

What do providers and people who use services tell us about what works?

This section is drawn from group discussions with parents and carers and, separately, with local service providers to discuss key issues affecting children's learning in the early years. It is therefore based on their experiences and opinions rather than the research evidence on which the rest of the knowledge review is based.

Here are some illustrations from this feedback:

'Being interested in what your child does and showing them that their likes and dislikes matter helps develop their confidence. By showing your child the importance of reading and learning it encourages them to be hungry for more.'
(Mother, South East)

'I've come across education officers who have no idea about individual budgets or social care and other staff have no idea about health issues. Knowledge needs to cross over and that horizontal training is so central.'
(Father, Eastern)

'There is a little girl who has just started talking and I am very proud [...] I think just giving them that extra special time and making them feel appreciated and wanted in the nursery and using some of their first language – learn it from the parents – that builds their confidence. It makes that link between the child, the home and the school.'
(Teacher)

Stay involved with C4EO

- The C4EO website includes a range of support and data about your local area for you to access and compare with other areas.
- Encourage practitioners to put themselves forward to be C4EO sector specialists.
- Access support from C4EO as part of the Tailored Support scheme provided by accredited and trained experts on the theme priorities.
- Make sure your organisation submits examples of local validated practice. Examples can be entered onto the C4EO website.

Final Summary and Recommendations

This summary is a concise overview of C4EO's work in this theme for directors of children's services. Please visit www.c4eo.org.uk to download full, in-depth versions of the knowledge reviews.

Early Years

'They (nursery staff) always play with me and love me. If they did not want to play with me, that would be a bad adult. If they didn't listen to me that would be bad too.'
(Nursery child)

Introduction

C4EO's aim is to support strategic managers in local authorities/Children's Trusts by providing evidence of 'what works' to improve the outcomes of children, young people and their families. We do this by reviewing available evidence from research and evaluated practice and by offering practical support to individual authorities through our team of 'sector specialists'. This summary of C4EO's Early Years theme work highlights the evidence from its three priority areas:

- Narrowing the gap in outcomes for young children through effective practices in the early years
- Improving children's attainment through a better quality of family-based support for early learning
- Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating early years services.

A full knowledge review has now been completed for each of these priorities but the work of the theme will carry on until March 2011. We hope you will continue to engage with the Centre by contributing more practice examples and taking advantage of the offer of tailored support.

This summary includes findings from the knowledge reviews and examples of validated local practice. It also highlights views from providers and people who use services which have much to add to our knowledge of 'what works' in narrowing the gap in outcomes for young children.

Please go to www.c4eo.org.uk to download the full and in-depth knowledge reviews



Using the evidence to improve practice

Narrowing the gap

Children's outcomes can be improved by:

- ensuring take-up of high-quality early years services by families on low incomes
- reviewing, monitoring and supporting early years provision to ensure it meets agreed high-quality standards
- maintaining funding to services providing high-quality provision
- ensuring professionals have the resources and information they need to support families in improving their home learning environments
- targeting early childhood services to the most disadvantaged families to ensure parents are aware of and take up their free entitlement to early education and the childcare element of working tax credits
- developing opportunities for mothers to improve their education and skills
- including childminders in local partnership working
- agreeing protocols for sharing early years health data
- developing children's language and literacy skills and providing additional support for young children with English as an Additional Language
- helping early years staff to provide culturally sensitive activities and play-based learning.

Family-based support

Children's learning can be enhanced by:

- routinely auditing local needs and take-up of services
- developing a home learning environment strategy for frontline staff
- ensuring high-quality pre- and post-natal care
- providing guidance on breast feeding and nutrition
- providing parenting classes and support for parents of children with behaviour problems
- increasing opportunities to share information from sources trusted by parents and taking account of the specific needs of parents from black and minority ethnic groups, and fathers
- encouraging initiatives that engage parents and children to do activities together and help raise expectations of what children can achieve
- ensuring that staff in all early years services have training to work effectively with families
- developing training, support and accreditation for childminders.

Integrating services

Children's development outcomes can be supported by:

- encouraging initiatives that target two or more outcomes
- working with partners to review integrated practices to ensure they operate well at service, agency and middle management levels, and when commissioning services
- ensuring all staff understand how each service contributes to the whole and key roles are clarified. This may well involve:
 - multi-agency/interdisciplinary training
 - developing a shared professional language
 - providing opportunities to share experiences, ideas and goals
- providing inter-agency training targeted at staff working at a similar level
- reviewing and addressing disparities in professional status, pay and working conditions
- when commissioning early years services or initiatives:
 - ensuring goals are clearly identified
 - ensuring outcomes are agreed early and are measurable
 - exploring how funding can be sustained for successful projects
 - involving people who use services in planning and delivery
- considering integrating outreach and home visiting services for at-risk groups
- ensuring that information services for parents and families are well coordinated.



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(Mother, South East)

Local practice that has made a difference

Validated practice examples that have been submitted to C4EO and assessed against a range of criteria to determine the extent to which they are evidence-based. Here we summarise three of these projects:

Darlington Borough Council has designed a resource pack for parents and carers of children aged 3–5 years. The primary aim was to narrow the gap between the low-achieving children and their higher-achieving peer group. The resource pack includes a manual, DVD and additional material from an interactive website. It provides a programme of structured physical activities, targets thinking skills and the development of pre-requisites for literacy and numeracy as well as providing accessible information on healthy eating. Feedback from children, parents and carers, and staff in early years settings has been positive with participants finding the programme to be enjoyable and showing measureable achievements.

Leicester City Council addressed an achievement gap in children scoring below the national average in communication, language, literacy and development. They provided families with information on how to promote communication skills, engage in their child's learning and access relevant resources and help. The service implemented a strategy: to develop community awareness of the importance of early communication and language development; provide information and guidance to families on how they can promote their child's communication; provide children with early interventions when needed and daily interactions with the care giver (to those attending local authority childcare or early education settings).

By implementing a new assessment and record-keeping system to support parents and children as partners in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), **Tower Hamlets** has improved parental involvement and awareness of their children's learning. *The early learning development record* now provides:

- a *Learning diary* held in the setting but sent home regularly – including observations, photos, drawings, children's, parents' and practitioner comments
- an *All about my unique child* booklet held by the parent and intended to support transitions as it is shared with practitioners in any new setting
- a *Learning and development record*, which includes regular assessment notes and observations graded using Leuven scales (measuring the child's wellbeing and involvement) and class recording sheets
- *The setting story*, including self-evaluation materials and planning forms based on the four EYFS themes, areas of learning and development, and the school or setting's improvement plan.

Other validated local practice can be found on the C4EO website