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PRESS RELEASE

First steps to future success with early years project

An innovative early years programme is helping preschool children develop communication, confidence and key learning skills through the power of movement, storytelling and play.

The Story Steps combines storytelling, brain dance warm-ups, movement exploration, rhythm, repetition and interaction to create an environment where children can learn naturally through physical experiences. Story Steps is designed to support children's development in a joyful, engaging and accessible way.

Delivered by Beccy Hurrell Voice & Arts (BHVA) in partnership with Kettering Town Council, the project has been funded through North Northamptonshire Council's Local Area Partnership Health Inequalities Additional Allocation (HIAA) programme. These funds support community activities and interventions that reduce health inequalities experienced by residents across North Northamptonshire. and is designed to support children's development in a joyful, engaging and accessible way.

Lindsey Atkins, Director of Beccy Hurrell Voice & Arts Limited and Project Lead, explained: "Movement is not separate from learning. Children develop language through the body first. Through activities involving rhythm, balance, repetition and whole-body movement, children are building the neurological foundations that support communication, confidence and learning."

The project is built on research that shows movement plays a critical role in brain development. By encouraging children to crawl, balance, cross the midline, repeat movement patterns and physically engage with stories, Story Steps helps children connect language and meaning to real experiences.

Rather than asking children to sit still and learn, Story Steps creates opportunities for exploration, imagination and participation.

Story Steps focuses on supporting: communication and language development, gross motor skills, confidence and self-esteem, social interaction, listening and engagement and school readiness and was held at the Ronald Tree Nursery School in Kettering.

The programme has been particularly effective in supporting children with communication delays, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and children who struggle to engage through more traditional seated learning approaches.

Lindsey added: "When children jump the puddles, swish through the grass or stomp through the mud, they're not simply having fun. They're attaching meaning, sequencing and vocabulary to physical experiences, helping to support speech development, recall, confidence and emotional safety.

"For some children, Story Steps may be one of the very first times they experience success without pressure. Those moments become the building blocks that help children keep trying, keep communicating, keep exploring and keep believing in themselves as they grow. That is why this work matters."

Councillor Andy Byatt, Chair of Kettering Town Council's Finance and Governance Committee, said: "Kettering Town Council is proud to support projects such as Story Steps that make a real difference to the lives of local children and families. Early intervention is one of the most effective ways we can help young people achieve their potential, and this programme demonstrates how creative, inclusive approaches can improve confidence, communication and school readiness. It has been wonderful to see the positive impact Story Steps has had within our community, and we are delighted to have worked alongside BHVA and Ronald Tree Nursery School to make this project a success."

Councillor Brian Benneyworth, North Northamptonshire Council's Executive Member for Housing, Health and Leisure, said: "It is particularly encouraging to see the positive impact Story Steps has had on children with additional needs and those who may find traditional learning approaches more challenging. Through our Local Area Partnership HIAA funding, North Northamptonshire Council is proud to support initiatives like this that give children the best possible start in life, strengthen family engagement and help create healthier, more resilient communities for the future."

Since its launch, Story Steps has delivered a range of positive outcomes for children and families. Practitioners have reported increased confidence, participation and communication among children, alongside improvements in language development, listening skills and attention. The programme has also supported coordination and physical development, with many children becoming more willing to engage in activities and group experiences. Families have observed children recalling routines and stories more independently, while parents have become increasingly involved in storytelling and play-based learning at home.

The programme also works closely with families, recognising the important role parents and carers play in a child's early development. Parent engagement workshops provide practical ideas and activities that can be continued beyond the sessions, helping families build confidence through play together.

A key objective of Story Steps is ensuring the programme's impact continues long after the funding period ends. Alongside direct delivery, the project includes staff training for nursery practitioners and the creation of accessible resources that can be embedded into everyday practice.

For Kettering Town Council and BHVA, the project represents a commitment to early intervention and long-term community impact.

The long-term vision is to expand Story Steps into more early years settings, support more families and provide practitioners with practical tools they can use every day.

The project team believes the most significant impact is often seen in what may appear to be small moments: a child joining in independently, speaking confidently, waiting patiently for their turn or remembering a routine.

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