



Open Kindergarten Update

Welcome

Welcome to this July 2025 update from the Open Kindergarten Project. The Open Kindergarten Project (Phase 3) is a partnership between Parenting across Scotland, Midlothian Sure Start, The Open University and Children in Scotland. It is funded by the Scottish Government's Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and runs from July 2024 to December 2025. In this update we'll give you an overview of activity that's taken place over the first year of the project and what to expect over the coming months.

About Open Kindergartens in Scotland

Open Kindergarten is a well established Nordic model of early years whole family support. Groups of parents, carers and their young children meet regularly in family centres and are supported by highly-qualified early years staff who work alongside specialists to develop parents' skills, confidence and knowledge.

The project partners have been working together since 2018 to bring Open Kindergartens to Scotland. Early phases of activity included a feasibility study and initial piloting in Midlothian and Edinburgh. You can read about the history of Open Kindergartens in Scotland by visiting the [Parenting across Scotland website](#).

In this current phase we've been funded to further test Open Kindergartens in different locations, venues and communities. We're also developing a range of learning resources, which will be available towards the end of the project.



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Special points of interest

- What happens in an Open Kindergarten
- Where our groups are running and who's attending
- How we are evaluating the project
- How we are sharing our learning



Where our groups are running

We started delivering Open Kindergarten groups in November 2024. To date we've delivered groups in the following locations:

Midlothian

Bonnyrigg Guide Hall
Gorebridge Family Learning Centre
Millerhill Community Hub
Paradykes Library
The Pavillion, Mayfield

Penicuik Family Learning Centre
Woodburn Community Hub

East Lothian

Dunbar Medical Centre
Lewisvale Park

West Lothian

David King Partnership Centre

City of Edinburgh

Goodtrees Community Centre

"I feel more confident in how to interact with my child as a parent thanks to Open Kindergarten"

Who's taking part

We have engaged with 225 families through our groups so far. This includes 232 adults and 270 children.

We have one dedicated group for young parents (aged under 25) but all other groups are open to anyone with children aged under 3. The groups are reaching parents/ carers with poor mental health, experiencing domestic violence, living in poverty and disadvantage.

A recent snapshot survey told us that 36% of families were from one of the child poverty delivery plan [six priority groups](#).

A place based approach

Midlothian Sure Start is the Delivery Partner on the Open Kindergarten project and is responsible for delivering all Open Kindergarten sessions. We have worked with local partners, such as health visiting teams, to identify locations where Open Kindergartens would be helpful to establish. Reasons for identifying particular sites include a lack of other types of family support in the area, and / or particularly high levels of need in a specific community.

We aim to make use of community venues and our Open Kindergarten 'kit' is transportable and adaptable to all types of settings. The venues where we've delivered Open Kindergartens include community centres, early learning & childcare settings, libraries, health centres and outdoor spaces. Their locations range from SIMD 2 to 5.

Sessions run weekly in each of the venues for between 60 mins and 120 minutes. The average length of session is 88 minutes. Most sessions take place during the day Monday – Friday, but we have trialed both a weekend group and evening group in Midlothian.

At time of publication we had delivered 198 sessions across our various locations.

Information about where groups are currently running is available on [Midlothian Sure Start's Open Kindergartens Eventbrite page](#).



Photo: Families taking part in an Open Kindergarten session

What happens in an Open Kindergarten

Open Kindergartens are free to attend and you don't need a referral or to sign up to a specific number of sessions.

The sessions are parent and child led, which means there is no set programme or agenda. What you can expect when you come to an Open Kindergarten is a relaxed space, with opportunities for babies and children to take part in self-directed play. Adults can play with their children and chat to each other and the workers.

If the Open Kindergarten workers identify a particular issue that parents want to discuss or learn more about, they can bring in outside professionals to support this. Frequently raised topics have included sleep, feeding, birthing trauma, returning to work, childcare and nursery places, relationships, benefits and worries about the future.

The group may also decide to visit local community resources such as the local library or park. Unsurprisingly there has been an increased focus on outdoor play over the summer months.

Being well connected with other sources of local support is an important feature of Open Kindergartens. If the worker identifies a family that is really struggling then referrals will be made to external agencies.

One Parent's Experience

'I started going to [named Open Kindergarten] with my son when he was about 4 months old. I was new to the area and didn't know many people...and felt a bit isolated after having a baby and my partner being at work during the day.

I can honestly say that I have found the Kindergarten to be very welcoming and non-judgemental. During my time attending the group I met a lot of other parents and children, and have gained so much confidence, as well as friendships. This has not only helped myself but also my son, because it has helped him to share and mix with children.

The staff of the Kindergarten have always been great and encouraging, they have been resourceful and helpful...I would really encourage anyone to attend.'

Our Advisory Group

It is important that our Open Kindergarten project continues to reflect the Nordic Model from where it came. It also needs to respond to the local Scottish context and our policy and practice landscapes.

To support both of these endeavors, we have established an Advisory Group, comprising practitioners, academics and policy makers from Scotland, Norway and Sweden. The Advisory Group will meet three times over the second half of this project.

We are grateful to all Advisory Group members for their time and insight. Particular thanks are also due to Husby Open Kindergarten in Stockholm, Sweden, who helped us to induct new project staff into the Open Kindergarten approach.

Learning resources

New to this phase is a focus on sharing our learning and practice with external audiences. Later this year we will publish a new elearning module and implementation toolkit. These resources will help practitioners and organisations find out more about the Open Kindergarten approach and how it could be incorporated within a wider system of support for families.

Children in Scotland is the Learning Partner on the Open Kindergarten project and responsible for the development of our elearning resource. The

resource will eventually sit on the Children in Scotland [elearning hub](#)

We'll share further information about these resources in our next update.



Picture of a computer mouse

Out and about

We may be in the process of developing our learning resources, but the project team has still been out and about spreading the word about Open Kindergartens where we can.

In November 2024 we held a very special launch event in Bonnyrigg Guide Hall, involving parents and carers, babies, practitioners, academics and decision makers. This was our opportunity to share our plans with stakeholders including contacts in local authority areas where we were interested in piloting Open Kindergartens in this phase. The event was covered by [The Herald](#).

In December 2024 we published a [blog](#) on the Children in Scotland website outlining our hopes and plans for this phase of activity.

Also in December 2024 we presented on our work at the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund [Learning Into Action Network](#)

In March 2025 we delivered a workshop at The [Right Start Conference](#), a national conference on babies' rights, held in Stirling. We were pleased to highlight how our Open Kindergartens take a babies' rights approach, and the emphasis they place on curating spaces with babies in mind.

Evaluation

The Open University is the Open Kindergarten Phase 3 Project Evaluation Partner. The evaluation methodology takes an ethnographic approach—a qualitative research approach that involves observation as well as interviews, focus groups and diaries. We are currently in the data collection phase and will report the evaluation findings at the project end.

Through the evaluation we hope to understand:

- Who is taking part in Open Kindergartens
- How Open Kindergartens work in different contexts
- The impact of Open Kindergartens on parents / carers and children
- How Open Kindergartens supports multi-agency working and any challenges associated with this



"It has a positive impact on my mental health as I find it helpful to get out the house and socialise with other families and Open Kindergarten is a positive space for me to go." (Parent)

Emerging themes so far

We have already generated considerable learning through previous and current phases of the Open Kindergarten project.

Our [Phase 2 evaluation](#) showed that Open Kindergartens:

- Fill a gap in service provision
- Support the mental health of parents and carers
- Provide peer support
- Provide opportunities for babies and young children to play and interact
- Rely on skilled professionals who are able to build positive relationships with families

Our learning from Phase 3 to date further confirms these findings and suggests that Open Kindergartens

have huge potential for roll out across different communities and settings in Scotland. They offer non-stigmatizing support that is adaptable to different environments and family circumstances.

Our challenges centre on how we best balance the open, universal offer of Open Kindergartens with our limited capacity to deliver. In one area for example we have introduced a waiting list when numbers grew too large.

We are also deliberating on what group size best supports person centred approaches and doesn't spread our workers too thinly, particularly when families come with significant challenges in their lives.



[Find out more](#)

To find out more about
Open Kindergartens in
Scotland, please visit:

www.parentingacrossscotland.org/learning/open-kindergarten-project

Or contact

info@parentingacrossscotland.org

What's next

We'll continue to deliver Open Kindergartens sessions until the end of August 2025. After that point our focus will turn to bringing together the findings from the evaluation and developing our learning resources. It is anticipated that our learning resources will be available to access online towards the end of 2025.

We plan to share our learning from this phase at a final event in December 2025 and our final report will be submitted to the Scottish Government in January 2026.

We are already discussing what the next phase of the Open Kindergarten project could look like, and how we might build capacity for delivery in a range of organisations across Scotland. If Open Kindergartens in Scotland are to reach the level of availability they have in Nordic countries, many more organisations will need to get involved. If this is something your organisation might be interested in discussing with us, please get in touch.

