems. A locally developed initiative can spread across different localities when it builds on the knowledge and expertise of communities and is co-created with its users. Some local authorities like the idea but do not have the funds to implement it in their area. Governance structures are, at times, hindering implementation.

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Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>'50 Things to Do Before You're Five' plans to expand across the United Kingdom. In particular, it hopes to establish Scottish headquarters focused on delivering goals tailored to Scottish needs.</p> <p>They are currently developing more interactive paper-based resources to help address the concerns around screen time. They are also developing a more user-friendly version of the app.</p>	
How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?	
<p>'50 Things to Do Before You're Five' has already been replicated successfully in different localities with support available centrally for this, including marketing & communications and training. There are also regular opportunities for new localities to hear from other localities on the way they deliver '50 Things to Do Before You're Five'.</p> <p>There is also potential for it to roll out internationally.</p>	

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