

## Speaking Out

Neil Leitch

### Leading the Organisation

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It seems naïve looking back, but as a young manager I always believed that common sense and logic, coupled with a strong regard for fairness, would always win through and influence the minds of key decision makers. But as I quickly discovered, things are really not that simple.

With over 40 years of working in a variety of sectors, I confess rare surprise when I encounter influential policy formers and commissioners who tell me that they “understand where I am coming from” but then do absolutely nothing to help me deliver a solution.

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## “A good leader and a strong advocate needs a clear head as well as a sound argument”

This leaves me with the choice of either accepting their inaction, or pursuing the matter and running the risk of alienating them and subsequently being marginalised. It's a dilemma that many leaders now face and we need to recognise when a situation has reached a point where we can no longer sit back and do nothing.

Maybe it's my upbringing, but I find it incredibly difficult to accept injustice. I confess that I also find it extremely difficult to simply roll over and accept the inevitable. Of course there is wisdom in the saying 'pick and choose your battles', but this all too often leads to a reluctance to challenge the status quo, which can result in serious, and irreversible, consequences for an organisation.

Most of us dislike confrontation; if you enjoy it, then you're probably the last person on earth that should be delivering your organisation's message

because a good leader and a strong advocate needs a clear head as well as a sound argument.

For me, speaking out is always uncomfortable. Ideally, I would like to befriend everyone, but of course, when openly criticising another's position, I know that there will inevitably be some kind of fall-out. But I am constantly reassured and encouraged when Alliance members say to me, "That needed to be said". It's a strong reminder about the enormous responsibility and duty I have in ensuring that I represent their voice, along with those of Alliance staff, volunteers and beneficiaries.

When it comes to striking a chord with others, there is nothing more effective than bringing an argument to life – using real-life experiences to show how people have been affected by something; after all, it's probably what motivated me to take up the issue in the first place.

It's easy to reel out facts and figures – for example, how a lack of adequate funding is affecting childcare providers and the services they are able to offer some of the country's most disadvantaged families – but this doesn't always truly demonstrate the impact of such high-level decisions on people's day-to-day lives.

We have a responsibility to connect with others as honestly as we can and telling the stories of real children and families helps me achieve this. I want to refer to people by their real names and show the real consequences of failing to support and reflect their views when speaking on their behalf.

It would be misleading to say that speaking out always produces results and I am constantly asking myself, 'did I say too much?' But if there's a chance that in doing so, I can help change lives for the better; I am convinced it's worth it.



## Organising Dialogue

—Vicki Lant

Did you recognise this man before the opening ceremony of the Olympics? I confess I did not. He is Sir Tim Berners Lee, creator of the world-wide web on whose invention we rely disproportionately for much that enables our daily lives. Our sixth edition of Leader Reader - completing our first volume - focuses on leading the organisation and unsurprisingly a strong theme of communication runs throughout.

All leaders need to handle the flow of information to, from and between their teams, partners and stakeholders. In the world in which we operate, we may be challenged by the more traditional forms of top-down directives from local authorities or lead agencies (command and control styled monologues), yet we are developing more conversational approaches with our families, stakeholders and partners (inclusive dialogues). Boris Groysberg and Michael Slind (2012) have researched communication in a variety of different sized organisations over two years and identified that achieving organisations describe having conversations with their people. Groysberg and Slind have described this as organisational conversation and suggest that a prime benefit is that this approach enables large

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organisations to operate like small ones; retaining that person-to-person feel implicit in a face to face conversation. They have identified four elements of organisational conversation that reflect interpersonal qualities of dialogue:

**Intimacy** – getting close

**Interactivity** – promoting dialogue

**Inclusion** – expanding people's roles

**Intentionality** – pursuing an agenda

As restructuring of children's centre models in many local authorities has created larger, more diverse organisations that need to communicate across many areas with many partners and increasing numbers of stakeholders and families, Groyberg and Slind's ideas offer valuable insights. In summary the elements espouse styles of communication that many centre leaders would recognise as their norm within one centre, but the approach can be replicable through creative use of social media technologies to a wider group.

## **Intimacy** – getting close

Physical proximity between leaders, teams and stakeholders may not be feasible, but mental or emotional proximity is essential and possible, through exchanging ideas, asking questions and more importantly listening to answers. Sue's interview with Hazel Davies identifies the essential qualities of open and frank dialogue in service planning – intelligent leadership (p15). Gaining trust to achieve conversational intimacy is only possible when people see the leaders as authentic and transparent in their dealings. Leaders need to know when to stop talking and start listening, demonstrating respect for others, curiosity and interest in what they have to say has shaped the offer at Centre Place (p13). Asking for **feedback on performance** can signal a genuine desire on the part of a leader to listen and improve.

# 4 doubting is a method for thinking and being



## Interactivity – promoting dialogue

By definition a conversation involves an exchange of ideas. Through media possible via the web, it is now far easier to engage in personalised conversations with individuals or groups, enabling interactive development of ideas, policies and planning that engages everyone. In his book, *The Thank You Economy*, Gary Vaynerchuk acknowledges how we have all come to expect personalised service and translates that into how we communicate with those to whom we offer services. If it is increasingly important to go where those we seek to reach are, using social media become a must. Joyce Matthews encourages us (p6) and Julie Caldwell describes how she has begun an online journey (p8)

## Inclusion – expanding people’s roles

Personal conversation can offer the participants a shared ownership and responsibility for the content of their discussion. Experience and passion are hallmarks of interpersonal dialogue and can be incorporated into organisational conversations generating content that tells the centre’s story. Neil Leitch describes how personal stories empower an organisation’s understanding of its values and principles, to empower speaking out when action falls short of expectation. When a centre’s teams and stakeholders feel passionate about its work, they become ambassadors for the centre – offering recommendations in their networks, which if tweeted, spread quickly and widely.

## Intentionality – pursuing an agenda

Personal conversation is rarely aimless – people know what they want to achieve from a constructive dialogue. Organisational conversation should operate by the same principle, focusing conversation towards an agenda that aligns with the centre’s strategic plans or the cluster’s objective if working within a wider system or network. Lucy Buckingham confides how internal dialogues supported her leadership of reorganisation (p10).

Recognising that centres’ networks involve communication across wider groups than direct employees, I have adapted Groyberg and Slind’s summary of the impact of organisational conversations to the context of centres so that we can preserve all we value in small as we endeavour to meet the challenge of sudden increase in scale. Are you inspired to embrace the web and converse?

### elements of organisational conversation

intimacy	inclusion	inclusion	intentionality
How leaders relate to stakeholders/partners	How leaders develop organisational content	How leaders develop organisational content	How leaders convey strategy

### old model: corporate communication

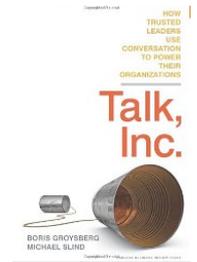
Information flow is primarily top down Tone is formal and corporate	Senior executives create and control messaging Recipients are passive consumers of information	Senior executives create and control messaging Recipients are passive consumers of information	Communication is fragmented, ad hoc and often reactive Leaders use assertion to achieve strategic alignment
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### new model: organisational communication

Communication is personal and direct Leaders value and trust authenticity	Leaders relinquish a measure of control over content People actively participate in organisational messaging	Leaders relinquish a measure of control over content People actively participate in organisational messaging	A clear agenda informs all communication Leaders carefully explain the agenda to employees Strategy emerges from a cross-organisational conversation
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### what it means for leaders and led

Leaders emphasise <i>listening to</i> people rather than speaking to them	Leaders involve people in telling the centre story People act as <i>brand ambassadors</i> and <i>thought leaders</i>	Leaders involve people in telling the centre story People act as <i>brand ambassadors</i> and <i>thought leaders</i>	Leaders build their messaging around company strategy via specially designed communication vehicles
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### References:

With acknowledgment to Boris Groyberg and Michael Slind (2012) *Talk, Inc.: How Trusted Leaders Use Conversation to Power Their Organizations*; Harvard Business School Publishing: Boston Massachusetts

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## Are You A Tweeter?

Joyce Matthews

following vacuous celebrity gossip anyway? Why would you as leader want to engage in that sort of frivolous activity when you have much better things to be getting on with?

Are you on Twitter? Maybe Facebook is your thing? Or is it Instagram, or Pinterest? Maybe you blog, or produce your own videos for YouTube. Or perhaps you produce podcasts? Or have a profile on LinkedIn and join in the discussions on a few professional groups on there?

Or are you not interested – you don't do social media. You haven't got the time or the inclination. Why on earth would anyone want to be on Twitter, or have a Facebook page for their Children's Centre? Or have a Pinterest board or an Instagram account? Isn't that all about

And anyway you can communicate perfectly well with your network using the routes you have already. You can phone people, email them, you can meet with your colleagues and discuss topical issues if you need to. In fact you probably have regular network meetings with just those very people. And on the odd occasion, you might get to The





## Can you be discussing pedagogy with colleagues from Sydney, Seattle, Stockholm or Sheffield, all at the same time

National College or to a conference to meet with a wider network, and to share ideas with colleagues you haven't even met before. And that's usually quite good

fun, and often inspiring – looking at things from a different point of view, hearing others discuss issues that are familiar to you, being able to join in discussions and put your point of view forward, or even leading a workshop or delivering a key note speech yourself. You might even write an article that gets published or meet some new colleagues who become lifelong friends, allies or mentors. Yes, these are the kind of things that are far more important than Tweeting, or any of that other social media stuff.

Sound familiar? Have you ever said any of those things? Because they are all perfectly valid reasons. But what if you could do all of these and more by engaging with social media? Aren't you in the business of providing free access to the best service, the best information, you can? The business of developing others? The business of helping others to learn? The business of providing the best opportunities?

Education and service provision is constantly moving on – or, are there still children in your area that are put up chimneys to clean them, or children that still write on slate tablets with chalk, or

workhouses in your area? In fact, did children's services even exist when these things were around? Or are Children's Centres a provision that has evolved as society has moved on and a need has become apparent?

Are Children's Centres places for "social interaction, which are highly accessible"? A place that "allows users to interact with each other", to "share with each other" and to "create communities through networks"? A place where your "customers" can find "useful, valuable and relevant information and services to attract visitors"? And probably a lot more besides. Isn't that weird – these are the definitions that you get for 'social media' when you Google it?

So can 'social media' be thought of as providing a similar service to Children's Centres? Just as Children's Centres are many things to many people, so is social media.

There are many reasons that people use social media: - to build relationships, to access information, to publish their content, to make their voice heard, to take part in discussions and debates, to turn monologues into dialogues, to share ideas, to be part of a community of like minded people, to market their products, to enhance their personal brand, and to find information. And

many more reasons that we probably haven't even thought of. And a bit like Children's Centres, social media can provide a range of services depending on how you want to use it, and which form you use. There are probably hundreds of different forms of social media out there, from Twitter, to LinkedIn, to Flickr, to Instagram, to Wiki, and more evolving every day. And they are all just different forms of communicating and building networks.

So whilst the postal service may have been okay, back in the day, when one to one communication over a period of time was perfectly adequate, and termly network meetings or annual conferences were the norm, we're now seeking much more rapid communication, accessing information from many, in a short space of time. Ever heard the phrase 'the knowledge is in the room'? Well now the knowledge around the world can be 'in the room' - at your finger tips, whether it's on your iphone or iPad or laptop – it's that easy.

## Which type of leader will people follow

From the luxury of your own living room you can be discussing pedagogy with colleagues from Sydney, Seattle, Stockholm or

Sheffield, all at the same time. All the things you do already on a face to face basis, you can do on a virtual basis, in real time. All the networking, meeting, conferencing, courses, workshops and learning can be done through different forms of social media.

Prefer speaking to someone directly? So do I, but if I stuck to that rule, then I'd wouldn't be able to build my personal learning network as 7



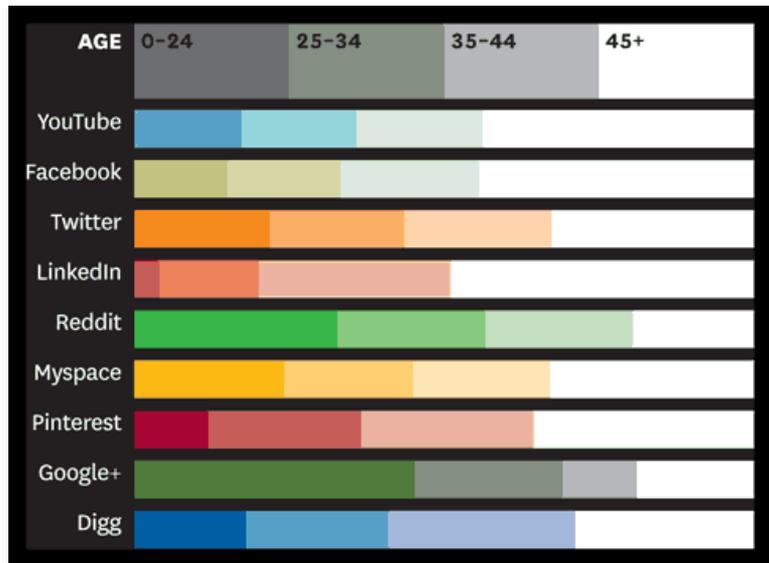
Who hangs out where? Data by Muhammad Saleem, Harvard Business review July-August 2012 (p33-34)

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widely as I have. I wouldn't be able to talk to colleagues in America, Australia and Austria – to ask their opinions, to share ideas, and even to host debates and discussions. So everything you do with your local networks, you can scale up with social media – if you want.

So as a Leader of a Children's Centre, how are you using social media? Could your centre be at the heart of your own social media web? Could you provide different ways for your clients to access your services through different social media channels? Could you provide a way to grow and develop your opportunities through social media? Could you reach a wider audience through social media, get to the hard to reach? Could you build your reputation, so that people know the quality of what you offer? How can you use social media to communicate better?

And personally, how can you use it? If you're reading this, then I assume you're a Children's Centre Leader, and as leader, people will follow you. So the question is – which type of leader will people follow? A leader, who appreciates change, is curious and has an open mind? One who moves with the times, is willing to listen, discuss, and see what else is out there? One who wants to connect and build a bigger learning network? One who is happy for their conversations to move from the sideline, to be heard by others, because you might just have something important to say that others want to hear? One who wants to talk with other people? One who wants to create content and inspire others? One who



Who hangs out where? Data by Muhammad Saleem, Harvard Business review July-August 2012 (p33-34)

wants to provoke, and debate, and stimulate discussion? One who is curious?

So if you've ever thought that social media isn't a method of communication for you, just think about how far we've come with Children's Centres. They didn't exist 20 years ago, people didn't know what function they could serve, and you probably never dreamed you would have a leading role in them, and now they're the norm, and provide a range of really useful services – what if that is social media?

**create communities through networks**

## New Face On The Block

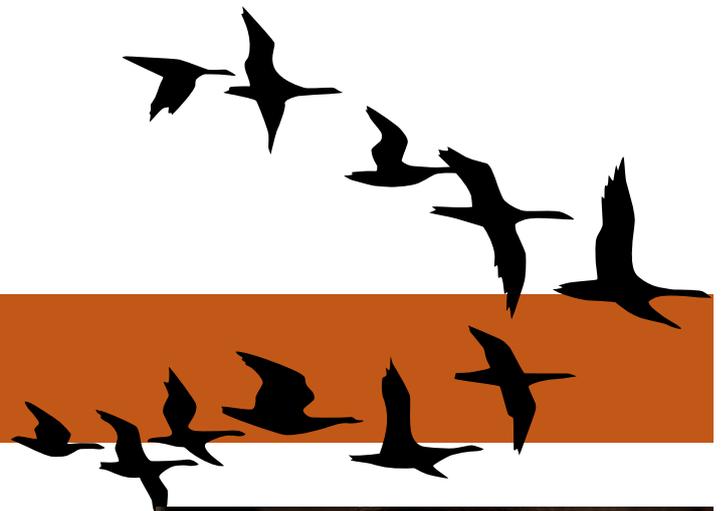
Julie Caldwell

During the five years I have been in the role of Centre Leader it has become increasingly apparent that we need to change the way we communicate with some of the more vulnerable families in our community.

Following feedback from our parent forum it was decided a Facebook page would be designed offering regular

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### Increasing the amount of hard to reach families accessing family learning programmes

updates as well as opportunities to consult on the suitability of services we offer.

Although we knew we needed to move with the times we were a little concerned around the negative implications of using Facebook and safeguarding issues that could arise. Our Centre has very tight guidelines ensuring that everyone is valued, respected and feels included, this is closely monitored by staff. By entering the world of social networking there were concerns we would not be able to maintain the same principles.

We were therefore relieved to find there were a number of security settings you can apply to safeguard children, parents and staff as well as preventing damaging or negative comments being posted. We made it a closed group checking with our databases before adding new friends.

We began by using the page

for weekly updates on services linking it to our website. We noticed parents started posting comments on services and decided it would be good to post topical questions.

On the morning parents had notification of their school places we posted the following question:

**Good morning. We hope you all receive good news this morning about your child's school place. What are your hopes and fears for your child starting school?**

A number of comments were posted meaning we could tailor our transition programme around their concerns.

Some other examples of using Facebook include recruiting volunteers across the Centre, increasing the amount of hard to reach families accessing

family learning programmes and offering online invitations to Centre events.

More recently the page has been invaluable at contacting parents of children who are entitled to the two year old offer. We initially used our database to identify families that met the criteria but quite often when we tried to make contact we found their phone numbers had changed since they had completed their registration documents.

We used our Centre Facebook page to send them a private message, making them aware they could be entitled to a free childcare place. They were often keen to know more and we could answer their questions and make appointment times for them to visit to complete a referral. By using this method we were able to focus on a number of vulnerable children.

We are now starting to see the

**focus on a number of vulnerable children.**

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benefits for both the children and parents. For example after contacting one parent about the two year old offer we updated her on services available at the Centre. We were able to signpost her to our Family Advisor who works for Job Centre Plus, a service she was unaware she could access here. She made an appointment and two months later she is returning to work and her child is starting in our childcare provision.

“an ideal way of engaging with more vulnerable families.”



Haven Children's Centre Gosport

[Add Friend](#) [Message](#)

From our experience we would say this type of communication has been an ideal way of engaging with more vulnerable families. Although initially reluctant we can now see the many benefits for children and families if managed safely.

Julie Caldwell

Leader Haven Children's Centre

[facebook.com/havenchildrenscentre.gosport](https://facebook.com/havenchildrenscentre.gosport)



## Seek First To Understand

Lucy Buckingham

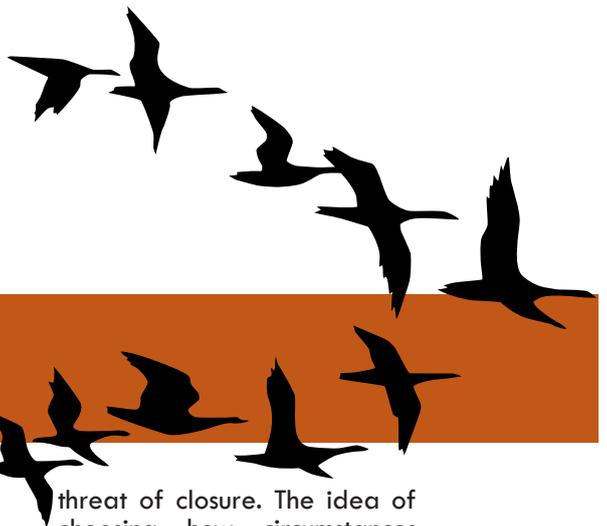
Having just completed the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL), I recall the trepidation with which I approached the programme, and the real possibility that my centre would close before I completed it. I couldn't have predicted the ups and downs that have since unfolded, or the support that the programme offered throughout this turbulent period.

When I first met with my mentor, she told me I'd find myself exploring loads of different ideas taking me in many different directions, and I thought 'yeah, whatever...!' but that's exactly

what happened – neuro-linguistic programming, grief reactions, Buddhist thinking – it was all there!

Journaling was a new approach to learning for me, which I embraced from the start. The process enabled me to crystallise, analyse and reflect on my leadership challenges and

“journaling enabled me to crystallise, analyse and reflect on my leadership challenges and aspirations”



aspirations. I could dismantle meaningful events and the emotions they evoked, how I dealt with them and the impact of this, and in doing so converted the incidents into learning opportunities.

I sat with colleagues from another region, rather than those I knew, and this proved to be a real bonus, enriching the learning experience. Genuine support, sharing of skills, and working hard together characterised the time we spent together on the programme. The rich wealth of knowledge, experience and creativity helped us all feel safe and supported enough recognise the value of our own experience. The Leadership Learning Group (LLG) was great too, helping me to identify my leadership aspirations, which focused on how to effectively motivate and support staff through change and likely closure, with morale and self-esteem intact, feeling valued and able to celebrate their achievements.

Exploring critical incidents felt awkward and unfamiliar at first, but as promised, led to deep reflections and illuminating discussions.

The assignments were really valuable. I genuinely wanted to enhance my leadership, to get us all through a crisis, and to soften its emotional impact. I was also conscious that the situation had the potential to define my leadership. It was imperative that I continued to get results, to develop the centre, its staff and its users in a period of turmoil, anxiety, confusion and insecurity.

Assignments made me do the reading I would never would have got round to. Some of it was heavy-going, but sharing that burden with the LLG made it manageable. Most of it was useful, easy, relevant and full of practical ideas. Naturally inclined to optimism, I know being positive isn't about false optimism, and ignoring the challenges we face, but there are reasons to be positive - yes, resources are scarce, but commitment, enthusiasm and skills are in plentiful supply.

Reading gave me a theoretical context to my situation – the

threat of closure. The idea of choosing how circumstances are going to affect you had a real impact. The way in which we respond is what counts, and in this context, feeling like a powerless victim can be self-fulfilling. So I focused on what I could change, without wasting energy on feeling like a victim of circumstance.

### Assignments made me do the reading I would never would have got round to

They say there's nothing as practical as a good theory, and I go along with this! Theories helped me make sense of my challenge – they are practical tools that have enriched my knowledge and enhanced my skills, like a lever to effective performance. The NPQICL reminded me how much I enjoy learning, and how much there is still to learn.

Lucy Buckingham  
Children's Centre Services Coordinator  
West Derby Children's Centre  
<http://westderbychildrenscentre.co.uk/site/>



## Time To Lead Your Organisation

Gillian Kitchen

“The key is not in spending time, but in investing it.”

– Stephen Covey

Do you feel that there are never enough hours in the day? There are still 24 hours in a day or did our days just get shorter? Why is it that we have more labour saving devices now than ever before and yet we yearn for more time? At this time of the year, we may hark back to our childhood and memories of long hot summers. As we grow older we may think that our time is not our own. But you are in charge of you and you can reclaim your time if you want to. In talking with centre leaders, time is something that most of us want more of. As a busy children's centre leader you may feel that your time is not your own, but who or what are the time stealers, where does all our time go? What do we spend our days doing? Have you discovered the National College's **Good Practice** resources? Log in as a member and take the **time management self assessment**; it will help you identify whether you have room to improve your time management skills. Your response to the statements will identify your time management issues and then enable you to formulate an action plan to address them.

Here are 7 tips for taking control and gaining time back to reinvest in your organisation:

**1** Keep a time diary for a week. Be honest with yourself, how much time do you really spend on what it is that you want to get done. Write down what you do and when you do it. Start from the time that you get up in a morning to the time that you go to bed. Log all your activities and note down how long that you spend on each task. It's a bit like an old-fashioned time and motion study but you're in control.

**2** Analyse your time diary to find out what you really spend your time doing. What does this tell you about yourself and how you manage your time? What or who are your time stealers? Do you spend your time endlessly checking your emails or are there certain people that take up your time? What is it that you do that takes up your precious time? Once you have established what it is that takes your time you can decide what you want to do about it. Sometimes it's a case of a simple 'no' to someone who you always say 'yes' to or creating a must-do list each day.

**3** Be clear what your goals are and when you want to achieve them by.



**4** Schedule actions based on your goals in an identified time scale. If there are things that others can and should do - delegate and follow-up.

**5** To-do lists can be blown off-course if too many items are listed. A short, must-do list will ensure that you always do what you want or need to do. This focus may help you assess your realism about what you can fit into your day and where your attention has most impact. **Find more tips for your 'to do' list here**

**6** Having a weekly overview can really help to get things done. This contextualises your calendar and must-do list. The big picture focuses the tasks and when you are going to do them and how much time you can allocate; which can then free space for developmental things within your organisation.

**7** The must-do list can contain things that are personal for well-being. The criterion for being on the list should be those things that only you can do.

## ↳ This could be a transformational investment

So now that you have more time what are you going to do with it? Networking with peers, working with a coach or a mentor may help you keep a fresh eye on your organisational development. It can also help you to identify your priorities and long term goals and work out how you are going to get to where you want to be. This could be a transformational investment?

Gillian Kitchen  
the change agency

# One Place - Many Spaces

## The Experience Of A Housing Association

Centre Place Family Centre Leadership Team

Leading a children's centre in a diverse system is never easy, and is frequently challenging. However, at Centre Place Family Centre our leadership team have found this journey personally challenging, but ultimately rewarding in terms of the services that we are now able to deliver to our families.

In 2008, we integrated a children's centre into our existing services. We could not have achieved this without the partnership and support from our local authority (Southend Borough Council). In making the whole service truly holistic we aimed to bring together our housing enquiries service, a neighbourhood nursery and a small not for profit organisation that provided community education and training support to the community. The particular innovatory element of Centre Place Family Centre, has been to bring this all together under one roof and gateway, and one leadership team.

Estuary Housing Association is a registered provider of Social Housing, which works across 18 local authority areas. Centre Place Family Centre is sited in the largest concentration of our housing stock (725 properties, 338 families) in Southend on Sea, Essex. According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2010, Dept of Communities and Local Government) this area is in the top 0.3% most deprived areas of England and Wales. This affects our residents with challenges particularly in terms of income, employment and health and disability. This makes our services especially crucial to the community in which we work.

The remainder of our families (1535 properties) in the reach area are a diverse mixture of properties that are owned, privately rented or with other social landlords. 51% of the properties that we serve are in the 0-30% most deprived areas.

The transitional refit was particularly crucial for us to ensure that we continued to deliver uninterrupted family support services to our most vulnerable families. This included utilising a local landmark building (the Kursaal Dome) to accommodate our large and thriving Nursery, and a flat to deliver small scale adult and family support services.



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The integration however has not been without its challenges including:

The diverse and sometimes conflicting needs of residents and centre users e.g. residents paying their rent, reporting their repairs and triaging and welcoming centre users. This involves managing the complexity of risk management and other health and safety issues

**The social exclusionary affect of social housing (e.g. Taylor, 1998, Evans, 1998) in terms of other users and providers accessing and using the centre**

Integrating the regulatory requirements of housing (Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Care Quality Commission (CQC), with OFSTED and the Local Authority.

However, the benefits have been as follows:

Providing universal and targeted services to all centre services regardless of age, ability or circumstance

**A wealth of experience in housing, resident involvement and community development**

Providing outreach services via our existing and well established Student Social Work Unit

**A connection with our communities and the cultures within them**

Challenging the negative consequences of the stigmatisation of social housing

**Signposting our residents to centre services, and centre services to housing**

Providing a true 'wrap around' service for our residents and their families

**Being able to utilise pre-existing partnerships e.g. Police, and local resident associations**

**prevention of homelessness and worklessness through working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions**

As a result we are proud that our centre, has been instrumental in such outcomes as:

**The prevention of homelessness and worklessness through our revenue team working closely with centre staff and the Department of Work and Pensions**

A self sustaining café service run entirely by volunteers from a local residents association

**Increased health and wellbeing through the delivery of fun fitness classes and healthy eating workshops (funded externally through the transformation fund)**

The development of a sensory garden for use by the community at the centre which was supported by Dame Helen Mirren

**Year on year improvements in 'narrowing the gap' in achievement in our Early Years Foundation Stage Profile**

Shortlisting for a national Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) award for our multi cultural 'One World' event

**Enabling ten under 5s to take part in swimming lessons**

Enabling 30 adults to undertake a level 2 qualification



“increased health and wellbeing through the delivery of fun fitness classes and healthy eating workshops”

At the moment, Children’s Centres are currently facing very challenging times. However, with our centre users and residents being our most passionate advocates, we hope to continue providing this integrated and innovative service for many more years to come.

## Intelligent Leadership

Hazel Davies  
& Sue Webster

Estuary Housing Association  
Centre Place Family Centre Leadership Team  
[www.estuary.co.uk](http://www.estuary.co.uk)

In an environment where we are expected to achieve more with fewer resources a collective commitment to improve our communities is imperative. When two leaders and their organisations collaborate, how do they know when they have the balance right between the needs of their own organisation and the wider system they are part of? Increasing demands and the greater complexity of modern life requires leaders not just to work in partnership but to develop a self-improving local system. Practising ‘intelligent leadership’ where the partners are learning from one another by listening to each other, builds the knowledge needed to improve the lives of children, young people and families.

### You can contact us as follows:

Centre Place Family Centre  
Estuary Housing Association  
Prospect Close  
Southend on Sea  
Essex, SS1 2JD  
Tel: 01702 617446

### References:

Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2010):  
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A National College research paper: Daniels, H. and Edwards, A. [2012]. (Leading for learning: how the intelligent leader builds capacity suggests 15

# PRACTICE

that successful collaborations across a system are a result of 'intelligent leadership'. The paper argues that learning across the whole system and within the partner organisations is effective when leaders:

## Recognise

the overall challenge and draw upon all the intelligence and data available

## Respond

by establishing what needs to be learned and how this needs to be led

## Reflect

by ensuring the challenges in the system are addressed, reviewing the leadership approach and implementing lessons from their joint learning from experience.

We were curious to know what this might look like in practice so in this edition we are working collaboratively with **LDR**, the National College's quarterly magazine to explore the experiences of Hazel Davies (Children's Centre Leader) and Alison Walsh (Head Teacher) at **Leatherhead Trinity School and Children's Centre**.

In this article we will focus on Hazel's perspective but you will shortly be able to read Alison's perspective in the September Edition of **LDR**. So what does this look like in practice and how do the two leaders work together to achieve better outcomes for the children and families in their system?

Hazel has led the children's centre since its early development phase in April 2006. She recognises the value of time spent working collaboratively with Alison side by side as they both planned for the opening of the school and children's centre in September 2006 with a shared focus on children 0-11 and their families. During this phase of their collaboration, they had time to:

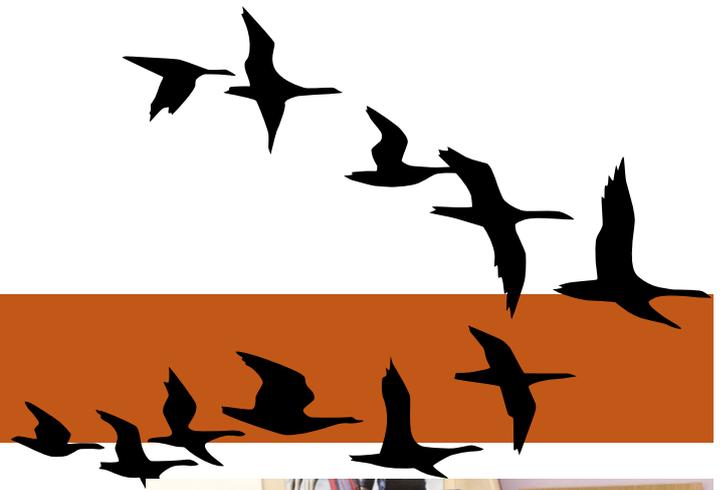
**governance arrangements are integrated**

**Explore and discover** how the new shared organisation could meet the needs of the local community

**Establish a shared vision**, principles and an agree approach that was truly integrated and a single organisation

**Promote an open and shared agenda** with team members and partners and develop a structure that aimed to distribute leadership while maintaining a clear overview for leaders at every level of the organisation.

While that five months was invaluable, and Hazel argues that the organisation and community are still reaping the benefits it brought, she feels that the really important aspect of their success (e.g. Children's Centre's Outstanding Ofsted 2011), has come from a joint commitment to



ensure that they as an organisation keep children and families needs at the centre of everything they do. For Hazel this makes it easy to prioritise, make decisions about the deployment of resources and to bring their teams (school, children's centres and satellite children's centres) together to work for a common aim. Staff work for one organisation, and are led across two main sites by Alison and Hazel with no distinction between the school and children's centre professional boundaries. They both respect each other and **recognise** a synergy for the community that they can create together, that would be impossible individually.

A key feature of bringing the organisation together has been to ensure that governance arrangements are integrated. The school has a Governing body with a children's centre Link Governor that feeds into the children's centre Advisory Board. Both bodies have shared members and also a range of expertise from the community. There is an overall senior leadership team, and clusters of leaders who focus on specific work in the organisation. Knowledge and practice is shared across and between practitioners in small meetings and whole organisation training at least twice a year. Hazel and Alison ensure that all teams in the organisation contribute and share their knowledge and skills, for example the children's centre led the Forest School initiative that

has is now available for all children at Leatherhead Trinity and their families.

### ↳ finding the can-do

'Being together as an organisation is very important for us, it has established a sense of belonging in the team and enables everyone to see the bigger picture of what we can achieve together' says Hazel, 'Alison and I work very hard to avoid silos, to share, integrate, inspire a sense of well being and excellence by boosting ours teams' and partners' morale.'

Another achievement from this leadership collaboration has been a real investment in children's speech and language development. The centre became an ECAT (Every Child a Talker) setting to complement the services of the school's specialist Speech and Language Unit. Outcomes from sharing knowledge and greater liaison to develop shared systems mean that more children get specialist interventions. The success has attracted investment from the Speech and Language team to train eight staff to become Speech and Language intervention Leaders to work across the school and the children's centre. Hazel and Alison's integrated approach to leadership ensures that they can **respond** flexibly to address local challenges and improve their system.

Hazel enthusiastically **reflects** on their collaboration, 'our organisation

was set up to be wonderful and our joint achievements suggest that it is. There are always challenges, but it's about finding ways to overcome them, about finding the can-do in them. Sometimes we have just had to agree that we both understand a small part of what we want to achieve and that is the place where we need to begin from. We are part of a confederation of schools, which Alison chairs and is carrying forward our ethos, 'we are here for the community whose needs are always larger than our individual school and centres.'

Hazel Davies  
children's centre leader  
leatherhead trinity children's centre

Sue Webster  
early childhood studies, lecturer,  
university of warwick

## On The Hinge Of History

Donna Leigh

Extract from the National College full conference report (04 July 2012)

**Children's Centres – Supporting Families in the Foundation Years - A Difference Today, A Future Tomorrow?**  
Donna Leigh

The full report can be found [here](#) (you will need to be logged into the National College members area to access this report)

A post conference provocation can be found [here](#)

Foundation Years leaders have arrived at a crossroads. What they decide now will affect the lives and future potential of children, families, centres and settings well into the future.

That the changes taking place are fundamental and unprecedented, not just within their sector but throughout society, leaders have been left in no doubt.

Indeed, they find themselves positioned “on the hinge of history”, according to Maggie Farrar, Executive Director at the National College.

“We could go two ways. We could move either to an atomised individualised system, very market driven, where some survive and some go to the wall and the risk is you get much greater variability, she said.

“Or we could go to a system that is much more collegiate and joined up, driven by a set of core principles

everyone stands behind, and a system that is committed to better improvement for all. I absolutely believe that which way the system goes is in our hands. It's up to us to make it happen or not.”

Facing an ever lengthening ‘to do’ list and serious budget cuts, leaders have somehow to respond to the needs of their children and families like never before - particularly the most vulnerable: Those who are most at risk of being overwhelmed by increased personal and economic pressure in their everyday lives and feel threatened by the disappearance of some familiar support systems.

Embattled as leaders are, they are agreed that in this period of austerity leadership is at a premium. How they direct and drive, nudge and nurture the sector now is paramount.

“What has become increasingly apparent to me is that the quality of our children's centres is down to the leadership...It's not just about being able to do a great job and having good communication skills with families. Rather it's about having strategic, pedagogical leadership skills and political nous: knowing how to assess, evaluate and make best use of information and resources to improve education, health and economic outcomes for children and families, and reduce disadvantage.”

This may go some way to explaining why so many sector leaders made the time to attend this year's National College Conference, ‘Children's Centres – Supporting Families in the Foundation Years’ on 4th July in Nottingham. They ranged from Foundation Years teachers and strategic leads to local authority operational staff and councillors, a significant number for whom it was the first time.

The event, centred on a series of provocative questions posed by keynote speakers, stimulated professional dialogue and debate, and generated considered, collective responses from delegates. The main themes addressed were:

**the current and future opportunities and challenges facing children's centres**

**the quality of Foundation Years leadership**

**family outreach; recognising the importance of an inclusive service while supporting the needs of the most disadvantaged**

**radical efficiency models designed to achieve better outcomes through better use of resources.**

This article (extract), produced in response to the conference, provides the opportunity for the wider sector to share and comment on the learning that has emerged and to join in the dialogue.

The provocative challenges distilled down to the same two questions.



How can clarity of purpose in the Foundation Years leadership continue to retain its focus? How can the collective commitment of sector leaders best be harnessed so that the response to the African Masai greeting, 'How are the children?' will be the hoped for one, 'All the children are well.'

The values implicit in this will be understood by Foundation Years leaders: the Masai's first concern is the next generation and at its heart is the recognition that society can be well only if all the children are well.

While genuine collaboration is the preferred choice into the future to achieve this goal, knowledge of system leadership is not widely understood in the sector.

Three key elements to leading across the system collaboratively are moral purpose and responsibility; learning to be better – through joint practice development and not settling for less than the best; and holding oneself and each other to account through peer review. Vital to its success: relationships, relationships, relationships!

Investing in capacity building, acting as talent spotters – seizing opportunities

to pass on knowledge through modelling, shadowing, mentoring, coaching and apprenticeship within the workplace – are grist to the sector's survival.

By strategically embedding joint practice development across all settings, and using these as a crucible for leadership development, children's centres in whatever guise will be set to thrive in the future.

Maggie reminded delegates that some of the best current practice in the entire system is in the Foundation Years sector. The lessons learnt from Sure Start, in particular, have made them sure footed in working across multi-disciplines, a firm basis upon which the collaborative gene will

**“a system that is much more collegiate and joined up, driven by a set of core principles everyone stands behind, and a system that is committed to better improvement for all**

flourish.

Payment by Results, currently being trialled in a number of local authorities, was the rubbing point when delegates considered how best competition could be reconciled with collaboration. They acknowledged that to balance the two they must resist becoming too inward looking and focus on the long-term interests of children and families.

This would require “slog work” according to Sue Egersdorff, Director Early Years Leadership at the National College, reinforcing Maggie Farrar's point that competition can co-exist with collaboration.

Crucially, it would involve working with colleagues across the sector to incorporate competition in ways that support each other and make their services better as a whole, such as benchmarking themselves against other settings.

Linking budgets to the development of services over a five to 10 year period is a shared ideal. The intelligent and discerning use of data in enabling the Foundation Years sector to strongly evidence their case is regarded as well worth pursuing.



Sue Egersdorff



Margaret Farrar

Leaders accept that this would have to be continually monitored, evaluated and tweaked. The hope is that it would greatly reduce, if not stop, the plethora of short-term interventions and lead to a sufficient understanding of how something works so it can be replicated.

Indeed, the potential of data as a persuasive tool with which to influence partnerships, policies and politicians was a theme embraced by all keynote speakers.

National College Director Sue Egersdorff challenged leaders to drill down to the very essence of engagement with children and families and create a data set around what they really want and need. What children ask for, she said, can be distilled into three bullet points: helping them

**make friends**

**feel loved and listened to**

**feel happy**

“That’s not an unreasonable ask. That’s the starting point for thinking about equality and equity and fairness of access.”

Maggie Farrar advocated leaders use data and evidence to hold themselves and each other to account, to inform professional conversations aimed at improvement.

Driving all of this must be the desire for the truth. Delegates were spurred on to consider whether they are selecting the data that told them what they wanted to hear. Are they acting on current intelligence or what they think is the case, indeed, may have been the case a year or two ago? Or for targets’ sake, are they keeping certain vulnerable families on their books when they are ready to move on?

So here we are: back to what really counts. ‘Change is the only constant’ has been a familiar refrain since children’s centres came into existence. But authentic leaders know the truth.

The true constant is to achieve better outcomes for children in their earliest years by supporting families – and beyond that, genuinely reduce inequality and narrow the gap. That, above all else, never changes.

*This extract identifies the key themes of the day, amplified by contributions from:*

**Chris Frankland**, one of four system leaders - Hampshire

**Liz Marley-Smith**, newly appointed Cluster Manager - Hampshire

**Nadine Massey**, Children Centres’ South Locality Co-ordinator for Stoke City Council

**Tracy Jackson**, centre leader and **David Alston**, Head of The Crescent, the local primary academy (Stoke City Council)

**Sally Jaeckle**, the local authority strategic lead for early years - Bristol

**Andy McCullough**, Head of Public Affairs and Policy for Railway Children (a charity that works with street children at risk)

**Sally Burlington**, deputy director for Sure Start - Department for Education

**Sarah Gillinson**, who leads the Innovation Unit’s work with local government

**Melani Oliver**, who worked on the Reading Radical Efficiency pilot

The full report can be found at [www.nationalcollege.org.uk/supporting-families-in-the-foundation-years.pdf](http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/supporting-families-in-the-foundation-years.pdf) (you will need to be logged into the National College members area to access this report)

# POLICY



## POLICY

After a burst of publication just before the summer holiday period, there are four areas for centre leaders to have on their horizon:

Watchfulness for reporting as the funding for two year olds programme begins to roll out

The newly published [Framework for the regulation of provision on the Early Years Register \(04 Sep 2012 Ofsted Ref: 120288\)](#) This guidance explains how Ofsted regulates and inspects providers registered on Early Years Register, including those who are also on the Childcare Register. It summarises the main features of registration, inspection and the enforcement action Ofsted may take.

The launch of the new Foundation Stage

The new [framework for the inspection of schools](#), where only good or better is good enough – there will be quality issues that must be addressed across local systems supporting local children and their families

A new IPPR publication [A long division – closing the attainment gap in England's secondary schools](#) The new report from the IPPR (PDF 38 pages) controversially and perhaps helpfully says that school improvement policies will not be enough to close the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils in England's schools.

The report says:

**Pupils from deprived areas are about as likely to attend a school rated 'satisfactory' or 'inadequate' as wealthier pupils are likely to attend a school rated 'outstanding'. It is therefore vitally important to improve the quality of schools in England.**

The authors assert that government cannot rely on school improvement policies, such as academies and free schools, to narrow the education divide that exists between rich and poor pupils. They argue that even if every pupil in the country attended an outstanding school, the achievement gap between the poorest and wealthiest pupils would only be cut by a fifth.

They argue:

**If the education divide is to be closed, we need more focus on interventions such as one-to-one tuition and preschool programmes.**

The report examines how the education system in England compares with other countries, including Finland, Canada and Korea. It finds that a large number of very low achievers is holding England back from becoming a world class system. In the world's leading systems 1 in 10 pupils fail to reach basic proficiency in reading. In England that figure is twice as high.

The report recommends a number of measures to reduce the attainment gap and promote both equity and excellence in the education system.

“Essentially the report concludes that there is no magic bullet, but a combination of early years support to ensure every child starts school at the same level

coupled with sustained interventions at primary and secondary school to prevent falling behind, alongside a programme of continued school improvement, would ensure that the attainment gap between rich and poor would disappear.

The report provides new data analysis on:

**How much of the achievement gap is a result of what happens at secondary school**

**Whether 'school improvement' policies can narrow the attainment gap**

**What impact the Pupil Premium and other targeted interventions will have on the attainment gap**

“How the attainment gap can be closed using a whole-system approach



Thanks to [Terry Connolly](#) (former Together for Children) for regular updates on Government Policy and national guidance alerts.

[terry.connolly@mac.com](mailto:terry.connolly@mac.com) 21

# PRODUCTIVITY



National College dates for Children's Centre Leader's Network events from the National College

27 Nov 2012 South Aztec Park Hotel, Bristol  
4 Dec 2012 Central LCC, National College, Triumph Road, Nottingham  
5 Dec 2012 North Everton Children's Centre, Spencer Street, Liverpool L6

[Register Online](#)

## 'The two-ness of two': why leadership for children under three really matters event, Thursday 4 October at IGEM House, Kegworth, Derbyshire

The introduction of the free early education entitlement for vulnerable two year olds is a key government focus. While presenting challenges, it also presents a real opportunity for foundation years leaders across the sector to work collaboratively towards a self-improving system.

This event is for strategic leaders of early childhood services, children's centre leaders and leaders of foundation years provision in schools and other settings.

For further information and how to register please [click here](#)

This autumn, whilst offering foundation years leaders the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue and exchange ideas and thoughts on practice, the CCLN events will focus on several key themes for foundation years leadership. These include:

**Ofsted** – consultation on the new children's centre inspection framework

**The Teenage Pregnancy Unit** – what's working well, and less well, in engaging teenage parents in children's centres?

**Two year old provision** – why leadership really matters

Have a look on the website for more about Pick-a-Puppet



Windhill Children's Centre,  
Odette Morgan, Manager

Odette Morgan, Manager of the Windhill Children's Centres Network in Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire is enthusiastic about Pick-a-Puppet. She says: "By using a very simple resource, our team, particularly the Outreach Workers will be able to introduce small yet significant interventions both in and outside the home. This could be as simple as talking about a bedtime routine using the puppets/stories to actually encourage parents to take time to share books with their children. In terms of school readiness this will help with establishing good routines, encouraging communication and language development and familiarisation with books. The packs are so easy to transport as well and we would leave them with families for a while and reinforce any learning by encouraging attendance at our sessions."

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**Nov 2012**  
Leading Self