

children's Centre Leader Reader

The Future of Children's Centres

2 people

we'd better start
swimming

4 a welcome

5 the future in parents' hands

9 a gateway to services in the community

12 the future for children's centre leaders

15 happy, healthy and ready to learn in hackney

19 practice

windows of
opportunity

22 policy

learning from
lessons



PEOPLE

We'd better start swimming!



.....

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'.

.....



These words, written by Bob Dylan in 1964, seem to sum up the plight of many people working in children's centres. This issue of Children's Centre Leader Reader (CCLR) is all about the future and our continuing roles in early intervention. Models of delivery may change, but at the core of all our remaining services must be our commitment, drive and effort to provide identification early, followed by effective interventions.

The forefront of change

Children's centres have always been at the forefront of change. Change in the way services are located, delivered and positioned. They also aim to change the ways in which parents and children access and participate in services and receive the benefit of preventative, early identification, interventionist and child protection services.

Keep the best of what we have

We must retain our institutional and professional memories so we remember how services failed without such innovative, ground-breaking and exciting approaches. This will make sure we do not lose the best of what we have, and will inform appropriate decisions for what happens next.

As a key structural change riding the crest of the post-Laming Inquiry wave and the implementation of a raft of new approaches following the Children Act (2004), children's centres became sponge-like in their attractiveness to services that had struggled to reach and engage families universally and in targeted ways. Never before had we seen this migration of services at such a scale to one universal and national model. Now though, we may be tempted to think our magnetic personality has lost some of its power.

Long-lasting legacy of children's centres

It has not been an easy ride. However, we should be proud of some of the amazing services, centres and professionals that have grown in the wake of this change. This is the true long-lasting legacy of children's centres. This learning and professional consciousness, commitment and cause will bear us well during this next phase of development – whatever that may be. This next phase has been with us for some time and is widespread. Challenges are many and the changing environment can be puzzling. With the newly elected Conservative government and financial constraints prevailing, combined with a thirst from Ofsted to see, inspect and make judgements on outcomes, the future has the potential to be very interesting, exciting and

challenging. That's why this issue of Children's Centre Leader Reader is well-timed and we have aimed to focus on some of the contemporary issues facing us all.

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There is a strong theme in this issue of embracing change and noticing windows of opportunity as they happen. One of those windows across the board seems to be an emphasis on stronger partnership working across health, early years and social care with the new integrated progress review. It is something that Helen Stephenson from the Department of Education (p11) supports in her article. We also have examples of successful projects in practice – parent volunteering in Leicestershire (p5) and the integrated review in Hackney (p15). And to round off this issue (p18), James Hemsall considers how children's centres can target services while remaining offering universal access. He also echoes another theme of the issue which is that involving parents in decision making about the future of centres is central to their success.

A Welcome

James Hemsall

I am pleased to introduce you to the first CCLR under our guardianship. We really want to build upon the solid foundations established by CCLR's creators Sue Webster and Vicki Lant and their team. Their tremendous efforts had great achievements in creating such an amazing resource and network for children's centre leaders.

Including CCLR in the work of Hemsall's brings an exciting and charitable dimension to our work in the children's centre arena. Hemsall's are committed to the achievement of children's centre aims, equality, and the highest standards of professionalism. I first managed a children's centre over 20 years ago. And in more

recent times, we have supported their creation, evolution and delivery. We were delighted to lead the West Midlands National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) consortium for its final two years, and we have been delivering parent volunteering programmes for centres in Leicestershire amongst other activities, such as reviews and consultations.

So we are delighted to take the baton and support its continued development for now and into a bright future. We aim to continue to publish, FREE of charge, on a quarterly basis, and maintain the strong editorial legacy. We hope to continue with the amazing

contributions from the group of dedicated writers and experts who have supported CCLR so far. Also, we want to invite new writers to get involved, especially those of you currently leading a centre or groups of centres, so please let us know your ideas by emailing cclr@hemsalls.com and we will consider them for future issues.

Growing our readership is a key ambition, so please don't be shy, pass your copy on! Forward your email CCLR to your contacts working in children's services across the board, and encourage leaders, workers and others who support children's centres to join our community.



If you haven't received this issue by email and you would like to, email cclr@hemsalls.com to join the subscription list. Access back copies of the journal on the website: www.ccleaderreader.com.



The Future in Parents' Hands

Julie Crookes

Julie Crookes shares her experience of leading a parent volunteer programme in Charnwood children's centres in Leicestershire. One of the aims of the programme was to increase parents' skills enabling them to consider returning to work while valuing the positive contribution they make to the centres.

The whole notion of parent participation, engagement and involvement is central to the accessibility, effectiveness and targeting of children's centre services. Far too often I have seen it perceived as an afterthought, extra work, or something that someone else should do. Now, it is gaining more attention within the context of financial constraints and spreading resources thinly for greatest impact. But parents are the main reason we have children's centres in the first place. Anyone confused or concerned about whether centres should be primarily about children, or primarily about parents, needs to realise it is both. And under that assertion, we are about parenting, employment, health, education and partnership.

And before things change again and enter the next phase of all our development, there's been some really great work done on parent involvement that should be celebrated. In Charnwood in Leicestershire, the local authority took the decision to commission a parent volunteer coordinator role across the seven children's centre areas. We started delivering this role in 2011 and I joined to lead the programme in 2012. We have recently held an event that concludes our delivery, as a new structure and arrangements were introduced across the county from April 2015.

SUPERVISING PARENT VOLUNTEERS

Recently, we shared our journey with the team of parent volunteer coordinators (PVCs) in West Sussex who have an established programme of parent volunteering, yet wanted to take time for a considered review and planning session to outline their future direction. The session gave them lots of ideas for a new direction of travel they said they will introduce shortly. The session also increased team motivation. Key learning outcomes were around the devolution of day-to-day supervision of volunteers from central roles to those in day-to-day contact with volunteers in their placements. Also, the importance of starting with the individual who wants to volunteer and creating volunteering opportunities that are tailor-made for that parent.

SUPPORTING PARENTS TO BE WORK-READY

So, let me tell you our story: Charnwood is one of six localities of Leicestershire, with a 15-mile radius and it surrounds the university town of Loughborough. It contains seven children's centre reach areas, and serves a 0-4 years population of around 9,000 children. In June 2011, our commission was awarded. Its purpose was to recruit, coordinate and support a target of 60 active parent volunteers, all drawn from

PEOPLE

targeted, vulnerable or groups considered to be priority across the different areas. Right from the start, we wanted to be clear about what a 'parent' was, and this led to us deciding parents, parents-to-be, carers, grandparents, and prospective foster and adoptive parents were all to be included – as long as the children involved were under the age of five years. It was vital we worked with other children's centre services, especially Adult Learning, so parents could be supported to become work-ready. And we prioritised taking the time to record impact and outcomes, case studies and evaluations.

PARTNERSHIP AND SHARING

The key principles for our leadership and coordination of this programme were partnership and sharing. We had no intention of being solely responsible for everything. It just wasn't possible to do that with the time and resources we had available, and neither was that going to be useful for placements, professionals and the parents themselves. To support this, we attended a whole raft of meetings, held one-to-one conversations with key contacts, and produced briefings for partners, both newly appointed or created roles and

long-term team members in well-established roles.

OPENING OPPORTUNITIES

Pivotal change was achieved through short and accessible training sessions that helped professionals to become confident and clear about what volunteering was, and how essential it is for opening up parents' opportunities, skills, confidence, self-esteem and motivation. We'd observed that too many professionals seemed apologetic about the whole matter of volunteering, and when asking for help from parents. If an intervention starts with the word sorry, it sets the wrong tone straight away.

We wanted our materials to be positive too. We developed short leaflets and punchy posters, as well as shooting a 12 minute DVD showcasing real volunteers, their experiences and the difference volunteering had made to them. When volunteering, parents were given identity badges and T-shirts to wear.

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

We developed a criteria-based referral process that passed the contact details of parents who expressed an interest or responded positively. Then we could arrange to meet them at a convenient time and location, as soon as we could, and start the recruitment process.

This was structured around:

- starting the completion of a three-part personal development plan (PDP);
- safer recruitment processes including DBS and references;
- and a basic induction session covering general volunteering, safeguarding and professionalism.

“Anyone confused or concerned about whether centres should be primarily about children, or primarily about parents, needs to realise it is both.”



This was all completed before identifying a placement and allocating the volunteer with an on-site supervisor. We did not set any minimum or maximum numbers of hours to volunteer either. And if the volunteer did not have a maths or English qualification, we would discuss a referral to adult learning at this stage. Many volunteers attended our nationally recognised and accredited training course, achieving their first-ever certificate of achievement.

THE ROLE OF PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR

In the spirit of our partnership approach, the placement supervisor was the main source of support. If the volunteer called in sick, or was going to be late, they contacted their placement supervisor – because this is all part of work-ready skills. However, our coordinating role enabled us to maintain a keep-in-touch status, and the effectiveness of regular texts, calls and drop-ins can never be underestimated. Sometimes we would accompany volunteers for their first time, text to remind them of appointments, or call to see how they got on and provide encouraging feedback. These methods were also crucial in collecting evidence and case studies for our quarterly

reporting, and for Ofsted inspections. They identified when PDPs needed reviewing so volunteers were stretched or supported with new goals if needed. All this information fed into our central tracking mechanism, where volunteers were colour-coded according to their stage of development.

We were able to support attendance at appointments, training, and other events with travel arrangements (including taxis) and expenses, and childcare. The availability of petty cash for immediate reimbursement and the occasional upfront payment was of critical importance.

SHORT-TERM WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Employability was always a watch-word for PDPs and this linked to another project called 'Moving on Up!' which offered 12-week work opportunities in children's centres. These were designed to be as simple and straight forward as possible when it came to their potential effect on benefits, and offered direct routes to applying for internal council job vacancies – a real and valuable step on the employment ladder.

Last year, after an Ofsted inspection that highlighted the excellent and outstanding

elements, the project changed to fix its attention on parents leading groups independently, where staff had withdrawn either due to budget and resource decisions, or groups were not priority actions for the local authority strategy. The targets for this included 24 active parent volunteer leaders, and the coordination of the programme's Facebook presence as a key communication method between the programme and parents.

“ If an intervention starts with the word sorry, it sets the wrong tone straight away.

TOWARDS GREATER AUTONOMY

Facebook is a powerful method of communication as it is direct to parents and promotes dialogue and feedback like nothing else. Speed is of the essence and the programme needed to increase its responsiveness, speediness, and engagement with this method. For this phase, we needed more training and development in areas like safeguarding, first aid, and food hygiene. We also drove the next stage of development of the parent network (now entitled the family network) that feeds into the governance and consultation mechanisms of the programme. This has moved to define officer

PEOPLE



roles and become constituted to such a degree they can now apply for funding grants – an important step towards greater autonomy. At recent event, we heard stories of how parents had been helping other parents on their journeys from their house-bound anxiety through to aspirations for small business creation.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The commissioning arrangements have now all changed in the county and our contract ended in March 2015. A new structure containing three centrally employed coordinators is planned for the whole county. We have learned that it takes a lot of time, effort and contact applied in a traditional 'development work' approach. There is a constant need for contact with parent volunteers, so they feel valued and supported. Partnership working is key from start to finish, and taking the time to track and report the difference made means everyone is able to identify the achievements made, including Ofsted when they come to make their judgements.

Watch the Charnwood DVD on
www.hempsalls.com

Julie Crookes is development officer at Hemsall's. As well as managing this project, she leads the A2YO conference programme and other projects. She is an experienced extended schools development coordinator, and has worked in schools improvement services, and an early years and childcare service.



A Gateway To Services In The Community

Helen Stephenson

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Helen Stephenson from the Department for Education shares her thoughts on the importance of children's centres in bringing together professionals across health and social care to support families, communities and to make sure all children have the best start in life.

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“ We increasingly see the importance of good quality early years provision giving children the best start in life and preparing them for school

One of the best things about my job is being able to visit some inspirational early years provision across the country. I recently visited a couple of children's centres in Wiltshire and saw first-hand the excellent work carried out. Rise in Chippenham is outstanding and provides a marvellous example of early intervention in the early years. It made me realise how important the work of children's centres is in making sure that children have the best possible start in life, regardless of background or circumstance. They play a key role in early years development for thousands of families across the country; from providing advice and support to signposting to services within the community. A core aspect of this role is ensuring that children are properly prepared for school and learning.

GOOD-QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION

We know that children learn more between the ages of one and six than they do at any other time of their lives. Good-quality early education for two year-olds can really help to develop and complement all the skills a young child is learning at home – and research shows that children are more likely to enjoy and do well at school if they've experienced high-quality early education.

“When making their judgements inspectors must consider the extent to which the centre:

Provides or facilitates arrangements for targeted children to take up the free entitlement to early education, especially two-year-olds from disadvantaged families.”

Children’s Centre Inspection Framework Guidance

BENEFITS OF THE TWO-YEAR-OLD ENTITLEMENT

Many two-year-olds are entitled to up to 570 hours a year of free early learning and childcare; the partnership working and targeted outreach work of children’s centres means that they are in an ideal situation to work, alongside the local authority, with families who have eligible two-year-olds to help them understand the benefits of the entitlement for their children.

The benefits of the entitlement extend to parents, too – knowing their child is being encouraged to try new things and develop new skills even when they’re not with them can give them the assurance they need to go back to work, take a college course to refresh their skills, or even

get ideas about how to help their child play and learn. Children’s centres act as a gateway to services in the community for many parents and helping them secure the best, high quality provision for their child should be a key part of this.

WORKING JOINTLY ACROSS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Children’s centre leaders play an important role in bringing together professionals locally to promote early learning for two-year-olds and work jointly with key workers across health and social care. For example, we know that health visitors can often be the first point where parents hear about the entitlement and therefore offer an opportunity to broker advice

“Children’s centres act as a gateway to services in the community for many parents and helping them secure the best, high quality provision for their child should be a key part of this



Helen Stephenson is Director of Early Years, Child Poverty, and Children's Services Strategy at the Department for Education (DfE) where her team is working to improving quality, affordability and choice for parents in early years provision. She joined DfE from the Cabinet office where she was Director of the Office for Civil Society and Government Innovation Group (which aims to mobilise people finance and data to tackle social problems in innovative ways). She led the team setting up Big Society Capital and was responsible for running several of the OCS investment programmes. On joining the Cabinet Office, Helen ran the Charities and Sector Support Team (Charities law and regulation, cutting red tape, infrastructure, strategic partners, business support and skills).

Helen joined the Civil Service from the Big Lottery Fund where she was Head of Strategic Policy and Partnerships. She has worked for a large national charity as a development manager and as a researcher and consultant in the statutory and voluntary sector. Helen has a PhD from Bristol University.

She was awarded her CBE for services to civil society in 2014.

and support in conjunction with the children's centre. Working to develop a strong local network means that all families, including those who are less confident or engaged, can be supported to introduce their children to positive and ultimately beneficial learning experiences.

A CORE PART OF THE INSPECTION FRAMEWORK

This role is particularly important for children's centre leaders as Ofsted now considers take-up of the entitlement as a core part of the inspection framework.

As you know far better than I, children's centres have a duty to reach families across the community, with a particular focus on those who are most in need. Early learning for twos has a clear focus on the

40 per cent most disadvantaged children as we know that children from this background start school at a developmental level around 19 months behind their peers, but that with access to good quality childcare the gap can be reduced. To support this movement, many local authorities have set children's centres specific targets for take-up as well.

We increasingly see the importance of good quality early years provision giving children the best start in life and preparing them for school.

By bringing together parents, volunteers and professional staff, children's centres support families, strengthen communities and help put children on the path to achieve their potential.

The Future For Children's Centre Leaders

Jackie Lincoln

Using an overarching family support model, Jackie Lincoln considers what's going well in children's centres, what we're concerned about and what needs to happen next. She is looking out for opportunities to build on good practice and establish new commissioning arrangements to deliver activities and childcare service

I have travelled an interesting journey over the last 26 years from being a local authority head of early years, planning, designing and implementing Sure Start Trailblazers, then working as a strategic adviser on the roll out of the national programmes and now as an independent consultant working with a number of local authorities and also back, experiencing first-hand, the impact of current policies as a part-time children's centre leader.

**work as
part of
a wider
professional
network of
support**

In considering the future role of children's centre leader, I have decided to organise my thoughts as I would in an overarching family support model – looking at what's going well, what we are concerned about, and what needs to happen.



WHAT'S GOING WELL?

Sure Start Children's Centre brand provides a clear identity for families

An established framework for multi-agency working, for example, team around the child and common assessment

Increasing evidence of the impact of children's centres and integrated working

Extension of this integrated working model to 0-19 age range across an increasing number of local authority areas

Funding streams to early years providers for 2, 3 and 4 year olds with free entitlement and the forthcoming early years pupil premium (EYPP).

Commissioning of children's centre services delivery from providers external to the local authority – where the specification is clear and linked to children's centre outcomes and the quality of service is effectively evaluated

Examples of good partnership with private and voluntary sector early years providers, who are providing the childcare for the children's centre reach area

Partnership with schools in working on transition and school readiness.

WHAT ARE WE CONCERNED ABOUT?

Uncertain political landscape and continuing change

Reducing resources, "salami slicing" decision-making approaches which doesn't prioritise specific service areas

Loss of "corporate memory" as key senior management and decision makers leave and take with them their expertise, knowledge and commitment to the delivery of children's centre services

Closure of buildings and amalgamation of centres where this reduces access to services and leads to underuse of purpose-built facilities

In the wake of pressures on the children's social care agenda, maintaining an appropriate balance of investment in universal, early intervention and prevention services. There is a worry that opportunities for the early identification of needs, often picked up in universal sessions, will decrease as there is a shift of emphasis towards those families already in need

Uncertainty about changes to the future Ofsted framework and being able to achieve good or outstanding inspection outcomes in an environment of diluted services

Discontinuation of the children's centre manager leadership programme (NPQICL) despite being praised for its effectiveness.

PRACTICE

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

We need to take and make opportunities.

The recommissioning of birth to five health visiting services this year provides a key opportunity for further shaping universal children centre delivery for prospective parents, parents and children up to the age of two. The specification sets out the requirement for community-based delivery of health services and use of children's centres to do this...there is an urgent need to examine potential combined resources arising from this exercise before any further children's centre buildings are closed.

We need to take opportunities to build on good practice and establish new effective commissioning arrangements for the delivery of activities and childcare in children's centre premises.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF NEED

We need to maximise opportunities for the early identification of need (particularly for the 2-5 age group and especially those in receipt of the 2-year-old free offer and eligible for the EYPP). Children's centre leaders can do this by working in partnership with PVI early years providers (and using existing examples of good

practice) to look at how early years and childcare settings can promote home learning and be upskilled in recognising family stress. With this support and training, they can be confident about referring families for early intervention and potentially deliver low level family support themselves.

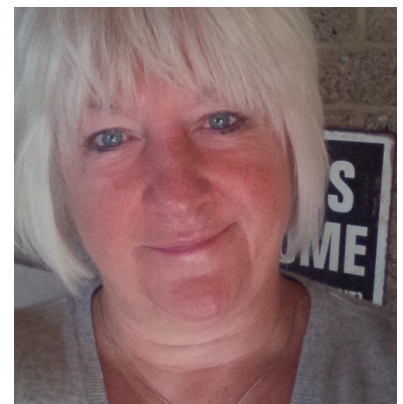
maximise opportunities for the early identification of need

THE INTEGRATED APPROACH

Taking opportunities for further developing and embedding

the integrated approach works well for the professionals in their collaboration and continuity of service for families with children and young people across the 0-19 age group. There are exciting discussions about children and family hubs and school alliances which are striving to pull together complex partnerships to improve communication and the quality of services. However, we must remember that families usually look to services at the point, age and stage of need – which is why I feel we should maintain the identity and brand of “children's centre” for parents and the public, whilst as children's centre leaders, we recognise that we need to work as part of a wider professional network of support.

Children's centre leaders need to identify additional champions who can influence decision making on



policy and resource allocation at a senior level in the local authority. We need to present and highlight our local evidence on how very early access to services, parent support and health delivers the core purpose of improving outcomes for children and that this can be achieved by balanced investment in universal and targeted services.

Finally, there is a need for us to take the opportunity to influence the policies of a new government now that it is in place.

maintain the identity and brand of children's centre for parents and the public



Happy, Healthy And Ready To Learn in Hackney

Caroline Hart and Chrispina Omoniruvbe

From 1994 to 2001 as head of service, Jackie Lincoln led the development and transformation of integrated early years and childcare services in Leeds and contributed through various working groups to the development of subsequent national policy. She was subsequently appointed as an adviser to local authorities by the Department for Education and supported the roll out of early years childcare, Sure Start and extended services programmes. Jackie provided strategic support to Children's Trust partners in delivery of 0-19 children and young people's agenda until 2010. Since then she has worked as an independent consultant continuing to provide support to local authorities and is also employed, part time, as a children's centre services manager for North Yorkshire County Council.

Embodying joint working across early years and health visiting services, Caroline Hart and Chrispina Omoniruvbe introduce the integrated review for two year olds in practice in Hackney. Their model emphasises the importance of both the child's and parents' involvement in the process

In recognition of the importance of the early years in laying the foundations for health, development and wellbeing, the government has increased investment in preventative and early intervention services. The Government's Healthy Child Programme includes a review at two to two-and-a-half years of age and the Department of Health and the Department for Education announced in December 2014 that integrated reviews would be rolled out nationally.

“ reviews are held
in the child's early
years setting

This short article describes the ways in which a partnership between health visiting teams and early years services have delivered an integrated review for two-year-olds in Hackney.

BRINGING HEALTH VISITORS AND EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONALS TOGETHER



An implementation group with representatives from the health visiting and early years services in Hackney was established in January 2012, creating a foundation of inter-professional working from the start. The work from this group included a practice guidance toolkit, a governance framework, joint conferences and a continuous professional development programme.

All early years settings have a healthy child programme lead and a named lead from the health visitor team with joint meetings held in lead children's centres within the cluster areas. To date, 311 early years and health visiting staff and have been trained in conducting integrated reviews, including childminders and playgroup leaders.

The aims of the integrated reviews are:

To **identify** the child's progress, strengths and needs in order to promote positive outcomes in health and wellbeing, learning and development.

To **facilitate** appropriate intervention and support for children and their families, where progress is less than expected.

To **generate** information which can be used to plan services and contribute to the reduction of inequalities in children's outcomes.



REVIEWS HELD IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

The integrated review model developed in Hackney places emphasis on the importance of both the child's and parents' involvement in the process.

“**success due to individuals, groups and organisations working cooperatively**

Reviews are held in the child's early years setting and are attended by an experienced member of the early years staff team, who are known to the family, together with a health visitor. This joint holistic approach by professionals which involves the family has proved highly successful. 90 per cent of early years providers are now able to offer integrated reviews. The uptake of these reviews in Hackney has risen from 23 per cent in 2008 to 92 per cent in 2014.

Parent feedback has been very positive, as shown by the following comments:

“**I liked having my child's health and education needs discussed together at one meeting.**

“**I felt able to contribute what I know about my child and what they can do.”**

Health visitors and early years practitioners also value the reviews:

“**Greater insight into how nursery staff can support parents with development needs, e.g. toilet training.”**

“**Able to support parents better than before in their child's learning and development.”**

PEOPLE

SHARING HACKNEY'S APPROACH

We, the project leads, have worked closely with the Departments of Health, and Education, and NHS England to share the experience of Hackney's approach and to explore how it relates to the introduction of the ages and stages questionnaire.

The success of this work has been largely due to the willingness of individuals, groups, and organisations to work cooperatively. The strategic multi-disciplinary healthy child programme group with representatives from paediatrics, community nursing, therapies, psychology, children's centres and education, have set the strategic vision for this successful approach. It hasn't been achieved overnight but we believe that it has provided long-term benefits for the care of children in Hackney.

“Parents think about the opportunities they provide their own children

Caroline Hart is a local authority early years consultant, leading on several key innovative educational/health partnership initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for young children, notably Hackney's two-year-old integrated review. She has been supporting schools and early years settings across Hackney to ensure quality within EYFS delivery since 2003. Prior to working for Hackney Learning Trust, Caroline gained wide-ranging experience as a teacher in schools and children's centres, building her expertise in early childhood development.

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Chrispina Omoniruvbe is a lead health visitor in Hackney, working in partnership with health providers and children's centres in her locality and leading a large team of area health visitors. With over 30 years' experience in health visiting, Chrispina has also lectured in further education. For the past four years, Chrispina has been leading on Hackney's integrated developmental review, coordinating a multi-disciplinary approach to meeting the needs of young children and their families.

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Windows of Opportunity

Barbara Mands

At a time of unprecedented and relentless change within local authorities, with no blueprint to work to, children's centre leaders must be a champion for those families who are hardest to reach. They should not be distracted from their core purpose to ensure that enough resources are still prioritised and effective support services are in place so that those families with young children can continue to be identified and offered the right support at the right time.

EMBRACE CHANGE

The context is challenging, especially when we take health changes into consideration. There are ongoing pressures to deliver more for less and transform traditional ways of working. This is to be embraced and can create new windows of opportunity for closer and more joined-up working between all professionals and services working with young children.

PREPARE FOR THE NEW INTEGRATED REVIEW

One area I do want to focus on for children's centre leaders is two year olds—increasing the take up of the new early education entitlement and preparing for the new integrated review at two to two and a half.

Firstly, we know that the new two-year-old entitlement is working well with many parents taking up a place for their child. However, from experience we know that some families do need hand-holding and encouragement to find the best setting for their child and support to visit a setting through to actually taking up a place. These families are often the ones who are the most difficult to reach and the frontline children's centre staff who identify these families, work with them and put support packages in place, are critical.

children's centre leaders must be a champion for those families who are hardest to reach



Barbara Mands urges children's centre leaders to embrace the changes that are happening and to notice new windows of opportunity to work closer with other other professionals. One example of this is the integrated review for two year olds.

DEVELOP A CLEAR NARRATIVE

At a time of financial cutbacks children's centre leaders must develop a clear narrative that engages the local policy makers via the various strategic agendas and be ready for the external challenge that comes from Ofsted and the Department for Education, to ensure that valuable frontline staff remain in post and are able to prioritise these families.

Otherwise, we are at risk of young children not taking up their early education entitlement and chances to improve outcomes for them at the earliest opportunity will be lost when we know these are the children who need it most. For these children, the journey to being ready for school could be delayed possibly by up to a year and even more if a family continue not to take up an early education place when their child reaches three or four.

It's vital therefore that the children's centre workforce is there to do this important support work to engage families as early as possible.

COMBINING THE BEST OF EARLY EDUCATION AND HEALTH CHECKS

Secondly, we now have on the horizon the coming together of the Early Education Progress Check and the Health Progress Check from September 2015. The challenge is to create a meaningful and holistic integrated review at two to two and a half that combines the best of both checks, that all parents will want to engage with, and identifies any early support needs.

REACH ALL TWO YEAR OLDS

Currently there are two progress checks, one carried out by health visitors and the other by early years staff. Each check has a slightly different focus and they can be completed at different times whilst a child is aged two. Shared agreement on the best tools to use and multi-agency training to deliver the check is a

priority over the next few months. The size of the task should not be underestimated including reaching all two year olds, not just those who attend settings or health visitor drop-in sessions.

Children's centre leaders should take a strong position together with health partners to plan the new integrated review in a way that builds on existing relationships between health visitors, children's centre staff and early years staff working in childcare settings to create a shared dialogue. There may be existing or new local partnership arrangements that can be used as a forum to build trust and mutual respect through this common agenda and shared purpose to reach and improve outcomes for all young children.

“build trust and mutual respect through this common agenda”

“a meaningful and holistic integrated review”



WORK WITH HEALTH POLICY MAKERS

An added challenge for the integrated review is that it feels as if there is a shift away from those important early intervention services that are so important to be able to signpost to. If professionals are unable to signpost to services because they are no longer there then the early windows of opportunity to address or reduce any health issues that affect a child's learning and development are then missed. Therefore children's centre leaders should work with health policy makers to find new ways to work in partnership to minimise risk or provide services in a different way. This could also include increasing the confidence, knowledge and skills of other staff working with

these children to deliver some of that early intervention as part of the day-to-day service they offer, whether that is a children's centre drop in or a child attending a local playgroup, day nursery or childminder.

Whatever the future holds for the way services are delivered to families the facilitation of good relationships by children's centre leaders and prioritising front line support is key to making sure that they make the most of the windows of opportunity to intervene in a more targeted way when families most need it.



**plan
the new
integrated
review in
a way that
builds on
existing
relationships**

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Barbara Mands has many years of experience within education and children's services, predominantly in early years childcare strategy and policy roles. She previously worked as City of York Council's Head of Extended Services and is currently head of childcare strategy within the same local authority and is the strategic lead for two-year-old education places.

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Find out more

**Integrated Review at Age 2:
Implementation Study, Department
for Education, November 2014**

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A Dual Approach For Universal And Targeted Services - Learning From Lessons

James Hemsall

James Hemsall considers what it means to offer a targeted service while making sure the service is available to everyone. He advocates a return to the original values of Sure Start children's centres, and placing parents firmly at the centre of decision making.

Much is said about learning the lessons of Sure Start and children's centres, and my focus in this article, is to consider some of the important ethical issues resulting from the transformation of targeted Sure Start local programmes into universal children's centres. And how they are relevant now children's centres are becoming so varied and different. Essentially these issues are the impact on parents' and families' autonomy, rights and responsibilities, and the challenges presented by potentially conflicting targeted and universal aspects.

Relative examples offered by the American Head Start programme and the Swedish childcare model are useful too. Children's centres are at a pivotal point in their development. Building from a successful targeted Sure Start and early excellence programme, they have been universalised with the political aim of becoming a permanent part of the welfare state, now they are being targeted for all sorts of reasons.

RESPECTING PARENTS AS INDIVIDUALS

Children's centres have occupied a new position in the state's involvement in parenting, interest in the household, and in children's early learning. The state's involvement and intervention tests boundaries at every stage, and challenges our cultural and social expectations of what is acceptable parenting, and what the desired outcomes for children are.

Working in partnership with parents is essential because they should be respected and valued as individuals, with their rights to self-rule and self-determination recognised. Parental autonomy is important because they

“An important role in building the capacities and abilities of parents”

have the freedom to raise their own children (within acceptable and legal bounds). And children's centres have an important role in building the capacities and abilities of parents, in trans-generational ways. However, parents

do retain their right of choice, within their responsibilities defined by the Children Act (2004).

FULL INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS

The full and real involvement of parents in the development, delivery and management of children's centres is a key mechanism for this; it was a success of local programmes,



and some children's centres, and is essential for the future of children's centres. It can be achieved through a range of practical methods including:

- ongoing, formal and informal consultation
- annual independent external evaluation
- involving parents in service delivery
- real volunteering opportunities
- developing parents' forums and peer support groups
- parents' representation at management, advisory or steering board level
- all at times accessible to parents that also fit in with their work-ready activities, employment, and training.

However, our own values and roles can affect our ability to apply these principles consistently across teams and partner organisations. In my experience, different centres have considered the same actions to be both successful and unsuccessful. Once, I was working with two centres at the same time. One had organised a women's pampering day as a start to developing trust, relationships, participation and involvement – and found it to be a great success; whilst the other had delegated a small budget to their newly established parents' group and when they spent the funding themselves on a pampering day – the programme disapproved and asked for the funding back – damaging trust and future participation. So, common values are clearly essential to ensure that we all know what is valuable, and what processes need to be in place to build participation in everything that happens in a children's centre.

A comprehensive approach also aims to provide services that parents want, trust, and importantly use – thereby breaking barriers to participation, and reaching those parents that services have difficulty including.

made available to as many people as possible

The state aims to provide a respectful and community-driven programme of children's centres, available to all, and enhanced for those that would benefit from extra support. It is key to the early intervention agenda.

TARGETED AND UNIVERSAL

The terms 'targeting' and 'universal' are frequently used, often misunderstood and they require sensitive consideration. The targeted nature of services creates its own barriers (including the stigma they are only for 'failing' parents), and whilst targeted services appear to have the most benefit for the least advantaged, the ambitions to roll-out the children's centre strategy universally 'in a sense' or even 'progressively' are constrained, not by local or national political will, nor lack of evidence of impact, but by financial resources and somewhat unrealistic expectations.

REVISIT SURE START VALUES

Sure Start's process of working was effectively guided by a set of values, identified early on by the Comprehensive Spending Review

in 1998 called Modernising Public Services, and these, in my view should be revisited. Of particular importance for parental autonomy are the values of:

TWO-GENERATIONAL – involving parents as well as children

LOCALLY DRIVEN – based on consultation and involvement of local parents and communities

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE – sensitive to the needs of all parents and children.

These values recognise the importance of parental participation, and that centres should be consistent – yet individually focused. To achieve this, parents will need to be included in the decision-making surrounding services in three key areas of:

PARENTING – decisions relating to their individual role in caring for their own children, as it is important for parents to make decisions over how their children are raised

PARTICIPATION – decisions and informed choices about their participation in children's centre services, because it is a free and open choice

MANAGEMENT – decisions made about the development, delivery and management of the children's centres, as this supports partnership, inclusion and autonomy.

Scandinavian levels of excellence often appear to be the goal, yet the required levels of taxation and expenditure are some way off in times of austerity. Until this position is achieved, the balance of universalisation and targeting will be compromised. This compromised approach will demand sensitive application that acknowledges the complexities of its effects.

FUTURE PROOFING SERVICES

Our continued risk is politicians and funding decision-makers don't hold their nerve and don't future proof services for another fifteen years. We are still in our early years, so any criticism is premature. Preventative services cannot and should not be expected to deliver the immediate tangible outcomes that intervention can achieve. Head Start's experience in the USA has shown a four-fold return in savings in later years, so perhaps the more invested now, the greater levels of savings later. But it did take Head Start a generation to find this evidence. We have not yet had that time.

Children's centres should importantly be:

NON-STIGMATISING – as access based on stigma can never be a good thing, even if the eventual outcomes are successful

MULTI-FACETED – targeting a number of factors

PERSISTENT – lasting long enough to make a real difference.

TARGETING WHILE AVOIDING STIGMA

The consequences of targeting services, in that a service excludes in the name of focusing its activities, will almost always contain an element of stigma – and maintain the feeling that services are for 'failing' families. If there needs to be targeting, to meet the greatest need, this should never be communicated nor promoted. Children's centres should be made available to as many people as possible,

“Common values are essential to ensure that we all know what is valuable”



and to achieve this, an enhanced, more generously funded programme of children's centres should be made available universally – not 'in a sense' but in actuality.

CLOSING ATTAINMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES GAPS

As a key equalities strategy, children's centres and their relative contemporaries have been found to have significant effects on closing attainment and opportunities gaps. To demonstrate and monitor impact, the focus on the collection of evidence should retain its original aim of supporting the whole child's development, and further embrace the five outcomes (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic wellbeing). The impact on educational success remains of equal importance, but should not overshadow other essential outcomes.

To conclude, children's centres will only be successful if parental autonomy, and the targeted and universal models of this early intervention strategy are recognised and effectively addressed. All targeted social inclusion strategies like children's centres have exclusion at their core.

This is ironic, so whilst seeking to open up access to all, children's centres need to carefully balance their thirst for targeted delivery. The original values and approach identified by the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review provide a useful framework.

There are strong arguments to support targeting and universality, as both have positive outcomes.

True universality may be unachievable in the short and medium terms; in the interim, any future strategy should have a combination of both elements. A dual approach could ensure that children's centres make the most difference to the most disadvantaged. Duality would enable everyone to access children's centres – children and parents that need it the most, would benefit the most, and those that would also benefit and have a less urgent need. All have a right to make the most of their potential, and we have a moral duty to provide preventative and interventionist services in children's centres.

“ provide services that parents want, trust, and importantly use

James Hemsall has worked in the sector for 25 years. He is a former playworker, children's centre manager, further education lecturer, development worker and regional manager/senior projects manager for a childcare charity. His career has been spent supporting organisations to develop quality and sustainable childcare. James is also the National Support Director of the Department for Education Achieving Two Year Olds contract, supporting the roll-out of the free entitlement for least-advantaged two year olds.

Find out more

Head Start Impact Study and Follow up 2000-2015

Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Sweden, OECD

Modern Public Services for Britain: Investing in Reform, Comprehensive Spending Review: New Public Spending Plans 1999-2002, July 1998

PRODUCTIVITY



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our best
resource.
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