

AI Cover Sheet

I acknowledge the use of (Copilot) (<https://copilot.microsoft.com/>) on (26 February 2026) to (create a logo for my business plan).

I used the prompt(s): 1. (Can you create a logo for a sensory story lending library called The Sensory Story Hub)

Cover sheet

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Business Plan- Sensory Story Hub



(Copilot, 2026)

Business Concept

This proposal introduces the development of a sensory story lending library as a social enterprise designed to support children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in the early years. According to Calo, Sancino and Scognamiglio (2024) a social enterprise is an organisation that operates to achieve social goals rather than to make profit. The social enterprise model prioritises social impact over profit, with income generated being reinvested to achieve social objectives (Doherty, Haugh and Lyon, 2014; Ghosh et al., 2024). Income generated through small membership or borrowing fees would be reinvested into maintaining and expanding the service, supporting sustainability while prioritising access, consistent with social enterprise models that reinvest surplus into their social mission (Ghosh et al., 2024).

What the service would provide

The service would provide sensory story bags that families and early years settings can borrow. According to (Preece and Zhao (2015) sensory storytelling is an approach that involves bringing a story to life using objects and sensory experiences. It can be felt and experienced, not just heard. Each bag would contain a structured sensory story, tactile and visual resources, and simple guidance for adults to support use. The purpose of the enterprise is to increase access to sensory-informed resources, strengthen home–setting partnerships, and promote inclusive early years development.

Why Sensory Storytelling Matters

Sensory stories are short, structured narratives supported by multisensory materials such as textures, sounds and visual prompts (Preece and Zhao, 2015). Predictable sensory input can support engagement, communication and emotional regulation for children with autism and complex needs (Humpheson, 2024). Research by Matos et al. (2015) suggests that presenting stories through multisensory experiences can increase engagement, participation and attention in learners with complex needs. Sensory stories allow children to access meaning through concrete sensory experiences rather than relying only on verbal language. Multisensory storytelling has been shown to increase attention and engagement in learners with complex needs (ten Brug et al., 2016).

Gap in current local provision

Public libraries provide free and universal access to books, digital texts and literacy resources, including home delivery services and book collections for early years settings (Cardiff Council, n.d.; Newport City Council, n.d.). In contrast, multisensory stories are typically prepared with individualised sensory materials and delivered by trained staff within specialised educational or care settings (ten Brug et al., 2016). Additionally structured sensory storytelling models do exist elsewhere to purchase at a high cost. For example, Bag Books delivers multi-sensory stories specifically designed for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities and additional needs across the UK (Bag Books, n.d.). Furthermore, some areas provide general sensory lending libraries, these focus on sensory equipment rather than structured, guided sensory storytelling packs (STAND North Wales, n.d.). This suggests that families in Newport do not currently have consistent access to structured, guided sensory storytelling resources through local services. While traditional books are easy to access, there is a clear gap when it comes to multi-sensory story packs designed specifically for children with Additional Learning Needs. This means families may either have to pay high costs to access services elsewhere or miss out completely. This shows a clear unmet need locally and supports the idea of developing a social enterprise that provides accessible sensory storytelling resources while reinvesting income back into supporting families.

Importance of early years and home learning

The early years are a sensitive period for communication and social interaction development (Schneider, Greenstreet and Deoni, 2021). Research highlights the importance of the home learning environment in shaping early language and literacy outcomes (Toth et al., 2019). When parents are provided with guidance and appropriate materials, they are more able to engage in shared learning activities with their child, supporting development (Dahl-Leonard et al., 2025). For families of children with additional learning needs, access to specialist resources may be limited by cost and availability (Goodall, 2021). This suggests inequality in early developmental opportunities. A sensory story lending library aims to reduce this gap by offering structured resources that can be accessed without the need for permanent purchase. Libraries and story sacks aim to support shared reading and literacy development (Shortridge, 2022), whereas multisensory storytelling is typically implemented as a structured intervention within specialist settings (ten Brug et al., 2016).

By creating sensory-informed story bags that families can borrow, the project adapts specialist provision into an accessible community resource, supporting inclusion outside the classroom. In addition to the lending library, the service would provide structured sensory storytelling sessions directly within schools and early years setting to support inclusion and pupil engagement, similar to Adventure Babies (Adventure Babies, n.d.). Delivering sessions within schools and early years setting would provide modelling for practitioners, strengthen inclusive practice and generate an additional income stream to support sustainability.

Registration and target customers

As the aim of this project is social impact rather than private profit, I would register the business as a Community Interest Company (CIC), which exists to benefit the community rather than shareholders, and register it through Companies House in line with government guidance (GOV.UK, n.d.). The target audience includes families of children in the early years, ALN practitioners, nursery settings and primary schools. Children are the central beneficiaries, as the resources aim to support communication, engagement and emotional regulation. Parents and carers benefit through increased confidence and access to structured guidance. Working with

schools, nurseries and local organisations can strengthen early years support by creating shared opportunities for children and families (Epstein, 2016).

Practical consideration

It is considered important to acknowledge practical considerations. Lending services involve repeated use of materials, meaning wear and tear must be carefully managed (Mishra, 2017). Insurance would be required to protect against major incidents such as damage or liability (Howden, n.d.). Routine lending deterioration would need to be considered within the service's operational costs, as frequently used materials inevitably deteriorate and require replacement (Ogar, 2020).

Financial sustainability

Research on lending libraries suggests that small membership or borrowing fees are commonly used to maintain sustainability (Baden, Peattie and Oke, 2020; USDN, n.d.). Families would borrow sensory story bags, typically for a two-week period. Membership would cost £10 per month. According to Estyn (2024), Newport has 27,647 pupils across 56 schools, with between 5 and 10 percent identified as having Additional Learning Needs. If we conservatively estimate 5 percent, this equates to approximately 1,382 children locally. If 25 percent of that ALN population engaged with the service, that would represent approximately 345 families.

At £10 per month, 345 families would generate £3,450 per month. That equates to £41,400 annually. This level of engagement would not only cover core wage costs but also contribute towards insurance, resource replacement and future development of the service. In addition, a single-hire option would be available at £8 per two-week period, alongside a refundable £20 deposit to protect against loss or damage (The Omnibus Project, n.d.). Income from sensory storytelling sessions would further strengthen financial stability. The model therefore remains realistic, proportionate and scalable. Initial funding could be obtained through grants, donations, fundraising events or crowdfunding, which are commonly used to establish library services lending (USDN, n.d.).

Securing a Premises

In Wales, there is a process called Community Asset Transfer (CAT). The Welsh Government explains that CAT allows public sector organisations to transfer the

ownership or management of buildings or land to community groups or third sector organisations where there is clear community benefit (Welsh Government, 2019). Newport City Council also has its own Community Asset Transfer policy. The policy explains that council-owned land or buildings can be transferred to third-sector organisations through arrangements such as leases or licences. The specific terms, including rent and responsibilities, are negotiated as part of the process rather than being fixed in advance (Newport City Council, 2024). I would therefore apply for Community Asset Transfer to secure a suitable space to operate the sensory story lending service.

Professional Experience and Conclusion

I am well placed to develop this idea due to my experience in inclusive early years, outreach service and sensory regulation. Working directly with children with ALN has provided insight into the importance of accessible, structured resources that support both children and families. This service reduces inequality of access in line with the (Equality Act 2010) and strengthens home–school partnerships and improves opportunities for children with Additional Learning Needs. This aligns with the Bronfenbrenner ecological theory, where home and school, work together and this strengthens the mesosystem which is the connection between two direct environments (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022)

In summary, the sensory story lending library offers an innovative and inclusive approach to early years support. Evidence supports the effectiveness of multisensory storytelling for engagement and communication, and research highlights the importance of equitable access to home learning resources. By combining sensory-informed practice with a lending model and social enterprise structure, the proposal aims to improve access, promote inclusion and strengthen early development outcomes.

Critical analysis of the Sensory Story Hub business idea

Introduction

This section critically analyses two key areas of the Sensory Story Hub business plan: how it supports early years development and how it promotes access and equity within the community. These areas have been selected because they reflect both the developmental purpose of the project and its wider social intention. The first topic focuses on early years development, as the core aim of the service is to support children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) through sensory storytelling. The second topic looks at equity and access, as the plan is designed to address gaps in community provision and reduce barriers to specialist resources.

Early years development

The early years are widely recognised as a crucial period of development, as rapid brain growth during this stage forms the foundations for later communication, learning and emotional regulation (Karakochuk et al., 2018; Garvey, 2023). Neurons send messages to each other across synapses, and the connections get stronger with repeated actions (Garvey, 2023). This understanding of how neural connections strengthen through repetition reinforces the importance of consistent approaches across home and educational settings. The Sensory Story Hub responds to this by extending multisensory storytelling beyond the classroom and into the home environment. Dong et al. (2020) found that children's development is more strongly associated with ongoing literacy experiences in the home environment. This supports the use of a lending model, as it increases opportunities for repeated engagement with materials over time. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains this well, as children develop across interconnected environments. When home and school use similar approaches, the mesosystem link becomes stronger, and children often feel more secure in learning (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022).

However, not all children access traditional storytelling equally. A study by (Andreou and Lemoni, 2025) found that children with developmental language disorder have difficulties with vocabulary and grammar, and this affects how well they understand and retell stories. Spoken stories rely mostly on language to carry meaning (Spencer

and Petersen, 2020). For children with additional learning needs, particularly those with language or processing difficulties, this can increase cognitive load and reduce engagement (Andreou and Lemoni, 2025). Additionally, in early years, learning is not solely language based. Kucirkova (2022) highlights that children experience stories through their senses, suggesting that meaning can be shaped through sound, touch and movement as well as spoken words. The Sensory Story Hub therefore aims to shift part of the meaning away from abstract language and into hands on experience, potentially making stories more accessible for children who struggle with purely verbal delivery.

This aligns with Piaget's view that young children construct understanding through action and hands-on exploration (Chand, 2023). During the sensorimotor stage, learning occurs through touching, manipulating and experiencing cause and effect. For some children with ALN who may be working at an earlier developmental stage (NDNA, n.d.), reliance on concrete sensory experiences remains developmentally appropriate beyond the typical age range. This recognises developmental stage over chronological age, which is particularly relevant within inclusive early years practice. Sensory storytelling reflects this by allowing children to handle objects, anticipate sequences and participate physically in a shared story. Increased engagement can also create more opportunities for repetition within shared interaction. Repeated exposure to stories has been shown to strengthen vocabulary learning and retention (Flack, Field and Horst, 2018), suggesting that repetition within sensory storytelling may further support early years development.

However, access to resources alone does not guarantee developmental benefit. Without effective adult scaffolding, sensory materials risk becoming a collection of objects rather than a meaningful shared experience. Research indicates that shared activities support development most effectively when adults are responsive and provide appropriate scaffolding (Deshmukh et al., 2022; Torr, 2020). This shows a limitation of a lending model, as the quality of interaction can differ depending on how confident, available, and informed the adult is. To address this, the Sensory Story Hub could build in clear guidance that support scaffolding, such as suggested phrases and wait times to allow for response. When parents are equipped with guidance and suitable resources, they are better able to engage in shared learning

interactions that support their child's development (Dahl-Leonard et al., 2025). Short workshops sessions could further strengthen confidence without making it feel like a demand.

Sensory storytelling may also support emotional development. Predictable sequences and repeated structures can reduce uncertainty, which is particularly important for some children with additional needs (Sperati et al., 2024). However, sensory input is not universally beneficial. Some children may experience sensory overload, particularly in response to sound or texture, demonstrating the importance of flexibility and individualisation (Jones et al., 2020). A solution is to design bags with optional elements, such as a "sensory sensitive" version and a "sensory seeker" version (OTwithsoph, 2023), plus clear notes on signs of overload and how to adapt by reducing sound and offering choice or using visual-only prompts. Research by Jones et al. (2020) highlights that inclusion is most effective when sensory environments offer choice and flexibility, allowing children to regulate sensory intensity and reduce overload (Jones et al., 2020).

Overall, the Sensory Story Hub reflects early years developmental theory by valuing interaction, hands-on learning, and repetition. Its success, however, depends not only on access to resources but on responsive adults who can adapt to children's developmental needs.

Access and Equity

According to Demissie and Pearse (2025), access to early years provision supports developmental opportunity by helping families build confidence, relationships and learning-supportive environments. Research consistently shows that children's outcomes are shaped not only by individual ability, but by wider environmental factors, including the resources and learning opportunities available to them (Harland et al., 2024). Socioeconomic factors influence access to enrichment activities, specialist resources and supportive learning experiences (Tan, 2024). This suggest that when families can afford sensory resources or private interventions, children may benefit from increased exposure to communication-supportive environments. However, when such resources are limited to certain families or settings, inequalities can widen them (Harland et al., 2024). The Sensory Story Hub aims to address this

gap by providing a lending model that reduces financial barriers and increases community access. This aligns with the principles of the Equality Act (2010) and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, both of which emphasise removing barriers and ensuring fair access to support. To address inequalities in access, the Sensory Story Hub uses a lending model that allows families to borrow sensory story resources. This helps reduce costs and ensures that more families can access specialist-style materials. Sharing resources in this way promotes fairness by making them available to the wider community.

However, access alone may not guarantee equity. According to UNICEF (2024) financial pressures can still present a barrier for families experiencing poverty. This raises the concern that even small fees can present a barrier for families experiencing poverty, meaning that low-cost services may still be inaccessible to some. Additionally, differences in confidence, and levels of support can limit how effectively some families engage with these materials (Demissie and Pearse, 2025; Harland et al., 2024). While a lending model reduces cost, it does not automatically remove affordability concerns or address barriers such as confidence that some families may have. Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem highlights that wider social and economic pressures affect what families are realistically able to engage with (Tong and An, 2024). El Zaatari and Maalouf (2022) explain that children's development is shaped by interactions with their wider environment, meaning that a service can exist within a community but remain difficult for some families to use. This shows that simply making a service available does not guarantee meaningful access and equity. According to Perera (2022) a social enterprise model, where income is reinvested to support social change, suggesting that financial barriers could be mitigated through a social enterprise model that allows costs to be subsidised for families experiencing poverty. This may help ensure that financial pressures do not prevent engagement with the Sensory Story Hub. According to Dahl-Leonard et al. (2025) parents confidence increases they are given clear guidance. The Sensory Story Hub would ensure that each bag would contain a structured sensory story, tactile and visual materials, and simple guidance for adults to support use, alongside optional training sessions. By combining subsidised access with clear guidance and support, the Hub aims to address both financial and confidence-related barriers, helping to promote accessibility and equity in early years.

Additionally, there may potential confusion between community-based provision and statutory responsibility. Under Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) children and families have a right to appropriate support, including access to specialist services such as speech and language therapy or occupational therapy, regardless of where this support is accessed. This rights-based approach is further reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, articles 23 and 24, which emphasise children's entitlement to appropriate health and specialist support, where local authorities must make sure ALN children and their families receive the support they require (UNICEF, 2022). This raises concerns that reliance on community provision to compensate for gaps in statutory support may create uncertainty around responsibility. The Sensory Story Hub must therefore be positioned as a complementary community service that supports families' rights, rather than replacing statutory duties, by actively signposting families back to statutory services where appropriate which can support families to access the help they require (Cantrell, Booth and Chambers, 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Sensory Story Hub demonstrates potential to support early years development and promote access to inclusive resources within the community. His business idea is informed by research, particularly in relation to early years development and access to inclusive support. However, this analysis highlights that access to sensory resources alone does not guarantee developmental benefit, as outcomes depend on confident and responsive adult support. Additionally, access alone does not guarantee equity. Financial pressures, confidence, and wider socioeconomic factors can continue to limit meaningful engagement. By adopting a social enterprise approach to subsidise access, embedding clear guidance and training, and positioning the Hub as a complementary, rights-based service, the Sensory Story Hub can more effectively support early years development and equitable accessibility.

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