

Children's Centre Leader

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IT'S ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR

Give Centres Resource and Freedom to Thrive

Any day now, the Government is consulting on the future of children's centres. It's a big issue and a timely one.

Consulting on and clarifying the future of children's centre services is essential now, as is honing everyone's attention to the outcomes we want and the best ways of achieving them during this political administration.

Much has been achieved over the past 15 years.

We've seen targeted Sure Start local programmes created and achieve excellent early results. We've then seen an ambitious programme of expansion and universalisation that spread our resource more thinly in the form of children's centres in every community. Over recent

times, we've experienced the reality of local politicians and funding decision-makers perhaps losing their nerve and financial clout, and being quick to reduce centres' critical mass and ultimately their ability to deliver.

What we risk now is losing the opportunity to future proof children's centre services for the next 15 years. Largely based on the sometimes sorry state that centres are in, rather than sound judgements based on their track record, their potential if resourced and managed effectively, and their core and relevant purpose.

FUND THE PREVENTION OF PROBLEMS

No one is suggesting that children's centres should be immune from the impact of

(continued on page 2)

Welcome

Welcome to the Autumn issue of Children's Centre Leader.

This issue celebrates partnership working by sharing the good work happening between Rotherham and Derbyshire on p4, as well as children's centre staff and volunteers working together in Crawley for a fundraising run on p3. Read suggestions of how to improve outcomes on p8 and how to implement the Prevent Duty on p8.

Let us know what you think by emailing:

cclr@hempalls.com

James Hempalls,
Editor, Children's
Centre Leader





(continued from page 1)

changes in local authority spending. But they must be afforded some grace, some opportunities to

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“Much has been achieved over the past 15 years”

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become established, and the resource and freedom to not only survive, but thrive.

Convincing decision makers to fund the prevention of problems has always been a tricky issue. Fortunately, we have all become a little more savvy at demonstrating outcomes of such work in the short, medium and long terms. We also need to be open to how we perceive children’s centre

services and how they are presented to the world.

TARGETED AND UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS

We argue that children’s centres still need to have both targeted and universal interventions. And we believe we should all consider ourselves to be children’s centres now. It should always have been more than about bricks and mortar. A base is useful, as long as it is vital and busy, and an accessible hub of effective practice and collaboration.

It’s about services and how they are offered and engaged with. We are still in our early years, so any criticism of lack of impact is premature.

DO MORE TO LEAD CENTRES

However, the range of models and actual effectiveness of services varies considerably, and we need to do more to lead and hold centres and their local authorities to account. Something we would like to see multi-agencies and partners having a voice in, to add value to Ofsted inspection.

THE ORIGINAL AIMS

Preventative services cannot and should not be expected to deliver the immediate tangible outcomes that intervention can achieve. Head Start’s experience in the USA has shown a four-fold return in savings in

later years, but it did take Head Start a generation to find this evidence. We have not yet had that time. Children’s centres should be held to account to the original aims of being:

Non-Stigmatising

- access based on stigma can never be a good thing, even if the eventual outcomes are successful.

Multi-Faceted

- targeting a number of factors universally too.

Persistent

- lasting long enough to make a real difference.

HAVE YOU GOT A VIEW?

We’re looking for writers for future issues of Children’s Centre Leader.

So, if there’s something bothering you about policy or practice in children’s centres or early help and you’d like to share your views, let us know.

Or perhaps you have a success story that deserves wider recognition.

Whatever it is, please email us to discuss your ideas: cclr@hempalls.com



Runaway Success for Crawley

On a warm, sunny evening in June, over 20 staff and volunteers from the six children and family centres across Crawley district gathered in Tilgate Park to join Race for Life, raising a total of £1,033 for Cancer Research UK smashing their target of £250.

For Claire Miller, Parent Volunteer Coordinator, the important thing was that everyone had the opportunity to come together, join in and help each other. She says, "some walked, some were carried (including Teddy the dog), some were pushed and some jogged, but everyone supported others within the team, smiling and laughing along the way. Teamwork at its very best!"

The Parent Volunteer Coordinator (PVC) is responsible for recruiting, placement, training and supporting of volunteers across the Crawley District Children and Family Centres to improve their confidence and gain relevant skills to support their study and/or return to work. The number of parent volunteers fluctuates but when the PVC took over three

years ago, there were nine. She has seen the number grow to 32 and then as people find jobs and return to study, the numbers fluctuate. Out of 44 volunteers who have left in the past year:

- 41% left to take up paid employment
- 41% left to attend further education
- 18% left for other reasons.

With this high turnover as a measure of success, the PVC needs to keep on top of recruiting more volunteers all the time. She attends community events, the quarterly volunteering manager's forum organised by the local volunteer bureau, works in partnership with the local college to agree placements for students, attends employability events run in partnership with JobCentre Plus, offers drop-in information events at the local library and at play and learn groups, and works with the family outreach workers and family support workers to support parents' stepping down from their support.

Supporting volunteers in their role giving them skills for future employment, a confidence boost, and helping them provide a good service at the centres is crucial. The PVC does this with a thorough induction, half termly supervision meetings or as often as needed, offering free, relevant training with the Early Childhood Service, the local college or Aspire, and emotional support and encouragement as needed. Race for Life was an opportunity for team members and volunteers, who don't see each other during the working day, to come together for a shared positive experience, raise money for a great cause, and to celebrate all the hard work the centres had been put in through recent tough times during restructures in the Early Childhood Service. The team were left feeling so inspired that they are planning more events like this to bring people together and boost morale. Claire says, "I wanted to share this story to show what a resilient and great team we have here in Crawley!"

Rotherham and Derbyshire: 2-Year-Olds and School Improvement

Two neighbouring local authorities get together to share good practice and exchange information. This is Derbyshire's side of the story.

Take up rates of the two year-old entitlement vary between local authority areas. "This is one of the challenges of a new and targeted programme of early learning, identification and intervention", says James Hemsall. On average, across England, 63% of eligible two-year-olds are in provision and take-up rates are growing all of the time.

Our Achieving Two Year Olds (A2YO) programme (funded by DfE) has helped local authorities, providers and their partners to share information, ideas and best practice to support and challenge everyone's delivery of this vital initiative. The role of children's centres and linked services has proved to be a key element of successful local strategies. Children's centres' contribution is essential in reaching eligible families, through outreach and supporting the brokerage of using early learning – including considering childcare choices, contacting providers and using their free provision. Rotherham Council has a good take up rate for two-year-old entitlement, in fact it has ranged between 70-80% over recent months. When Derbyshire County

Council was looking for an opportunity to take an in-depth look at another local authority's experience and strategy, Rotherham was an obvious choice. It just so happens that relationships are good between the current Directors of Children's Services in the two authorities.

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 new ways forward
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 better partnership
 working."

Ian Thomas, Director of Children and Young People's Services in Rotherham had taken up the role in January 2015 having moved from Derbyshire, and became aware of the local take up rate of two-year-olds compared to the regional and national averages reported at A2YO termly networks.

Ian suggested that his Derbyshire colleagues could learn from the strategies that Rotherham had been successful with. Although Derbyshire's take-up-rate was approaching the national average and improving, it was not as high as Rotherham's at that point.



TWO-WAY SHARING

Rotherham's Assistant Head of School Improvement Service, Frances Hunt, who also leads on early years and childcare, also suggested that as Derbyshire have improved Key Stage 2 attainment and progress at a higher rate than Rotherham Primary Schools, that a part of this sharing good practice could be that Rotherham school improvement colleagues also learn strategies implemented by Derbyshire.

Recently, Derbyshire's team arrived in Rotherham. They were: Assistant Director Schools and Learning, Kathryn Boulton; Assistant Director Universal and Targeted Services, Mel Meggs; Children's Centre Commissioning Manager, Tracy Marsh; and Senior Adviser, Early Years Sue Ricketts.

TWO-YEAR-OLD TAKE UP

They received a presentation from Aileen Chambers, Childcare Sustainability Manager, about maximising two-year-

old take-up. And there was a discussion about School Improvement Services in Derbyshire, which had resulted in improved pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Key Stage 2. It was really helpful for the Derbyshire early years team that they were able to confirm existing good practice about marketing to maximise take-up of two-year-old places, as well as new strategies for partnership working with children's centres.

Sue Ricketts was pleased to report that as a result they had "confirmation that our marketing strategies were sound, but (we discovered) new ways forward in developing better partnership working, including data sharing mechanisms, for working with children's centre colleagues. This included ways of sharing eligibility data and then challenging children's centre performance in a positive and professional way."

She added: "I don't think anything surprised us, other than the very different closely co-located working arrangements for schools and children's centres in Rotherham. The data sharing with children's centres and the way their officers are held professionally accountable to working in partnership with the local authority to maximise take up was really impressive."

The visit, coupled with input at an A2YO statistical neighbour group meeting in Birmingham the following week enabled Derbyshire to audit their work against the "10

steps to success" shared by A2YO. This was taken to their Early Years Strategic Team meeting and gave the drive for better partnership working real credibility.

The Rotherham data-sharing approach has been implemented with children's centres and written partnership working protocols have been agreed with children's centre lead officers.

What do Derbyshire say is key for children's centres' role with the two-year-old entitlement?

"Promotion of and following up any non-take-up by eligible families of the entitlement helps us all to achieve our targets and children to get the good start they deserve. We now have good check and challenge processes ready to implement as part of the partnership protocol. This will hold all local authority officers in positions of influence to account, in the promotion of two-year-old take up."

What would Derbyshire recommend to other local authorities and children's centre practitioners?



"Getting out and sharing practice like this really enhanced our thinking and has led to reciprocal sharing of strategy across the two local authorities. Although Rotherham and Derbyshire are very different socially and geographically, mutual respect between officers kept our minds open about what learning could be transferred across contexts."

Next, Rotherham visited Derbyshire to look at transferable practice with regard to quality improvement and evaluation work in early years settings, group care and childminding; provision and support for children with SEND and complex needs; sharing of practice on childcare sufficiency duties. We may hear more about that later.

Who should you contact if you want to know more?

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It's Everyone's Job!

I've heard people say it's not their job, just as some professionals did about child protection back in the day. Now we know keeping children safe is everyone's job. It's the same with the Prevent Duty.

Initially, it may seem different and perhaps irrelevant in children's centres, but it is central to our equalities, inclusion and tolerance agenda and should be seen as part of wider safeguarding duties in protecting children, young people and adults from harm.

WHAT IS IT?

The Prevent Duty is the duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) on specified authorities, including schools and childcare providers, to make every effort to identify and support those vulnerable to potential radicalisation, preventing them being drawn into terrorism, and other types of organised and serious crime. It's important to remember this is not limited to a particular cultural or religious background and can include white right wing extremists or animal rights activists, too.

Children's centres are not named specifically, but it would be good practice to take note of the guidance being offered to schools and the early years sector and plan how we can best support the families we work with.

BRITISH VALUES

As part of the Prevent Duty, we all need to actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance. These values are implicit in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and you are likely to be upholding them in the work you do already.

.....
 "Provide a warm welcome for all families and a place where they feel safe, valued and respected."

We'll offer some examples below of how you can show you are promoting British values, when asked; all of which can be deeply embedded into the work of children's centres. A surface approach, for example, having posters on the walls, multi-faith books on the shelves or a day celebrating British values just won't be enough.

DEMOCRACY

Democracy is about making decisions together. Everyone involved in your children's centre from staff and volunteers to parents, families and children need to know that their views count. Ask children their opinions

and given choices on food, play and rules. Parents should be driving equal partnership decision making. Show how you have listened and acted on their views.

Personal, social and emotional development in the EYFS offers a framework to support growing self-confidence and self-awareness in children part of which is enabling their voices to be heard.

RULE OF LAW

This is all about understanding rules. Talk about emotions with children, why we have rules and what the consequences are. Collaborate with families, staff and volunteers to create and implement the children's centre rules and codes of behaviour, then clearly display them and follow through. Unacceptable behaviour should always be appropriately challenged, and such opportunities never missed because of cultural misconceptions.

INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY

To encourage a sense of freedom among the families and children we work with, it's important for everyone to feel as if they have a positive sense of self and are free to have different opinions. Encourage children to express their opinions, take risks and try out new ideas. Again cultural difference and respect offers opportunities to discuss and reach agreement rather than reinforce difference and ultimately not achieve individual liberty.

RESPECT AND TOLERANCE

Working to the EYFS framework areas of Understanding the World and Personal, Social and Emotional Development will help children understand the similarities and differences between themselves and others. Actively promote tolerance of other faiths, cultures and races and challenge gender stereotypes. Encouraging a culture of sharing and respecting others' opinions, involving children and families in the wider community and working with parents to share their knowledge and experience will all help promote mutual respect and tolerance.

As well as promoting British values, the Prevent Duty requires schools and childcare providers to work in four general themes: risk assessment, working in partnership, staff training and IT policies. This would also be good practice for children's centres.

RISK ASSESSMENT

We need to assess the risks of children, young people and parents or volunteers being drawn into terrorism and have an understanding of what to do to support them. At the heart of the community, children's centres are in an important position to be able to identify risks in the local context. Local authorities can provide information to help us understand the risks in our areas.

Even very young children may be vulnerable to radicalisation by others within the family or outside and display concerning behaviour. But each child



Photo credit: Nicolas Raymond

will display different signs and some will hide their views. Staff need to use their professional judgement. Have clear procedures in place to protect vulnerable people at risk within existing safeguarding policies.

IN PARTNERSHIP

Building on existing local partnership arrangements, work with others to develop a shared understanding of the risk. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is a good place to start, and in some areas there are dedicated Prevent coordinators. The police and civil society organisations may also be able to provide advice and support.

Strengthening your existing relationships with parents and families is also a good tactic as they are in a key position to spot signs of radicalisation and with a culture of open communication and trust, such information is more likely to be shared. Be prepared to advise and support families who raise

concerns and be able to point them in the right direction for support.

IT POLICIES

A safe use of IT policy should be part of your general safeguarding policy. Update these in light of the Prevent Duty and make sure there is suitable filtering in place on all children's centre computers and IT equipment.

STAFF TRAINING

Train staff to give them the knowledge and confidence to identify children, young people and parents at risk of being drawn into terrorism and to challenge

Look out for Prevent training workshops in your area. The Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) is the Home Office core training product. There is also [an online training course](#) aimed at school staff and other frontline workers and covers how to identify factors that can make people vulnerable and case studies illustrating the types of intervention that might be appropriate.

Link: [DfE Departmental Advice for Schools and Childcare Providers](#)

Improving Ofsted Outcomes for a Better Future

We are at a critical time in the evolution of children's centres. Our future is being consulted upon, and the future of Ofsted inspection is an issue under the microscope.

It is unlikely we will achieve any of our aims without securing better Ofsted inspection outcomes. In this article, we look at useful approaches to do just that.

We've had a look at children's centre inspection outcomes. And there are common themes that emerge when the outcome is less than good. By addressing these themes, centres are better placed to achieve inspection outcomes that are good or better.

The three themes that stand out are:

- Low rates of registration and sustained contact with local children and families
- Low take up of two-year-old entitlement.
- An imbalance of attendance or the inability to demonstrate target groups using children's centre services.

Clearly, raising reach and participation rates of families ensures we spread our resource to greatest effect, and creates a vibrant community that will be more able to self-sustain and be resilient. We also increase the chances we have to

identify needs and develop and deliver interventions.

The two-year-old entitlement provides unique opportunities to reach and engage new families. This is enabled through the intelligence provided by lists of potentially eligible families given to the local authority, around seven times a year, by the Department

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"Data is the driver of participation and the defender of our work"
.....

for Work and Pensions.

And what's different here, is you have an offer of real financial value and tremendous potential for supporting a least advantaged or low income working family. It's a core activity, never to be viewed as another additional task.

Using and targeting our finite resource effectively and efficiently is a sought-after skill these days, and being able to do that now, and being able to demonstrate through targeted outcomes will, we feel, provide a solid and respected future for all children's centre services.

Locally, the prevention agenda is still one to promote

and protect. This is best done through showing value for money, clear outcomes, and good or better Ofsted inspections. So, how can we learn from these themes and make a greater impact, deliver the core offer and achieve better Ofsted inspection outcomes?

Well, first we should focus on registration and sustained contact through an opt-out rather than an opt-in approach.

Too often, we hear children's centre practitioners complaining their experience of Ofsted inspections were "too data focused".

We think there is no such thing!

So, if you or a colleague feel this way, read on. Because data is the driver of participation and the defender of our work and the difference we are making in every way. What's more it drives reach from multiple sources. We are all used to balancing the ethical issues around universal and targeted services.

Membership or registration for children's centres should be universal. Every children's centre should have a relationship with every local family.

For some, it may be the primary service delivery mechanism, but for most it act as the signpost and

advice hub to support families to engage with wider or linked services.

MEMBERSHIP CARD

One way to instil this approach is to create a membership card, with perhaps an agreed offer printed on, along with sharing of information disclaimer. This can be given to parents/parents-to-be at their first point of contact with partner agencies. This is most likely to be health; through midwifery, health visiting, or their doctor, but could be Jobcentre Plus or housing. It could even be a door-knock for the purposes of promoting the two-year-old entitlement.

The use of the term 'membership' rather than 'registration' has a softness and a universal feel – it is more positive and welcoming. Another advantage is families are less likely to opt-out, so this should lead to increase in registration rates. It offers a potential 'quick win' if all universal partners give these out and record membership i.e. midwifery; health visitors for the youngest; pre-school settings and schools for the two- to four-year-olds.

BIRTHDAY CARD

This enables the children's centre itself and key partners



to target unreached groups for example, workless households, and any not accessing universal services. Membership can be automatically renewed each year with a birthday card, reminding parents of service delivery and how to access them. Such arrangements can be included in service level agreements for all partners with robust monitoring. Appropriate data sharing and working protocols are necessary too.

TARGET GROUPS

Developing and evidencing sustained contact with target groups should permeate all management and operational front-line actions. It should be the key driver of anyone delivering on behalf of the children's centre and linked services. Centres can deliver a large majority of sustained contact to target groups within the fol-

lowing age groups:

- all up to 12 month olds
- three year olds and upwards
- two-year-olds eligible for the free entitlement.

That is, if all health contacts, along with all funded two-year-olds in early years settings/childminders, plus all three- and four-year-olds in early learning and school are counted as sustained contact. This is because they are receiving a universal service.

This allows the children's centre to focus on sustained contact with children aged 12-24 months and those more vulnerable children being referred for services.

WORKLESS PARENTS

Additionally, and more specifically Jobcentre Plus colleagues could report on all workless parents with children aged under five

(continued on page 10)

years. This would establish a baseline, details of those who they have contact with, so children's centres could then capture sustained contact of all workless households across the 0-5 years age range.

Again, this is advantageous in releasing staff resource away from chasing universal registrations to focus on the most vulnerable families. It does require robust information exchange protocols in place with universal service providers, and measures to enable secure data from Department for Work Pensions to be accessed.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

All universal service providers need to recognise themselves and be recognised as members of the children's centre, perhaps through a certificate being displayed in entrance areas of providers, surgeries, clinics, schools and Jobcentre Plus, with the children's centre logo being added to health visitors' and midwives' paperwork or name badges.

However, children's centres must be in a position to prove direct support to universal settings such as schools and settings where two-year-olds are attending. Such as holding regular meetings about shared cases, or concerns, and training on boys' learning for example, or running 'clinics' in settings for parents.

FLEXIBLE AND ENABLING

Centres should bear in mind the resource and time challenges of early years settings and be as flexible and

enabling as possible. There should be clear evidence that children in linked settings that require additional support are swiftly referred to and known by the centre.

All of this relies upon maintaining excellent working relationships e.g. robust information exchange/review meetings (monthly/fortnightly/weekly) with universal service providers through 'safeguarding' meetings

.....

"Children's centres must be in a position to prove direct support to universal settings."

.....

focussing on children raising concerns, or those where there is joint working to ensure no child 'slips through the net'.

PRIORITY FAMILIES

Finally, the issue around balancing attendees at children's centre directly delivered services to ensure they benefit targeted or priority families.

We know and understand the expectation children's centre resources are focussed on identified target groups with a particular emphasis on reducing any gaps in achievement.

Therefore, centres need to know the characteristics of attendees at universal-style activities (such as stay and play), and those of their partners in order

to demonstrate a majority of those attending are from target groups.

ATTENDANCE AND DATA

It's another example of the universal and targeted challenge we face. So, core time and resource should be dedicated to recording attendance and analysing it to extract the data.

BOOKABLE SESSIONS

And to ensure 'a majority' of attendees are priority families, all sessions could become bookable rather than drop-in. Booking could be open to professionals to refer in for an agreed effective initial period, and those places remaining can be more publicly advertised after the agreed initial period.

It needs a systematic approach and even simple IT solutions may be useful here. On a practical level, 'what's on' advertising can include public booking periods for each activity, and partner professionals need to be aware of and given earlier booking periods.

Implementing the ideas and suggestions outlined will help children's centres not only make a bigger impact, but measure that impact and demonstrate it to Ofsted inspectors. This can only be a good thing; helping to secure the future of children's centres and most importantly improving outcomes for children and families.

Children's Centre Leader



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