

## Early Support - Here to Help

Gill Haynes

Summer came, and along with it the House of Lords' consideration of the Children and Families Bill. One of the proposed amendments from Lord Listowel<sup>1</sup>, if accepted, would require local authorities to trial and evaluate using Children's Centres to register live births – a practice already in place in parts some parts of the country.

This is an important and exciting opportunity for embedding joint working and cooperation which has been talked about for so long. In particular, it brings to life the aspirations of the 2011 Green Paper, *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability* for children with SEND. For alongside the deliberations in the House of Lords, the Indicative Code of Practice for the SEND reforms is being developed; and the starting point for the Code is to remind practitioners from all disciplines that a fifth of children and young people have additional needs. Sadly, as many parents would report, those needs are often not identified or recognised early enough; and the task of coordinating information and support, or specialist help, falls to them. This new amendment therefore could give children and parents the chance that they could have their needs identified earlier than might otherwise happen, with multi-agency support established right from the start.

### Leading in a Diverse System

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New resources to support the sector couldn't have come at a better time. In 2011, Government identified **Early Support** in the Green Paper as an evidence-based approach to improving outcomes for children and families; and funded a consortium of organisations, led by **Early Support Trust and the National Children's Bureau**, as a key delivery partner in its SEND reforms.

Focusing on its principled approach to working with families and its offer of a framework for action to support implementation of the Children and Families Bill, Early Support has extended its remit to cover the age range 0-25 and has worked with other partners to support the testing of the proposed reforms. It has focused on developing the concept of 'key working' as an achievable

way of providing families with the single point of contact which makes integrated working a reality, and providing training for front-line staff and strategic managers. Alongside a new set of free information resources (downloadable as PDFs and available online), case studies, films and family journeys, two new Developmental Journals have been co-produced with families, to provide detailed support for families and practitioners alike.

**The Early Years Developmental Journal (EYDJ)** is a really practical resource which will help practitioners and families, working together in Children's Centres and early years settings, to celebrate and track their child's progress, particularly where there are additional needs

or disability. It has been designed to complement the revised EYFS and Developmental Matters; and is the key to recognising a child's unique profile and needs, not through a single 'snapshot' at the age of two, but as part of an on-going process. The new EYDJ also acts as a supplement to the Personal Child Health Record – the 'Red Book' – so that parents and practitioners, working together, can observe and record developmental progress in infants in more detail.

Perhaps, most importantly, because the Children and Families Bill is proposing a 'single category' for special educational need (SEN) – removing Schools/Early Years Action and Action Plus – the new EYDJ will fill the gap for those practitioners offering key working support and early years SENCOs, when the new

“a fifth of children and young people have additional needs”



# Early Support

for children, young people and families

Code of Practice for SEND is published next year. In addition, a Practice Guide, which includes a single page Developmental Profile and a table that maps the Developmental Steps to approximate age ranges, has been produced following feedback from practitioners from a range of settings.

“**Parents and practitioners, working together, can observe and record developmental progress**”

There is also a **Developmental Journal for Children and Young People with Multiple Needs** based on a series of ‘Can Do Cards’ that help parents and professionals record and celebrate children and young people’s abilities and strengthen and develop their skills.

In leading in a multi-agency context, collective resources, accessible to all that support children’s developing needs keep communication simple and consistent. Early Support is able to support you in your leadership role through its resources, training and advice. For more information, check out **the website** at:

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**[www.ncb.org.uk/early-support](http://www.ncb.org.uk/early-support)**

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## Collective Good

—Vicki Lant

“What have we got to show for ten years of pretty large investment of Government funding in Sure Start?” Graham Stuart MP asked to all of the panels presenting oral evidence to the Education Select Committee sessions during the summer months. In the cut and thrust of political challenge where the assumptions behind each question seemed to suggest *not a lot*, panel members from January to July responded robustly to set out many features of successful practice that lived up to the vision and values of Sure Start. What was challenging for their responses is this work is slow burn, yet we are being asked for evidence now. An evidence base is building through academic research<sup>1</sup>; practice based research<sup>2</sup> and Ofsted thematic reporting. Longer term research is showing modest gains in changes in parental behaviours that benefit children; but this review

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—sector engagement co-ordinator early support

has surfaced many conflicting views about the benefits and shortcomings of the programme in its present condition and it may require a major re-vision for Sure Start children's centres so that communities and those most closely associated can really influence how they develop and commit the resources to their success.

Some of the challenges surfacing in the evidence gathering are justified and not unlikely for a relatively new national service, whose stability is threatened monthly with each new local authority seeking to substantially reduce costs in tendering out the service at a fraction of former budget levels. Centres are being asked to operate on approximately two thirds of 2010-11 budget levels. In previous editions we have considered radical efficiency models, starting with community need to shape an outcome. This is a valuable process approach if we are clear about the goal, but we have to find answers for ourselves first before we can lead in this diverse environment.

In Sue Webster's article she talks of the need to find thinking space to keep refreshed for confident action. Frazzled from a summer of super-heated challenge, I took some thinking space at Richard Roger's new exhibition at the Royal Academy - *Inside Out*. As one of the country's most creative and ethically motivated architects, I was keen to understand how he approaches diverse environmental challenges for each brief. The exhibition opens with a suite of statements of ethos and purpose that guide his work with associates:

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**We believe in an ethos of collective and social responsibility and the production of the highest quality work**

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**Architecture is measured against the past, you build in the present and you try to imagine the future**

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In trying to imagine our future, we need a collective vision that we can share volubly to gain national and local traction for and financial commitment to a unique service that enables early intervention in all communities in the most cost effective way. *Collective* is a harder term than ever to apply to Sure Start given that many local authorities are diluting the impact of the pure Sure Start vision as they struggle to stretch the commission for centres to include a far wider brief. We may be morphing into something new by others' pragmatic need so it becomes more urgent to capture our own vision of the essential elements about which we cannot compromise.

The elements of the vision seem to me to include:

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**be future-focused**

**influence to secure high quality inclusive learning and child development, with a strong focus on pre-birth to two**

**influence and modelling of positive parenting**

**modelling of and enabling healthy lifestyles**

**enabling more secure economic futures for families**

**enabling greater financial independence and security for centres beyond contract resources**

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All these features demand leadership, strong care, guidance and support and safeguarding; areas that Ofsted deem to be strengths within our sector. But



the demands to improve and development learning on-site and of early years partners without appropriate influence, qualification or access to provision to model practice needs to be addressed nationally. Similarly the challenge, from Ofsted and MPs, that we do not reach all those who most need centre services needs to be addressed urgently, in part by local authorities in securing performance-managed data sharing agreements that give centres the tools for the job and in part, by leaders raising their game to analyse and use the data more effectively to focus limited resources to achieve greatest impact.

A recommendation arose from the Select Committee discussions for a national framework of measures to enable more consistent benchmarking, along with more sophisticated commissioning to enable more mature and developmental relationships between commissioners and commissioned.

Naomi Eisenstadt regularly reminded us during the growth years of Sure Start that getting all of the pieces to work harmoniously was hard. It was hard then because, far less people had heard of Sure Start. It's still hard now, because although people have heard of Sure Start, they don't always connect that vision with children's centres and to be fair, the Sure Start vision that powers Pen Green has been limply and disparagingly applied to the signpost in a spare community room in the name of children's centres.

This edition flags up many of

these current tensions in leading in a diverse context. Our priority for inclusive practice, our need for more inclusive environments and teams, our need to support the most vulnerable, our need to be in control of our own data and our need to self-challenge our practice demands we find the personal and collective space to re-energise our vision for the national children's centre service.

Rogers' ethos also includes:

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Work is not an end in itself. A balanced life includes the enjoyment of leisure and time to think.

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The summer has brought us face to face with some critical shortcomings in what we do - but equally the press has highlighted one amazing achiever, mobilised and motivated by her local children's centre in Southend - **Jack Monroe**. As a



Jack Monroe // photo courtesy of John McLellan

single mother, below the breadline, enraged by cheap jibes in the press about *people like her*, Jack was encouraged to attend her local food bank via her children's centre, and from it has blossomed an extraordinary blog and astonishing recipes for food on a very low budget. Jack has found a voice and has been heard - there are many families who find their voice through all that our centres do. Energised by some personal reflection time and inspired by the Jacks in our diverse localities, can we:

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demonstrate that we  
can accommodate the  
future and be excited  
by the opportunities it  
offers to be creative and  
innovative

work together to build  
an accessible evidence  
base and engage in  
action based research  
that we are happy to  
share

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engage with the  
changes around us such  
as the role of Clinical  
Commissioning Groups,  
Health Visitor Reforms,  
Free Schools, Academies  
and Teaching Schools

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to make our place in the new spaces?

Vicki Lant  
Director Cambridge Development and Learning Ltd

#### References:

To view the Select Committee Archive contributions follow [www.parliamentlive.tv](http://www.parliamentlive.tv) and in the dialogue boxes add **Keyword Sure Start**; tick the Committee box only; select the period from January 2013 to July 2013

To view the First Annual Early Years Lecture - Ofsted follow the link to **Ofsted first Annual Early Years Lecture Susan Gregory**



# Hello Baby! Birth Registration in Children's Centres

Debbie Koroma

## How it works

We believe the key to a successful baby registration service operating from a children's centre is 'good partnership work' and excellent interpersonal skills of staff. In both its most recent Ofsted inspections, Benchill was awarded 'outstanding' in partnership work which we believe is reflected in the success of baby registration at the centre.

Taking time to sort out all the practicalities with the registrar at the beginning of the partnership is essential. But we have found that this relationship must be ongoing, making sure that the individual registrars feel welcomed into the centre and operate as part of a whole collaborative team approach to the registration process. It must entail all elements of partnership work from strategic agreements and protocols, to the day-to-day agreements about the registrar accessing coffee and tea throughout the day. If the registrar feels comfortable then they will deliver in a positive way and have the motivation to make the service work.

Benchill Sure Start Children's Centre is situated in Wythenshawe, an urban residential area close to local schools and facilities including a large library, community centre, playground and shops. The Barnardo's centre developed from a Sure Start Local Programme and was designated as a phase one children's centre in 2004. The area served by the centre has high economic and social needs, being ranked in the top 10% of the most deprived wards in the country. The latest data on child population suggest that there are 998 children aged 0-4 living in the Benchill area (MCC March 2012). There is a history of long term unemployment within the area with 50.6% of children aged 0-4 years living in households dependent on benefits. This gives rise to many poverty associated indicators – such as poor health outcomes – and in particular leads to poverty of aspiration and ambition.

This context inspired us to establish registration of baby births at the centre. Baby registration has been delivered from Benchill since 2001 when it was operating as a Sure Start Local Programme. It was set up initially to support parents in registering their babies locally as the trip to town from Wythenshawe could be difficult to access, especially with a new born baby. Public transport was costly, and if a car was used it was difficult to park. It

was also hoped that dads would be more likely to attend if the service was situated locally, especially if they required getting time off work.

Conducting registrations locally was recognised as a great opportunity to engage with all families – particularly those that are deemed 'hard to reach' – because everyone has to legally register their baby. From the onset of this service we have taken the opportunity to automatically register families with the centre during their visit, and also provide information about all the Sure Start services in the area.

Since 2001, 7,500 families have registered their babies' birth at our centre – on average we register 680 births a year. In the year 2008-2009, 65 families from the Benchill area registered their babies' birth at the Centre and 33 families (50.8%) re-engaged with services. In the year 2012-2013, 128 families from Benchill, registered at the Centre and 112 families (87.5%) re engaged. As you can see there is a marked improvement around engagement than previous years and this figure has been slowly rising. At the centre we also register families from other areas in Wythenshawe crossing six centres.

**Baby registration has been delivered from Benchill since 2001**

**Since 2001, 7,500 families have registered their babies' birth at our centre**

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It is of paramount importance that all Centre staff; from reception to the outreach workers really understand and appreciate how important a day this is for families and create the right atmosphere and make it a special occasion. Therefore all the staff at Benchill know that on a Wednesday they should never pass by families who are waiting for registration without making a positive comment and saying hello. Another key factor is having consistent staff on the ground who have good local knowledge of the area and community and its needs.



## The benefits

The co-location of birth registrations has provided some great outcomes for Benchill children's centres.

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Baby registration engages 'hard to reach families' and has excellent re engagements figures of 87.5%.

The data collected via birth registrations has enabled us to identify trends in the community. For example following a survey in 2008 at baby registration we were able to ascertain that despite official figures showing that Wythenshawe was 95% white British we collected data that evidenced that White British took up 80% of the population and that the community of Wythenshawe was changing. The survey also showed that these families were often isolated and experiencing a degree of discrimination. This provided us with the opportunity to look at how we are meeting the needs of a new community and how to support community cohesion. As a result; we set up a 'welcome centre' for new comers to Wythenshawe. We fed this information back to partner agencies to influence and support their service planning and delivery, and were able to identify that many of the newcomers to Wythenshawe were from Eastern Europe. This led to the development of a partnership with a small Manchester charity – 'Europia' – which provides language support within community settings. In addition, we started to translate our information leaflets into different languages.

We have been able to train local people to become volunteers and support the delivery of baby registration.

The universal nature of the service has significantly helped us to dispel misconceptions about the work of the centre held by some parents and particularly engage 'hard to reach' families who might not otherwise have visited the centre. For example it has helped reduce the perceived stigmatisation of Sure Start Services being for 'problem families' only.


The early engagement helps with early identification of individual family needs. The early identification and targeting of young parents over the last few years has proved particularly successful with 100% re engagement of young parents who registered their baby at Benchill.

The service offers cheaper and easier access for parents than the one in Manchester Centre therefore less appointments are missed and less service time is wasted.

Opportunity for targeted support through a Universal service.

The service has helped foster better partnership relationships with other local service providers, and more cohesive service delivery for families.

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We have had the opportunity to share our experience in June with the All Party Parliamentary Group exploring the best way forward for children's centres and we recommended:

Outreach services run by Children's Centres are vitally important in ensuring families most in need can be identified and helped, and should be prioritised for protection from budget cuts. Birth registration services can be a simple and cost-effective means of offering 'outreach', often without actually having to leave the centre itself!

Government should be clear and unambiguous that universal provision such as baby registration remains the optimum model for Children's Centres to most effectively reach and improve outcomes for those families most in need.

For many families having a baby brings a renewed sense of responsibility and aspiration. But many parents – particularly those with deeply ingrained problems such as addiction or debt for instance – require some initial support to help themselves towards positive outcomes, such as work and having baby registration in the centre enables us to identify and act upon these additional needs early.

Research has also shown that Children's Centres which were well embedded in the network of local services were the most confident of their reach to vulnerable groups and the sharing of information is valuable in fostering greater co-operation between professionals; service-users find it easier to navigate and build trust in services when they are better linked.

**“create the right atmosphere and make it a special occasion**

If you would like further information about the practicalities of setting up the service we have some top tips we can share. Please contact me [Debbie.koroma@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:Debbie.koroma@barnardos.org.uk)

## The Freedom Programme

Helen Yarworth

Hilltop Children's Centre is a rural phase two Sure Start Children's Centre situated in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire. Domestic abuse is a significant issue in our community, being identified in many of the requests for our Family Support Services. It is predominantly perpetrated by men towards women (Hobart and Frankel, 2005). The children's centre team supports women to understand what is happening to them and to make positive decisions to protect themselves and their children. Originally in 2010, we made referrals to the county's Domestic Abuse Service, which delivered a Freedom Programme locally. The Freedom Programme is a 12-session weekly group developed by Pat Craven for women experiencing or having experienced domestic abuse. The intervention is designed to reduce survivors' isolation,

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build their self-esteem and empower them to make positive life-choices. Participants gain support from facilitators and other participants to:

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**understand the beliefs and behaviour of abusive men**

**recognise the traumatic impact of domestic abuse on children**

(Hame and Radford, 2008; Hobart and Frankel, 2005)

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**develop self-esteem and the confidence to improve the quality of their lives.**

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Initially a Domestic Abuse Project Worker delivered the programme singlehandedly, consequently experiencing difficulty managing group needs. To address this, we agreed to deliver the programme collaboratively with two facilitators leading sessions, one from each organisation. This was possible as we had built a mutually respectful and trusting relationship; crucial for effective partnership (Bagley et al, 2004). We planned to deliver the course within the children's centre to enable the provision of a crèche.

Our organisations successfully applied for a collaborative grant from Zurich Community Trust. A moving speech, made by a previous programme participant, enhanced our bid. The grant enabled us to fund the crèche, provide refreshments and resources such as the book *Living with the Dominator* (Craven, P, 2008). Furthermore, as transport is an issue in our rural area, we were pleased to be able to fund transportation for those from outlying areas or who had disabilities. We also trained Freedom Programme facilitators across both organisations including a previous programme participant, who wanted to support others.

There was high demand for the programme, with requests for the service from a wide range of agencies. We also accepted participants from outside our reach area as this was the only programme in the locality. Groups were typically attended by fifteen women; we avoided having a waiting list due to the urgency of the need for immediate intervention. Feedback from participants has been very positive, for example:

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**“I feel much more confident and stronger from this programme” and “(the course) has helped me grow and understand the journey I have been on”**

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Participants have felt less isolated, commonly stating “I know I am not alone”.



Facilitators have observed that “talking to other survivors helps participants feel empowered”, but that some women have initially been reluctant to participate; not realising that what they were experiencing was abuse. However, when they have engaged, they were surprised at the enjoyment they derived from of the programme. One participant stated “I didn’t want to take part but I am so glad I did.” The learning for the children’s centre team has been to carry on with this work and to continue to promote the group sensitively within our community. Women will attend when they are ready; Craven (2011) states it can take time for women to engage with and complete the programme.

We are responding to feedback and group size is a significant factor of potential success, a smaller group of six women highlighted the importance of reducing group size, particularly due to the sensitive subject matter. Participants’ comments included “Small groups are easier for most survivors to deal with. I really enjoyed the fact it was a relatively small group as it felt



less daunting and intimidating” and “It made it easier to open up and share experiences”.

Gasper (2010) affirmed the value of small non-threatening groups. Knowles (1970) stated the learning

climate needs to make adults feel comfortable. In future we will limit group size by delivering more programmes; we recognise many survivors of abuse have limited confidence (Kirkwood, 1993), impacting on their capacity to attend groups.

Another successful strategy, we have identified, has been the help from previous participants, who have volunteered to assist in later programmes. They wanted to “give something back”. They have provided inspiration for others that life can improve following domestic abuse. Volunteers’ self-disclosure has “encouraged participants to share their own experiences”; volunteers have illustrated learning with their own personal stories. Furthermore, their assistance has increased facilitators’ capacity to support individuals emotionally when they become distressed. Talking about abuse can be a painful process for survivors (Craven, 2011). Previous participants have also organised a monthly support group, which has continued to provide long-term support and friendship for members. Freedom Programme volunteers have experienced increased confidence and self-esteem as they have made a positive contribution to their community. The learning they have gained from engaging

in the programme has been enhanced and constantly revisited

through supporting others. Furthermore, volunteering has built on skills, knowledge and experience enabling volunteers to return to employment, training and study. I agree with Beaty (2011, p144) who states that, “Volunteering can be the basis of future employment and can provide a sense of empowerment and of aspiration.” However, working with parents has not always been straightforward, due to their own emotional needs. Freedom Programme volunteers have sometimes needed support themselves or dominated learning activities rather than enabling others to contribute ideas. We have learned to set boundaries with volunteers and to ensure that they are supported with their own needs outside the group.

Our future plans include working with other centres in our locality to deliver the programme. This may enable us to increase the number of groups, reduce their size and deliver the service in other parts of the locality to increase accessibility. When the Zurich Community Trust grant ends, we want to ensure that this successful partnership continues to support survivors of domestic abuse. We will seek funding from other organisations to ensure women can continue to access the service without transport and childcare issues being a barrier.

“talking to other survivors helps participants feel empowered”

“reduce survivors’ isolation, build their self-esteem and empower them to make positive life-choices”

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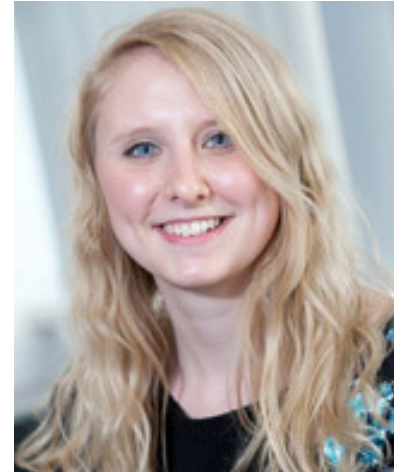
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## Where Are All The Men? Men in Childcare: Challenging the Status Quo

Charlotte Jones



### What are the figures?

Currently, there are 213,000 members of early childhood education and care (ECEC) staff working within full day care settings (Nutbrown, 2012: 5). The composition of the ECEC workforce is clear. As noted by Cameron, Moss & Owen 1999, this is a female-dominated profession. Women currently make up 98% of the ECEC workforce (Nutbrown, 2012: 7). The proportion of male workers within ECEC services is very significantly less. Currently, male professionals make up 2% of the workforce in diverse centre-based provision for children aged 0-5 years and only 1% within out-of-school provision (Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neuman, 2010). The composition of the workforce is not only influenced by the traditional association between women and childcare but also the attitudes and beliefs of society in relation to the male role in early care of children.

### What has worked?

Interestingly, past examples of positive promotion of the role of men and women in ECEC come from children's centres, specifically Sheffield and Pen Green. What are they doing differently? Why is this not happening elsewhere? Developments within Pen Green here have been triggered by a mixture of debate, discussion, reflection and training of staff. Similarly, Sheffield Children's Centre has focused on the need to provide positive gender role models, challenge gender stereotypes and also reflect the care offered within the home (Rolfe, 2006) (however, we know of course that not all homes have both mothers and fathers present). I wonder how the situation looks now within these children's centres because of course, recruiting men is only part of the journey, how do we keep them?

### To consider

Recognition within both the Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown Reviews (2012) of a link between the composition of the workforce and the quality of ECEC emphasises the need to focus on the qualities and characteristics of individuals who work with young children. Moreover, both reports identified the small proportion of men working within the field and noted this as a challenge to increased quality of ECEC work. The need to promote diversity, equality and inclusion within ECEC is entirely focused on the promotion of this in terms of the children who attend settings. There is less recognition of the demographics of those who work with our youngest members

of society at such a crucial point in their development. How can we (as practitioners) approach diversity, equality and inclusion when we do not reflect diversity ourselves? In addition to this, there have

been developments relating to the involvement of fathers in children's education and care (especially within the context of children's centres) - why has this not been extended to recognise the work of men in ECEC?

**Male professionals make up 2% of the workforce in diverse centre-based provision for children aged 0-5 years**



## Moving Forward

At the level of national policy, there is a lack of focus on the demographics of the workforce. Currently, emphasis is placed on the nature and quality of ECEC work, however less emphasis is placed upon those who work on the frontline of early education and care. Greater emphasis must be placed on promoting ECEC as a viable opportunity for both men and women; this must start at school-level during the time at which students participate in work experience and begin early navigation of career paths.

At the professional workforce level, it appears that male professionals currently working within ECEC are celebrated within their setting by children, parents and colleagues. However, less is done within settings to promote the role of men and women in ECEC in order to achieve a gender-diverse workforce. This is particularly related to the recruitment strategies used to ensure gender diversity within the workforce which, at present, do not occur.

“developments within Pen Green here have been triggered by a mixture of debate, discussion, reflection and training of staff

At micro-level, current research into this topic is lacking and focuses upon men in ECEC as an under-represented group meaning that the context of those who already work in the field remains un-reported.

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## Editor's Note:

You may also like to see the Barnardo's report **Are we nearly there yet, dad?** which helps us to reflect on the provision we make for fathers in our centres - how welcoming and inclusive are we in our practice? How might our modelling of inclusive relationships with parents help us to recruit more men into our teams as volunteers or as paid staff? **13**

## Learn, Do, Review

Sue Egersdorff

In my last article for Children's Centre Leader Reader I made a case for the continued importance of high quality children's centre leadership in establishing a shared sense of purpose, articulating improvement priorities and securing accountability and progress. Interestingly, leadership is the central theme of Ofsted's most recent good practice publication "Getting it Right First Time" (July 2013). The Report describes the features of strong leadership in early years settings and the ways in which the best leaders use their skills to develop and sustain outstanding provision. The foreword by Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, recognises and stresses the importance of the early years, reflecting on the clear association between the most impressive environments for young children and the role of robust leadership:

“Strong leaders identify accurately what works and what needs to change. They never lose sight of the link between the quality of the provision and its impact on children's learning and development. They involve staff, parents and children in the process of self-evaluation and they welcome challenge from other professionals.”

Executive Summary – Getting it right first time p.5

This is heartening and recognises the fantastic work of many early years and children's centre leaders. However there is growing evidence across public services of the disastrous and at times tragic consequences of consistently poor leadership and management on the very families services were intended to serve and support. The two recent Public Inquiry Reports into NHS Foundation Trusts, the Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust (**The Francis Report, February 2013**) and the **Keogh Review** into the quality of care and treatment provided by

14 hospital trusts in England (July 2013) explore key overarching performance areas associated with high quality provision, unpicking the things that sometimes get in the way across the following:

Service effectiveness  
User experience  
Safety  
Professionalism  
Leadership and governance

Both Reports are worthy of further consideration as they describe, in parallel, many of the issues and challenges increasingly faced by children's centre teams and commissioners of children's centre services, offering some helpful ideas to support and accelerate improvement. As with children's centre performance, the Report researchers found many pockets of excellent practice but also significant scope for improvement in some areas. They found numerous examples of hard working staff, showing huge commitment to patients and their families and ready to “go the extra mile” as a regular matter of course. However, alongside this they also found governance boards and leadership teams stretched and, at times, struggling to cope with a range of complex and pressing issues, particularly related to urgent and emergency care.

The core enquiry themes established for the Keogh Review in particular provide a useful framework to support formative and summative performance assessment and could be easily adapted for use to self-evaluate early childhood services:



### user experience

understanding how the views of users and related user experience data is used and acted upon. For example, how effectively complaints are dealt with and the “visibility” of feedback themes reviewed at advisory board level

### safety

understanding and constantly reviewing issues around safety and safeguarding such as compliance with procedures and policies that enhance trust, training to improve safeguarding performance and the effectiveness of reporting issues of safety and safeguarding compliance and use of routines and equipment that enhance safety

### workforce

understanding issues about workforce capacity and capability and ensuring there is a clear workforce strategy in place to enhance overall performance (for instance staffing ratios, sickness rates, use of agency/supply staff, appraisal and supervision systems and vacancy rates) as well as the provision of forums for listening to the views of staff

### operational effectiveness

understanding issues around operational performance and in particular how soft and hard data and intelligence are used to forensically analyse and improve the quality of front-line services

### governance and leadership

understanding the leadership and governance of quality, such as how the advisory board and local authority assure the performance of centres to ensure safety, a focus on standards alongside consistently improving performance, appropriate measures of progress and detailed use of information and intelligence to drive quality and secure accountability

What the reviewers found to be common areas for improvement are relevant and important for children's centre leaders to think about. Common concerns included:

#### poor articulation of strategies for improving quality

many trusts had findings from quality and safety reviews undertaken recently by internal and external parties but could not show a comprehensive and consistent approach to learning from these

a significant disconnect between what the clinical leadership said were the key risks and issues and what was actually happening in wards and departments around the hospital

Keogh Review section 4.5.2 (p.26)

These concerns were evidenced by weak quality performance reporting that failed to measure the right things or test them through systematic quality assurance programmes.



Reviewers felt:

managers were not always probing in the right areas or listening to staff, patients and stakeholders well enough

governance arrangements did not provide appropriate critical challenge to the management team

the poorly performing trusts tended not to be well-linked to professional networks and other centres of knowledge with staff “behind the curve” in some key areas of practice. The trusts were unable to demonstrate that they were consistently sharing and learning from good practice either internally, across their own range of services or externally across other trusts

some trusts found it very difficult to attract and retain a high quality workforce with a long-standing challenge of attracting the best managers

there was a lack of focus on providing high quality supervision, mentoring and pastoral support for junior staff with many ambitious junior staff not seeing the trusts as great places to build careers as leaders of tomorrow

trusts were slow in learning lessons when things went wrong and embedding that learning in improved ways of doing things

financial pressures to make significant cost savings through such things as mergers and restructures often diverted important management time and attention from a focus on quality

operating cultures often demonstrated defensiveness and a lack of openness to criticism

I'm sure some of these concerns will resonate and feel familiar so a brief overview of the suggested lessons learned and recommendations from

the Reports is a good place to finish as they offer both optimism and encouragement. They suggest that to achieve significant improvement does not require particularly radical re-organisation but rather a persistent focus on the interests of the patient and what matters most to them as individuals and a collective whole:

“the patient must be first in everything that is done: there must be no tolerance of sub standard care; frontline staff must be empowered with responsibility and freedom to act in this way under strong and stable leadership in stable organisations.”

The Francis Report - Summary of Findings 1.118 p 66

The emphasis on what the Reviewers acknowledge as truly important in outstanding service delivery is reflective for me of the Sure Start journey:

emphasis on and commitment to common values throughout the system by all within it

readily accessible fundamental standards and means of compliance

no tolerance of non compliance or under performance

openness, transparency and candour in all the system's business strong operational leadership and professional values

strong support for leadership roles a level playing field for accountability

information accessible and useable by all allowing effective comparison of performance by individuals, services and the organization as a whole

adapted from the Francis Report – Summary of Findings 1.119 p 66

Our journey has now brought us to a point in the road where decisions and choices about future direction are pressing and are very different across individual centres, clusters and local authorities. The Report from the All Party Parliamentary Sure Start Group – The Way Forward for Children's Centres (July 2013) is understanding of this position and supportive in its recommendations. It sees children's centres continuing to play a fundamental role in securing the best developmental and learning opportunities for babies, young children and their families:

“we believe that real opportunities exist for the future.”

The Way Forward for Children's Centres July 2013 p7

The task ahead is to work together and help each other to seek out, share and be ready to make the most of those opportunities however, wherever and whenever they present themselves. By working in this way we may even find we make our own opportunities happen – and - who knows where that may lead...

Sue Egersdorff  
director of early years, national college

# PRACTICE



emerged during the core offer phase and developed in line with the quality of their local authority's vision. More recently, it feels like the imperative to sustain centres has been undertaken in an environment that is largely sceptical, where professional knowledge is undermined and leaders are required to justify the existence of their centres. The needs of the current cohort of two, three and four year-olds appear to have been set aside as we all reside in a confusing and uncertain future.

## A Space For Ideas

Sue Webster

At this time of the year, I always have feelings of relief and excited expectation by turns. The rhythm of my work means that by early July I am concluding my work with one set of people and looking ahead to the next year, already mindful of the new National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) participants who I will meet in September, researching new ideas and planning new learning activities for the modules I teach within the university. It is a good time to think and ponder about ideas that have whizzed into my brain but have not emerged in ways that I am confident to apply into my work. My professional reflections suggest a challenging year, possibly the most challenging year I have witnessed during the relatively short history

of children's centres. Restructuring has almost become a way of life, but this year it has felt much more desperate; centre leaders have been put under immense pressure, protecting services, teams and often competing with colleagues for roles in a contracting environment. A working culture has emerged where no one feels safe, a fundamental human need, if we are to achieve a state of self-actualisation in our children's centres (Maslow, 1970).

Children's centres as universal early years services are still a dot on the professional landscape and despite much tinkering there is still a diverse range of ideas about the overall vision. Some centres developed during an era when the voice of the family was important, others

While there is evidence of discussion (and listening) about the vision for child-care, there is less evidence that policy makers are listening to the wider needs of children, or are failing to prioritise children's needs above a disdain for benefit-claiming parents. It is difficult to understand how mothers and fathers can put their politics above vulnerable children. Clearly it is better for all when families can provide for their children but surely children's centres can be part of the solution? Rather than view our work as a luxury we cannot afford, we need to ensure that policy makers understand what we contribute. Oscar Wilde wrote that, 'scepticism is the beginning of faith' many of you have first-hand experience of responding to and presenting challenge as you completed the NPQICL. Scepticism can provide us with healthy challenge, but is destructive and demoralising if we don't prepare our counter arguments. Critical

“Scepticism is the beginning of faith”

“mediating pressure imposed from above and below to avoid negativity maintain motivation and performance”

friends offer healthy challenge to our assumptions, but criticism and cynicism can feel abusive and dictatorial. Research from Einarsen et al, (2007) offers some evidence that a culture where even one person feels oppressed has a negative impact on the whole organisation. A leader needs to strike a balance between meeting the needs of the organisation and the needs of the people within it, adopting a 'constructive leadership approach' (Harris et al, 2013) that balances the needs of both the organisation and stakeholder. In the microsystem this may mean mediating pressure imposed from above and below to avoid negativity maintain motivation and performance. This is when a clear understanding of our own core values and professional principles is essential. As the Children's Centre Leaders Network events are concluding, it is vital that leaders create ways of getting their voice (and passions) heard. The voice of the children's centre leader does not need to be a whisper in the arena of power and politics or a loser in the competition of national resources.

Anthropologist Gillian Tett (2013) considers the politics of power within the financial sector, where she applies the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu's 'cognitive map'. The most important competition to win to achieve or maintain power is to influence collective thinking, Bourdieu warns us that elite power is maintained by controlling the thought thereby influencing social thinking. Applied to our work in children's centres this could include a definition of fairness and some of the Victorian sounding ideas about the 'deserving and undeserving poor'. While it is true that in an era of austerity resources must be targeted sensibly, it is also true that the families who engage with our services are being unfairly stigmatised. The power of national consciousness is unfairly focusing on families that have been poor for generations, those who do work but have low incomes and often live in

difficult circumstances, through no fault of their own.

This is a time when as children's centre leaders, we need to remain strong to our principles and ensure that we maintain an active voice in decision-making and use our collective knowledge to remain individually strong and jointly resilient to ensure that our partners and communities know what we do. We can ensure that all of our partners in health and education know exactly what we do and how we can support them to achieve their targets. I still meet too many people think that their children's centres are closed so feel that there is no point in engaging with them. Recently a teacher friend told me about the challenges of the phonics testing; when I suggested that her school engaged with the

**“make sure your partners know what you do, how you do it and how your services can be shaped to support their targets”**



local children's centre, she thought they were closed in her locality. It wasn't the case! Make sure your partners know what you do, how you do it and how your services can be shaped to support their targets.

An application of the work of philosopher, Mary Midgeley's (2001) metaphor of the 'aquarium', helped me to think about my centre's position in a community. In a much more generative climate for children's centres during 2005, I imagined my reach area enclosed within a glass tank, with large and small fish progressing through the plants, observing the services from multiple perspectives and different angles. Interestingly, I recently revisited her work, she also describes how over time the aquarium becomes murky with some viewing angles becoming distorted or hidden. Perhaps this metaphor is timely, we must now actively expose the hidden depths

of our work, amplify our reflections and feed the enthusiasm within the overall early years system by leading up and down, across and between our systems to ensure that children are central to our national ideology.

I leave the last word to Dominic Dare (Oakhampton Children's Centre) whose NPQICL Bristol symposium Haiku recently inspired and energised my thinking:

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Act with confidence,  
Even when you are  
afraid,  
Others will follow

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(Dare, 9th July 2013)

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## Parliamentary Reporting

### The All Party Parliamentary Group for Sure Start

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Sure Start (APPG) was founded in March 2010 in order to enable Parliamentarians with an interest in early years policy, and specifically in Sure Start Children's Centres, to come together to build the understanding of the role and benefits of Centres; promote the development of Sure Start Centres; and to identify and share best practice across the country.

The APPG was chaired by Andrea Leadsom MP, with Sharon Hodgson MP as Vice Chair and it has published its report in July

Its key recommendations are:

- 1** A holistic approach is required to 'the age of opportunity' and should be a priority for future delivery. Children's Centres should continue to provide advice, support and services to all families with children under 5 but with a renewed focus on conception to age two.
- 2** Local Authorities, Health and Wellbeing Boards and their local partners must make greater use of pooled budgets to allow for more innovative commissioning of perinatal and Children's Centre services, taking a more holistic and preventative approach to working with families, particularly in these straitened times.
- 3** Registration of Births should take place in Children's Centres – no legislation is required but cross-Government political commitments will be needed to make it happen.
- 4** The systematic sharing of live birth data and other appropriate information between health and Children's Centres must be put in place.
- 5** All perinatal services should be delivered under one roof with midwifery, health visiting and Children's Centre services all being accessed from the Children's Centre.
- 6** Government must put early intervention at the heart of the 2016-18 Comprehensive Spending Review, with a commitment to shifting 2-3% of spending from late intervention to early intervention each year.
- 7** Children's Centres should measure and compare outcomes for the children and families they work with over the longer term, at least until the point that the child starts school.
- 8** Local authorities should monitor relative performance of Children's Centres in their area and share information on best practice.



## The Education Select Committee

Taking oral evidence from key agencies, providers and stakeholders associated with Foundation Years: Sure Start Children's Centres between January and July 2013. The evidence sessions may be viewed via the television archive via the [Parliamentary website](#) by following the link and adding the specific parameters:

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**Keyword Sure Start  
Committee only/January  
2013 to July 2013**

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There are several hours of viewing here, but some key challenges emerge:

### **For all commissioners /providers:**

What is the vision and purpose of Sure Start Centres and how can this be appropriately funded in a climate of public funding restraint?

### **For centre leaders:**

What are the most important things you do, for whom and how do you know they make a real difference?

### **For centre users:**

When funds are tight, how can you influence what is done in your name in order that you receive the most vital help to enable your child(ren) to thrive?

If you found yourself in a lift with Graham Stuart MP, who has chaired the Select Committee, how would you respond to his challenge, "What have we got to show for ten years of a pretty large investment of Government funding in Sure Start?" Your own local authority members are likely to be challenging in a similar way - local schools too, so what will you say to win back some of the resourcing locally?

## Documents from Government

The Government published **More affordable childcare**, on 16 July, setting out its plans to help working parents access the childcare they need when they need it, in particular by:

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helping schools to offer affordable after school and holiday care, either alone or working with private and voluntary providers;

enabling nurseries to expand by reducing red tape and removing planning restrictions;

ensuring that childminders and nurseries that are good or outstanding can automatically receive Government funding for two, three and four year olds; and

supporting parents to access more informal care.

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You can find out more via the [Foundation Years website](#)

## Two year old funded programme

Elizabeth Truss **wrote** to all Local Authorities (8 July 2013) outlining the Government's support for the programme. The letter outlines the key role of local authorities in delivering the offer and communicating it to parents and sets out the support available from the Department. There is a central role for children's centres to be playing in this programme associated with locating the two year old children and families, enabling them to access good or better provision and integrating the holistic support offer (care, well-being, health, family support, children development and learning).

## Have your say: Consultations

The DfE has launched two consultations, one on **childcare regulation** (ends 30 September) and one on **primary assessment** (ends 11 October) that is asking whether there should be an earlier assessment in key stage 1 or in reception. Please take particular note of paragraph 2.3 (p7).

## News from the Sector

### Early Years theme grant holders

The Department for Education has announced 16 specific early years and childcare grants to voluntary and community organisations. These grants are:

**4Children 'Community Childcare and Early Learning hubs':** will bring together day care providers and childminders in Childcare Hubs to develop a financially sustainable model for a flexible childcare offer.

**4Children 'Reach Out':** will develop and disseminate best practice approaches that will help commissioners and Children's Centres reach out and deliver the biggest impact to disadvantaged families.

**Action for Children:** will recruit and train 630 new child minders to help meet demand, and support disabled, vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

**Barnardo's:** will improve the availability and flexibility of high quality childcare provision and increase parental employment.

**The Communication Trust:** will develop and test an accredited e-learning qualification to promote healthy speech and language development.

**Family Action:** will increase the supply of sustainable and affordable wraparound care in schools in areas with insufficient provision.

**Family and Childcare Trust:** will improve access to early education and childcare services for disadvantaged families by developing and delivering 'Parent Champions Plus'.



**The Fatherhood Institute:** will embed fathers into everyday practice and increase fathers' engagement in their children's learning.

**Home-Start UK:** will lead a parenting and school readiness initiative through an expansion of trained volunteers to provide intensive support to parents.

**Institute of Wellbeing Ltd (IOW):** will support Children's Centres and other settings to engage and support disadvantaged families, using best practice resources and training.

**National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA):** will undertake cross-cutting policy development and delivery of services to improve quality.

**NCB 'Making it REAL':** will develop accredited training routes for practitioners using a multi-media approach with a focus on supporting two-year olds.

**The National Literacy Trust:** will develop a model for Children's Centres to improve engagement of vulnerable families and support volunteers to improve children's early literacy and language skills.

**OXPIP: The Oxford Parent Infant Project:** will support the emerging PIP movement so it can develop, grow and widen access to parent-infant psychotherapy for 0-2 year olds.

**Pen Green Centre for Children and Families and Research Centre:** will offer training and accreditation courses focusing on support for nurseries and child minders including two-year olds.

**Pre-school Learning Alliance:** will deliver workforce training to improve early education and childcare settings, enabling all children to succeed.

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### A good read and one to share:

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#### **LGA Bright futures: local children, local approaches**

The LGA has published a report Bright futures: local children, local approaches exploring the ways councils are using children's centres from delivering early intervention through integrated health provision and developing their skills, to a more formal community focused approach. The reports many case studies may offer valuable insights for councillors and lead officers when planning the best way to capitalise on children's centres to help meet local needs and priorities in your area.

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# PRODUCTIVITY



Despite suggestions from the Minister about the commitment of the new National College leadership to early years, we can only comment as we find and we have found that the valuable Children's Centre Leader Network Meetings may have ceased and the Children's Centre Reference Group has been stood down. However, we are all still here and the Children's Centre Leader on-line Network is still in operation - you can use this to link with your peers and colleagues in centres, nationally. You need to log in to the College website as a member, then you can join or access this group:

[network.nationalcollege.org.uk/groups/12081](http://network.nationalcollege.org.uk/groups/12081)

Our May/June edition cover author, Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford prepared a think-piece to help early years leaders understand the concept of system leadership. This document is now published in full on the National College website

## **Understanding and advancing systems leadership in the early years**

A **must** for your summer leading reading!



sue webster



vicki lant

next edition

Anand Shukla will share his leadership challenges in leading two organisations through change to become one - the Family and Childcare Trust

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**Next issue:**  
**oct2013**  
Leading the  
organisation